

The Tender Tyranny of American Liberalism Redux

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Global Research, September 21, 2012

Region: [USA](#)
Theme: [History](#)

Liberalism itself is a synthetic creation of the power structure, a humanitarian facade behind which the dirty work of policing the world can go on uninterrupted by idealistic spasms in the body politic.[1]

Journalist Eric Norden's perceptive critique, "The Tender Tyranny of American Liberalism," appeared in the early years of the Vietnam era, accurately identifying how a predominantly liberal worldview projected by the ruling technocracy and its intellectual adherents acted to subordinate genuinely Left-progressive ideas and social movements at home while ensuring the furtherance of US imperial designs abroad. Today Norden's insights are worthy of reconsideration in light of how the Left remains largely devoid of its own voice or vision and more than ever liberalism provides ideological cover for aggressive Anglo-American militarism, the prerogatives of transnational corporations, and an ever-expanding police state.

Since the 1800s liberalism and its utilitarian philosophical bearings have been a central intellectual and popular means by which gunboat and "free trade" diplomacies alike are justified to the public at large.[2] It is also a foremost rationale through which aggressive social control is exerted on the population at home, more recently by political leaders who symbolize and embody real social struggles in American history and thereby may exercise a more valid claim to "feeling their constituents' pain."

The modern-day liberal handily anticipates and deflects criticism of her policies through a trumpeted alarm for a variety of social and political issues—student performance, public health, environmental degradation and the alleged atrocities of foreign enemies, waving about an array of solutions, from "educational initiatives" and "carbon credits," to "humanitarian" military actions.

Norden argues how the era of American liberalism that began with Franklin Roosevelt's election established a combined cult of personality and Keynesian welfare state that has diminished the possibilities for a more radical and participatory politics. A few short years following the establishment of Students for a Democratic Society, many in the Left continued to be hoodwinked and sidetracked by an oppressive militarized state effusing liberal bromides. For example, the Great Society's ambitions obscured the reality that the American-orchestrated "genocide in Vietnam [was] a liberal genocide," SDS President Carl Oglesby asserted.

[T]he menacing coalition of industrial and military power, the brutality of the blitzkrieg we are waging against Vietnam, the ominous signs around us that heresy may no longer be permitted ... [are] creatures, all of them, of a government that since 1932 has considered itself to be fundamentally liberal.[3]

In light of this, a miracle of social engineering and propaganda is manifest in a population that readily identifies despotism with Hitler's Nazism or Mussolini's fascism, while the exploits of authoritarian social controllers carried out under the cloak of liberalism remain almost entirely unexamined. "Think of the men who now engineer" Vietnam, Oglesby writes.

[T]hose who study the maps, give the commands, push the buttons, and tally the dead: [National Security Adviser McGeorge] Bundy, [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara, [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk, [Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot] Lodge, [Ambassador to the United Nations Arthur] Goldberg, the President himself. They are not moral monsters. They are all honorable men. They are all liberals."[4]

Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Leon Panetta, Susan Rice, Samantha Powers and John Brennan are the ideological heirs of America's holocaust in Indochina. Their warm and caring humanitarian patina allows the monstrous US-NATO war machine to proceed without question or incident. They plan the drone kill lists and oversee the accelerated tours of duty for US servicepersons. Their associates decide which branches of Al Qaeda mercenaries will be armed and dispatched into civilian areas to maim, kill and destroy. The wars and dislocation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria are now undeniably liberal wars, carried out by our moral, liberal leaders.

Closer to home Ben Bernanke and Timothy Geithner, strong advocates and practitioners of Keynesian fiscal alchemy, at once monetize the war debt while disenfranchising the working class, retirees and poor by creating billions of dollars, most of which are then forked over to corrupt bankers and hedge fund managers who proceed to sit on the money or further inflate the markets through speculation. Bernanke, Geithner, and their technocratic peers at the Fed and Treasury are cultured and thoughtful liberals, professing heartfelt concern for "jobs" and social uplift.

Until recently, Cass Sunstein was Obama's Information Czar. The law scholar professed an appreciation for "rational" public discourse and exchange. Yet in his academic writings Sunstein exhibited unbridled disdain for unconventional speculation and critique of government activities and policies ("rumors" and "conspiracy theories" in liberal parlance) to the extent of advocating COINTELPRO-style "cognitive infiltration" of groups discussing and circulating such ideas. Sunstein's liberal credentials are indisputable.

