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The Two Dozen Touchstone Issues

Who is liberal? Who is conservative? What words, beliefs or actions define a person as liberal? What policies, manifestos or position papers characterize their authors as conservative? We had better have a good understanding of the answers to these questions if there is to be any hope of achieving the book's goals set down in the Preface and Introduction. In fact most Americans have a clear intuitive sense of the political leanings of the politicians and political organizations to which they are exposed. When they hear a politician speak, or read a newspaper editorial or examine a party's position paper, they quickly come to a conclusion as to whether the stance they just encountered represents a liberal or conservative way of thought. As such politicians and political organizations get pegged rather quickly as to their positions in the political spectrum—from ultra-liberal, to liberal, moderate (or centrist), conservative or ultra-conservative. But sometimes the labels and reputations can be confusing or even misleading. The current Bush administration is widely regarded as conservative, even ultra-conservative by some. Yet its record on the growth of government, deficit spending and immigration control could easily be characterized as liberal. Its predecessor, the Clinton administration, was routinely tagged with the liberal label, yet it pursued welfare reform, free trade and (relative) fiscal restraint in a way that would garner laurels from a conservative audience.

So, perhaps we really do need to pin down more precisely what constitutes liberalism/conservatism and liberal/conservative thought and policies. But to do so we need to decide which, among several methods, is the best way to do that—especially in relation to our ultimate goal of correlating age to political axioms. Indeed, there are various ways to formulate a set of answers to the questions that opened this chapter. A logician or philosopher might attempt to write down

(perhaps long and elaborate) dictionary-type definitions of the two words, liberal and conservative, and then characterize words, beliefs, deeds, policies, etc. according to which of the two definitions they best satisfy. A very simple example might be:

A liberal is someone who believes in the perfectibility of man and that society must therefore be structured so as to foster the best possibility of man advancing toward that state of perfection; whereas a conservative accepts that man is inherently flawed, and therefore society must be arranged so as to minimize the mistakes he can make and the damage he can wreak.

Another possibility is to identify a small number—perhaps no more than one—of issues, whereby the individual's words, actions or beliefs addressed to these issues determine his locus in the continuum of positions between liberal and conservative. For example, for some people, if you are pro-abortion, you are liberal and if you are pro-life then you are conservative. End of story.

Yet a third method would be to examine the host of organizations to which you belong, newspapers and magazines to which you subscribe and parties that you support. That roster defines your political philosophy. For example, if you are a member of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and People for the American Way; if you subscribe to the Nation, the New York Review of Books, the New York Times and listen to CBS News; if you vote for candidates put forth by the Democratic Party; then you are most certainly liberal. On the other hand, if you are a member of the Heritage Foundation, the National Rifle Association and the National Association of Scholars; if you subscribe to the Weekly Standard, Commentary and the Washington Times and listen to Fox News; if you vote for candidates sponsored by the Republican Party, then no one would mistake you for anything but a conservative. Well this form of definition is a little like guilt by association, but it has its merits. It affords a classification without any deep analysis of philosophy or ideology. You are identified essentially by the company you keep.

In a similar vein, you might use the pantheon of political gods whom you worship. Thus if you read the books and approve of the words of Adam Smith, William Buckley, Friedrich Hayek, Russell Kirk, John Locke, Edmund Burke and Ronald Reagan, then you are most certainly of the conservative persuasion. But if you are moved by the scribblings and ideas of John Dewey, Voltaire and

Rousseau, Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, John Maynard Keynes or Karl Marx, then you are most assuredly marked as a liberal.