Over the past several decades America's chief war mongers and advocates of technocratic social control exude the aura of kind and caring masters who have been unwillingly forced into war due to humanitarian concerns; a "responsibility to protect" foreign peoples from the alleged oppression of their leaders, many of which are modern, pro-western US allies. The fruits of the violent Arab Spring color revolutions are a case in point.

"Things are Growing Better"

Today the world is told by the Nobel Peace Prize president how a new era of humanitarian interventionism has arrived through the establishment of the Susan Brown and Samantha Powers-inspired Atrocities Prevention Board. According to Presidential Study Directive 10 of August 4, 2011 laying the groundwork for the APB, and completed during the ultra-violent US and NATO-orchestrated guerrilla war and air bombardment of Libya, Obama identifies the prevention of mass atrocities and genocide as "a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States." [5] Almost as if on cue, the administration's

liberal backers applaud such maneuvers.

Much like Vietnam, R2P military ventures are carried out under the aegis of liberalism and would be roundly condemned by liberals as so much subterfuge were they meted out by a professed “conservative” administration. In reality, had Obama been in office and embarked on the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq while uttering the appropriate humanitarian-sounding shibboleths he would have succeeded with nary a peep from most if not all of the Left-liberal intelligentsia.

In the 1950s and 60s liberalism constituted the ideological armature of the Cold War consensus which provided for the massive Keynesian military buildup and the eventual recolonization of the Third World under brutal IMF and World Bank auspices. At the same time, however, social programs such as Medicare and the expansion of public higher education were in their infancy, thus providing concrete appeasement for the US population. Norden points to the Great Society as liberalism’s “giant con, designed to assure the American people that, whatever horrors we perpetrate abroad, our hearts are still in the right places; whatever injustices persist at home, *things are growing better.*”[6]

In the absence of such compensation the American public today is afforded a simulacra of 1960s social struggle while similar imperial wars are waged abroad and barely a finger is lifted as America’s infrastructure crumbles, industrial jobs are continually outsourced, and the earth sustains what are likely her greatest environmental catastrophes in the Gulf of Mexico oil “spill” and the dire Fukushima nuclear meltdowns. In fact, the American liberal establishment overlooks such trifling events, content in the notion that it has “overcome” racism with an African American in the highest office, even as he busies himself dutifully enacting the policies of zombie banks, insurance and pharmaceutical conglomerates, and the military-industrial-surveillance complex.

Liberalism’s Enduring Quest for Ideological Conformity

[D]espite their protestations of moderation, liberals are the most ruthless of ideological fanatics. If challenged on this point, the average lib will ooze the milk of human kindness from every pore, his eyes melting over to the consistency of hot butterscotch sauce. Is he not against “extremism” in every shape and form? But those who really cross liberalism are pursued with cold implacable fury, up to and even beyond the grave.[7]

While American liberalism exudes understanding and open-mindedness as its principal outward expressions, it is not satiated until it has achieved consensus on its terms and subsumed all intellectual challengers. What is more, it seethes in the notion that one or more political outlooks exist apart from what its disciples have endorsed and mandated. Thus efforts are methodically employed to discipline public discourse and thought along lines favorable to the liberal project of political (read: cognitive) correctness.

Much like in the 1960s, as Norden suggests, one method for accomplishing this is through liberals’ relativism. In this view there is “no absolute truth, no absolute good and evil, permitting only a monochromatic wasteland of differing shades of gray.” Such an outlook “leads to despair and pessimism; and ultimately, to a nihilistic manipulation of any and all values. It also, of course, provides a ready handle with which to dismiss all ‘extremism,’ and to proclaim, as liberal guru Daniel Bell does so triumphantly, ‘The End of Ideology.’”[8]

In the 1960s the liberals' wholesale destruction of Indochina and its peoples to forestall the alleged "domino effect" was the most visible and cold-blooded of their ventures. Yet liberalism's efforts to chasten and guide public discussion regarding the domestic activities of the deep state for which it stands are oft-forgotten. The assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Malcolm X (later Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy) are especially poignant examples of liberalism's overwhelming pretense that has only intensified in recent years.

When Malcolm X persistently violated liberal discursive protocols by straying from the milquetoast center through his intellectually incisive observations on American race relations he was routinely castigated in liberal venues for his transgressions. Shortly before Malcolm's death he told his biographer, "Watch how they will accuse me of hate." True to form, the traditional liberal venues sprang to life barely after Malcolm's corpse was cold.

"Malcolm X's life was strangely and pitifully wasted," the *New York Times* declared the day after the civil rights leader's murder.

But this was because he did not seek to fit into society or into the life of his people ... The world he saw through those horn-rimmed glasses of his was distorted and dark. But he made it darker still with his exaltation of fanaticism. Yesterday someone came out of that darkness he spawned and killed him.[9]

The hugely egotistical Lyndon Johnson, second only to FDR in his liberal credentials, simultaneously waged the Vietnam War and the so-called "War on Poverty." When Martin Luther King Jr. called Johnson out for his extravagant hypocrisy in his notable April 4, 1967 "Beyond Vietnam" address at Riverside Church, Johnson fumed with indignation and subsequent evidence indicates high federal government involvement in King's execution exactly one year later.[10]

Along similar lines today, public figures critiquing liberalism's foremost projects—the Affordable Care Act, "global warming" or "climate change," President Obama's biography, or Osama bin Laden's uncertain departure—are correspondingly singled out for blistering and slanderous condemnation complete with tailor-made epithets: "climate [change] denier," "birther," "deather," "hater," even "racist" and "white supremacist."

Given these excesses in political guile, is it any surprise that one of the most powerful contemporary bastions of liberalism and shameless appropriators of the civil rights struggle, the Southern Poverty Law Center,[11] classifies an activist organization called We Are Change as a "hate group," simply because its members have routinely questioned the US government's often implausible explanations of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks? True to its liberal bona fides, if Malcolm X were alive now the SPLC would no doubt label him an extremist, hater, and racist—perhaps even a conspi-racist.

Little has changed since 1965. The rabble capable of articulating the world as they see it are usually clumsy at learning how to identify and navigate certain avenues of "tasteful" dissent—the select few open to those who recognize and accept liberalism's definition of and monopoly over reason itself.

"Moving Forward" and the Disavowal of Historical Agency

Speaking for the liberal intelligentsia in 1964, at a time when there was considerable skepticism over the establishment's account of JFK's assassination, historian Richard

Hofstadter warned of the dangers awaiting intellectuals who might drift into the treacherous waters of “the paranoid style.” In an ideological move characteristic of an openly totalitarian society and taken to a whole new level by the liberal thought police at organizations such as the SPLC, Hofstadter was more than subtly suggesting how journalists and academics alike jeopardized their standing by questioning the state along certain lines.

Once the evidence surrounding JFK’s death pointed to “a well-organized conspiracy within agencies of the federal government,” Norden reminded his readers, “the liberals looked the other way. JFK could be mourned, but not avenged: too many apple-carts would be upset in the process.” In the end liberals fell in lockstep, “moving forward” while simultaneously betraying the principles they claimed to uphold and once and for all denying their own historical agency.

Since 2001 some of the most vocal detractors of the 9/11 Truth movement have not been conservatives but rather left-liberal intellectuals, the foremost among these being Noam Chomsky. Chomsky’s pronouncements and leadership in this regard are exemplary yet also consistent with his liberal technocratic forebears, setting the tone for the collective silence of left academicians and the so-called progressive alternative media. “This [September 11] attack was surely an enormous shock and surprise to the intelligence services of the West,” Chomsky commented,[12] echoing the early responses of the Bush administration almost to the word.