Our method for specifying liberalism and conservatism will draw to some extent on all four of the preceding schemes. We'll start by codifying the intuitive approach. We'll do this by listing 24 specific issues—I call them *touchstone issues*—such that one's position on these issues will, at the beginning of the twenty first century in the USA, reveal with near certainty, whether one leans to political starboard or port. This is considerably less formal than supplying a rigorous definition or a basic statement of philosophy according to which we would measure political temperature, but it is how our country's citizens generally distinguish between liberals and conservatives, that is, by the positions they espouse on the touchstone issues. When we listen to a presidential debate, watch the nominating conventions, read the newspaper accounts of stump speeches, we look for code words and phrases, and hints as to where the candidate comes down on "the issues"; most of us don't try to match the contents to the thoughts of Engels or de Tocqueville. If we know which side a candidate takes on 6-10 fundamental issues, we feel we know her political pedigree, and we vote accordingly. It may not be the most axiomatic or deductive method, but it works for the American people.

However, we must not lose sight of the basic goal in the book—namely, to attempt a correlation between age and political philosophy. Arranging our understanding of the differences between liberals and conservatives by locating them on the touchstone issues will turn out not to be the most effective way to pursue that goal. That will become clear as we explore each of the 24 issues briefly later in this chapter. So in Chapter 2, we will seek a dictionary-type definition of the liberal and conservative philosophies. In fact I will offer five. And although they are very useful in understanding political differences, they are in some sense too abstract for our attempt at a correlation. Therefore, in Chapters 3 & 4, we will reformulate them into a set of five categories, or compartments, motivated by the five definitions. We will see how the touchstone issues fit into these compartments (not always so perfectly it will turn out). Moreover, it is from this compartmentalization of the issues that we will obtain a structure for addressing the question of whether there is a meaningful correlation between age and political philosophy. That analysis will occur in the second part of the book. The third part of the book will measure whether reality matches the proposed correlation.

The Two Dozen Issues

I am about to present a list of 24 issues. You are certainly anticipating most if not all of them—abortion, taxes, the war against radical Islam, etc. But rather than list them as such, I will present instead a table with two columns. Each row in the table will highlight one issue and the two columns in that row will establish the generally accepted liberal and conservative positions on the specific issue, respectively. Taken as a whole, the table offers a mighty compelling illustration of the vast differences between liberals and conservatives. We will center our discussion of those differences around the table, and we will use it throughout the book. However, as we shall see, it will not be the best vehicle for correlating political positions to the age of their adherents. Here is the table:

Things that liberals generally favor	Things that conservatives generally favor
Extensive government spending	Limited government spending
High taxes	Low taxes
More government regulations	Fewer government regulations
Welfare	Welfare reform
Low military spending	High military spending
UN preeminence in settling intl. disputes	US leadership in settling intl. disputes
Multilateral agreements and treaties	US sovereignty as paramount in setting policy
Abortion	Pro-life
Homosexual rights	Strictly heterosexual marriage
Diversity, i.e. special favors for certain groups	Equal rights before the law
Protection for targeted industries	Free trade
Minimum wage laws	No government edicts on wages
Judicial activism	Judicial restraint
Environmental activism	Envir. concern, tempered by economic reality
Animal rights	Human rights
Wall between Church and State	Religious morality infusing laws of the State
Amnesty for illegal aliens	Deportation for illegal aliens

Social justice	Rugged individualism
Rehabilitation for criminals	Punishment for criminals
Abolishment of capital punishment	Appropriate use of capital punishment
Gun control	Concealed gun permits
Constitution as a living document	Strict interpretation of the Constitution
Group rights	Individual rights
Broadening the culture to accommodate the browning of America	Preserving traditional American culture

There is no particular order to the list, no item intended to be more important than any other. And although the list is quite comprehensive I do not mean to suggest it is complete. There are undoubtedly other issues that divide liberals from conservatives, and some of you may be red hot at this point upon noticing the omission of your favorite issue. Examples that come to mind include: outsourcing of American jobs overseas, support for the United Nations, re-importation of prescription drugs, the war against illegal drugs, censorship, and the use of the Senate filibuster to prevent executive and judicial appointments. There are others. No list could possibly be exhaustive. However, I contend that my list is robust enough to accomplish three objectives:

1. Catch issues in all the major categories of political discourse—foreign affairs, defense, finance, trade, culture, law, religion, medicine and science;
2. Be comprehensive enough so that the identification of a position in even half of these issues will certainly pin down the political leanings of any holder of those positions;
3. Begin to suggest a small set of embracing categories, into which the issues can be pigeon-holed, that are conducive to a study of correlation between age and political philosophy.

Succinct Summary Statements

My next task is to expound somewhat on the two dozen issues. I do not want to write a treatise on each issue, explaining why, for example, the liberal position on that issue is consistent with a basic liberal philosophy. After all, we have not stated an overarching liberal or conservative philosophy—at least not yet. Rather

I will attempt in several sentences, for each side on each issue, to provide a capsule summary of the conservative or liberal position on the issue, and in this way begin to identify the umbrella categories that will arise later in Part I.

In fact it is a challenging exercise to fashion these succinct summary sentences. Composing a short, cogent and convincing explanatory statement for each side of each issue forces one to go rapidly to the crux of both the stance on and the underlying principles for an issue—for both sides of the debate. Now you might contend that it shouldn't be so difficult for me to do that as I am an ardent proponent of one side, and I inhabited the other side for the first half of my life. I should have a good understanding of both sides. Hopefully so. In fact my goal in constructing these pithy descriptions was to do so in such a manner that if you didn't know which side of the divide I came down on, you would not be able to tell from my descriptions. Did I succeed? Read on.

But before you do, a word about *pronouns*. For centuries, when describing the actions of an unnamed individual in the English language, it was sufficient—and grammatically correct—to write, “the average theater attendee was in his 30s and he saw an average of three plays per year,” safe in the knowledge that the “he” in question represented a generic theater patron, female as well as male. No longer! Today we must employ grammatical monstrosities such as “he or she,” or “him or her,” or (s)he or s/he, or even the incorrect “they.” I find the following mode more acceptable. As the story unfolds, one alternates between the masculine and feminine pronouns in a systematic, yet arbitrary way. Not only does it preserve grammatical correctness, it occasionally introduces a bit of whimsy and even irony into the presentation. Thus in what follows in this chapter, the liberal role will be assumed by a male and the conservative counterpart by a female.

- **Government spending.** A liberal is comfortable advocating increased government spending because he views the programs, structures and equipment that the spending buys as essential for the improvement of society, and which would not come into existence if left to the devices of individuals, the business community, or civic and religious organizations. He also believes government spending improves the economy by creating jobs. A conservative, on the other hand, is sure that the programs and departments run by government agencies are wasteful, mismanaged and resistant to change—largely because the personnel who manage them are spending other people's money and so are not motivated to be efficient. She prefers that the tasks they manage be left to the market forces of the

private sector where companies, and their managers, must please customers or go out of business.

- **Taxes.** A conservative is comfortable advocating lower government taxes because she believes that lower taxes will spur economic development since it places more money in the hands of business to invest, invent and modernize and in the hands of consumers to save, invest or spend. This is consistent with her propensity towards smaller government in general, as the lower the tax rates, the less government can expand. A liberal, on the other hand, favors higher taxes in order to fund the expanded government enterprises he advocates. He also strongly favors steeply progressive taxes in order to diminish the social inequities he feels are inherent in a society that allows dramatic differences in the wealth level of its citizens. The conservative would counter that the progressive income tax structure punishes those who succeed and curtails incentives for the most bold and innovative people to develop new products and create new wealth.
- **Government Regulations.** Our liberal fellow advocates robust government regulation of various aspects of American health, consumer goods, utilities, business transactions, indeed of virtually all facets of US life, business and culture because left to themselves, the citizenry's interests are too diverse and unfocused to arrive at policies and practices that would benefit the general welfare. Specialists and concerned government officials can see the big picture more readily and are better positioned to establish fair rules that all citizens and companies should play by. Not so says our conservative gal, it is impossible for any bureaucrat to fathom the wishes and needs of tens of millions of Americans with diverse interests. The good intentions of government bureaucrats lead to inconsistent application of complex rules, wasteful policies that hamper economic development and intrusions on the life and business of the citizenry—often to the extent of violating our constitutional rights. We are better off letting the profit motive motivate business to play by sound rules rather than by imposing whimsical and often counterproductive regulations from a well-intentioned, but meddling central command.
- **Welfare.** The conservative views the plethora of government welfare programs as massive disincentives to work. She asserts that if the government will pay women to have babies and fathers not to work, then that is exactly what they will do. She believes that private organizations like religious and civic charities are better equipped to help and inspire disadvantaged people. The liberal, again motivated by his discomfort with financial disparities within society, believes it is the fundamental responsibility of the government to aid those who are less fortunate. He is not