Chomsky’s remarks deserve attention given his notoriety among the left. “One of the major consequences of the 9/11 movement,” he remarked shortly after the event, “has been to draw enormous amounts of energy and effort away from activism directed to real and ongoing crimes of state, and their institutional background, crimes that are far more serious than blowing up the WTC would be, if there were any credibility to that thesis.”[13]

The “radical” intellectual guru also helped to establish the liberals’ overall spineless stance toward September 11 and put into motion the eventually fractured 9/11 Truth-antiwar movement. Such cowardice was readily on display in the establishment left’s main news and opinion outlets. As political analyst Webster Tarpley notes, shortly after 9/11 *The Nation*

produced an anthology of its most important post-9/11 articles. A key contributor to this collection was Jonathan Schell, who wrote in his introduction: “It was clear from the start that Islamic fundamentalists were responsible, almost certainly in the service of the Al Qaeda terrorist organization, but the magnitude of the force involved remain hazy in the extreme.”[14]

Confining itself to historical examples indicating how political intrigue and coups are a mainstay in foreign lands, liberalism stubbornly clings to the childlike notion that America is that rare exception where political leaders and institutions have the very best of intentions and carry out policies with the overall public interest in mind. Those who question the avuncular goodwill of liberals’ idealizations are likely “‘extremists’” with a “‘conspiratorial view of history’”—tantamount to Malcolm X, 9/11 Truth, or Nazi skinhead types. Yet “history is not, of course, a succession of conspiracies,” Norden concludes. “[W]hat liberals conveniently forget was that there are conspiracies in history. The world, much less America, is not the tidy design of the League of Women Voters; it *can* happen here.”[15]

Alongside liberalism disciplining its own adherents from improper thought and thereby distracting the public from further interrogating the deep state’s role in the 1960s political

assassinations or the September 11 attacks, in the past few decades alone the US public has witnessed overall liberal complicity in if not sole authority over the murderous Iraqi sanctions following the Gulf War, the above referenced unconstitutional wars waged on phony humanitarian grounds, the long-running and costly occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, slow-burn economic devastation, the gutting of the Constitution, and now under Obama's National Defense Authorization Act a surveillance state complete with the capacity to jail or murder citizens on political grounds.

Americans and the citizenry of nations elsewhere have continually been asked by much of the Anglo-American intellectual and political class to direct their frustrations at swarthy-looking bogeys or the "right wing" as the causes of their rapidly transforming world. Yet the most pressing and indeed grave public concerns have largely gone unexamined and unchallenged not because of Muslim others, the "neocons," the Koch brothers, or the cartoonish talking heads at Fox News. That such elaborate crimes persist and go unpunished attests to the enduringly profound and magnificent fraud of American liberalism and its continued short-circuiting of the American political imagination.

Notes

[1] Eric Norden, "The Tender Tyranny of American Liberalism," *The Realist*, June 1966, 1-6, <http://www.ep.tc/realist/a-b-set/09.html>

[2] John Pilger, "The Liberal Way to Run the World: 'Improve' or We'll Kill You," Center for Research on Globalization, September 5, 2012, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-liberal-way-to-run-the-world-improve-or-well-kill-you/>

[3] Norden, "Tender Tyranny," 2.

[4] Quoted in Norden, "Tender Tyranny," 2.

[5] Fact Sheet: A Comprehensive Strategy and New Tools to Prevent and Respond to Atrocities, White House Press Release, August 4, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/23/fact-sheet-comprehensive-strategy-and-new-tools-prevent-and-respond-atro>

[6] Norden, "Tender Tyranny," 2, italics in original.

[7] Norden, "Tender Tyranny," 4.

[8] Norden, "Tender Tyranny," 4.

[9] Quoted in Norden, "Tender Tyranny," 5.

[10] William F. Pepper, *An Act of State: The Execution of Martin Luther King*, New York: Verso, 2003. See <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/WFP020403.html>

[11] See Ken Silverstein, "The Church of Morris Dees: How the Southern Poverty Law Center Profits From Intolerance," *Harper's Magazine*, November 2000, <http://harpers.org/media/slideshow/annot/2000-11/>

[12] Webster G. Tarpley, *Synthetic Terror: Made in USA* 4th Edition, Joshua Tree CA: Progressive Press, 2005, 27.

[13] Znet, "Chomsky Dismisses 9/11 Conspiracy Theories as Dubious," Rense.com, December 3, 2006, <http://rense.com/general74/dismiss.htm> Url to original article at <http://blog.zmag.org/node/2779> no longer operable.

[14] Tarpley, *Synthetic Terror*, 27.

[15] Norden, "Tender Tyranny," 6, italics in original.

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