impressed by the decline in welfare cases brought about by the welfare reform initiative of the last decade, but rather is incensed by the increasingly desperate condition of those it has left behind.

- **Military Spending.** The liberal sees expenditures for the military as money that could be put to far wiser use in domestic and international social programs for the betterment of Americans and all mankind. He also believes that war is a retrograde method for dealing with international disputes, and that the maintenance and deployment of large military forces are destabilizing to the cause of world peace. The conservative is less sanguine about the intentions of America's enemies. She regards as well spent the money required to create the most powerful and flexible US military force possible for deflecting threats and dealing with intractable foes such as Osama bin Laden. She wishes that it could be otherwise, but knows that unilateral disarmament will cost far more in the long run than the dollars we spend on the military. Those larger costs will be in the form of great harm to our homeland, economy and liberties.
- **International Conflict Resolution.** Our conservative lady views with suspicion the United Nations, which she considers an unholy conglomeration of nations, too many of which are led by bloodthirsty tyrants, corrupt gangsters and Marxist stooges, none of whom subscribe to the fundamental principles of Western Civilization. According to her, that organization is morally bankrupt and is unqualified to settle disputes that involve our national interests. For those, the US must take the lead. The liberal gentleman counters that the US has no corner on morality, and that unless our allies in particular (NATO) and the world in general (the UN) make common cause with us when we engage countries (or other entities) in disputes, then we have no justification for unilateral military action. He rarely enunciates it, but he increasingly believes that the concept of the sovereign nation-state grows antiquated and its replacement by an enlightened world order is inevitable.
- **Multilateralism vs. Unilateralism.** A liberal would be comfortable signing the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, adhering to the judgments of the International Court of Justice, and allowing US soldiers to come under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC). He sees these treaties, which on first inspection might seem harmful to US interests, playing an important role in converting America from the sole, but despised superpower into a shining example of a strong nation helping to lead the world's people toward unity, peace and harmony with the Earth. A conservative is aghast at the prospect of the Kyoto Protocol crippling our economy, the International Court of Justice declaring that we have no

right to seal our borders against illegal immigrants, and that the actions of American soldiers defending our freedom might be deemed criminal by the ICC. She believes that the President should present and the Senate should ratify only treaties that advance the welfare and interests of the United States of America. She believes that the USA was the first country in the history of the world to organize and run itself according to a rule of law endorsed and enforced by all its people, that it has the privilege, honor and duty to spread this gospel to all the nations of the world, and that it should not subvert its own special mission by allowing its purposes to be thwarted by noble-sounding multilateral agreements that do not serve our interests.

- **Abortion.** A conservative, if motivated primarily by religious beliefs, is almost certainly going to be strongly anti-abortion. She believes that life begins at conception and that abortion is the taking of a human life—murder is not too strong a word to describe the practice in her thinking. But even a non-religious conservative is likely to oppose abortion on demand, as *Roe v. Wade* has mandated, because she sees it as the most extreme manifestation of a culture of death (abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia) that threatens traditional American culture. And she believes *Roe v. Wade* was bad constitutional law in that it invented a legal concept (right to privacy) that is not present (in penumbras or otherwise) in the U.S. Constitution. A liberal will feel just as strongly in the opposite direction. A women's right to choose whether to terminate her pregnancy, he will counter, is a reflection of the highest form of individual rights protected by the Constitution—namely, her right to control her own body. He believes that the abortion of a fetus is not equivalent to the taking of a human life, certainly if the fetus is not viable, and that the rights of the pregnant woman far outweigh those, if there are any, of the fetus.
- **Homosexuality and Marriage.** A liberal believes that society has no more right to discriminate against anyone on the basis of sexual orientation than it does on the basis of race, gender, religion, ethnic origin or physical capabilities—namely, there is no such right in *any* of these instances. He believes that homosexuality is an involuntary personality trait (analogous to, say, left-handedness), and that stable, long-term homosexual relationships are as beneficial to society as stable, long-term traditional marriages. Therefore, they should be encouraged. The assignment of second-class status to homosexual families, especially if fostered by religious precepts, is an unholy reflection of ancient narrow-mindedness, he asserts, and the elevation of the status of homosexual relationships through legalized marriage will be a hallmark of great progress in an enlightened American soci-

ety. But a conservative believes that marriage is an institution, established millennia ago, whose basic ground rules have remained constant over that time: one man and one woman, until death does them part. She recognizes that the latter is an ideal to strive for and a commandment to fulfill, not a guarantee. But she views the former as immutable, an arrangement with unquestioned benefit for the participants, the children that result, and the society that blesses and nurtures them. Regardless of whether she views homosexuality as morally wrong according to scripture, unnatural in the sense of contrary to nature's laws, or an alternate lifestyle with no particular stigma, she feels that homosexual marriage, like polygamy, or other combinations of humankind, cannot be sanctioned with the accolade of marriage.

- **Diversity.** While the conservative gal acknowledges the historic wrong perpetrated on American blacks, and the legal and cultural obstacles that were faced by women, she argues that these have been addressed by changing the laws of the land (e.g., the 13th, 14th, 15th and 19th amendments to the Constitution and the civil rights laws of the 1960s). She approves the general agreement, arrived at more than a generation ago, that additional redress would be made in the form of "affirmative action," but she understood that to mean: *all other things being equal*, a position (or promotion or whatever) would go to the black or woman. However, affirmative action has morphed into reverse discrimination, it shows no sign of ever ending, and it has been applied to groups (e.g., Hispanics) who have never suffered any legal discrimination. Reverse discrimination, like discrimination in its original forms, is wrong and unconstitutional. Moreover, it taints the successful minority person's achievements, even if those successes are legitimately earned. All individuals should be treated equally before the law. Group rights are an abomination in violation of our individual constitutional rights. Our liberal guy does not agree. He is deeply disturbed by the inequities he perceives in our country between males and females on one hand, and between white people and people of color on the other. He sees the causes as historical (slavery), cultural (religions that foster male dominance), accidental (immigrant families are generally lower on the food chain) and malevolent (KKK). These inequities must be rooted out and eliminated—if necessary, by building artificial advantages for the disadvantaged groups in standard practices like school admissions, awarding of government contracts, hiring and promotions, and awards and prizes. While these practices may inconvenience members of formerly advantaged groups in society, that is a small price to pay for temporary measures that will redress historic wrongs.

- **International Trade.** When a liberal sees the importation of a product, manufactured at a lower cost in another country, which causes the loss of a domestic job, he believes the cure is to place additional duties on the imported good so as to equalize the cost and save the American worker's job. He furthermore suspects that American business is in collusion with international suppliers in order to cut costs by either holding down domestic salaries or outsourcing jobs to companies overseas. He sees international trade as a zero sum game that must be vigorously supervised and regulated by the U.S. Government. The conservative views international trade through the same prism that she observes the American economy—that is, a private market of buyers and sellers, each trying to maximize their own gain by trading aggressively but, in the vast majority of instances, fairly. Markets wax and wane, products come in and out of fashion, nations (or regions of a country) vary in their ability to produce a good efficiently. The market is far better suited, through the normal pricing mechanism, to gauge the worth of goods, the desirability of products and the amounts in which they should be produced. Protectionist tariffs restrict free trade by propping up inefficient industries and by impeding the flow of workers to better jobs in more efficient and modern sectors of the market. Adam Smith's invisible hand works just as well internationally as it does domestically. The government's heavy hand is just as deadening internationally as it is domestically.
- **Wage Regulations.** The existence of minimum wage laws is seen by a conservative as a particularly egregious example of government intervention in the market. She asserts that if we truly believe that our economy should be a free market system, then the government's role, albeit important, should be limited to: ensuring that contracts are honored, prosecuting and punishing those who fail to do so, and pursuing policies that maintain the strength and viability of the currency. But decisions on what to produce, where and how to produce it, what to sell it for, when to stop producing or whether to produce other items, and what to pay those who participate in the production, these are all decisions that must be left in the hands of the producers. The answers to these questions provided by the magic of the market (through the pricing mechanism) are far superior to those supplied by government bureaucrats. But, counters the liberal, the market system inexorably leads to inequities. The disparities between those who prosper, often beyond reason, and those who flounder, often beyond their control, are unjust. He believes a fair and just society must implement methods to smooth out those inequities. The government must play the part of the referee, not only to ensure that the playing field is level, but that the outcomes of the game are fair and equitable. The

NFL strives for parity; the U.S. economy should do no less. Minimum wage laws are a small part of that fair play mechanism. We could do much more—for example, capping the pay of corporate executives.

- **The Role of the Judiciary.** A liberal considers the judiciary to be the most important part of the US legal system. It is the final arbiter, the last bastion between the citizen and any possible tyranny that could be imposed by the executive or legislative branches of government. It is also ideally suited to blunt the excessive power or influence that might be exerted by other segments of society—for example, business, religion, or ethnic majorities. He believes that one of the most important developments in the history of the country was the emergence of the courts' power of judicial review in the early nineteenth century, and that it is the exercise of this power by the courts that has enabled our country to move forward over the last two centuries, unshackled by old laws, customs and practices. The conservative sees the exercise of judicial powers as excessive. In short, she complains that the judiciary is often legislating from the bench and thereby usurping the powers granted to the other branches of government. She feels that the proper role of the judiciary is to interpret the Constitution and legislative laws, and to adjudicate disputes. It is not to make the laws of the land. She views the actions of judges and courts such as court-ordered bussing, nullification of ballot initiatives legally approved by voters, wanton declarations that legislative acts are unconstitutional, the discovery of group rights not granted in the federal or state constitutions, and finally the setting aside of criminal convictions on the flimsiest evidence that supposedly represents a denial of the criminal's rights, she sees all of these as judicial tyranny.
- **The Environment.** The conservative, as the appellation implies, is inclined to conserve and protect the Earth's environment—its air, water and natural beauty. However, she recognizes that the desire to do so often comes into conflict with an equally natural desire to improve the human condition—by, for example, building bigger and better homes, improving transportation, developing new sources of energy, manufacturing new products. Resolving that inherent conflict is a delicate balancing act that challenges her and her fellow conservatives. She approaches the problem objectively, aware that Mother Nature is sometimes more harmful to humans than we are to her—viz., blizzards, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, avalanches, tsunamis. The liberal approaches the problem in a more religious way. To him, the Earth is sacred and all human desires do not measure up to the absolute requirement of preserving the natural resources and balances of the Earth's ecosystems. Finding energy sources,

building roads, and manufacturing trucks rank much lower in the pecking order for him than keeping the air and water clean, preserving the rain forests and protecting wildlife. Mankind's instincts for self-preservation and advancement must not be allowed to interfere with humanity's sacred duty to protect the environment.

- **Animals.** We are all God's creatures, admonishes the liberal; mankind's claim on the Earth's bounty does not exceed those of the animal kingdom. As part of our sacred trust to preserve the environment, mankind is also duty bound to preserve and protect animal wildlife. Moreover, the liberal insists, we should treat our domesticated animals with the same respect. In particular, animals should not suffer at the hands of humans. The conservative, at times taking her cue from the biblical command to humans to "exercise dominion over the Earth," and respectful of animals as God's creatures, nevertheless does not accord them the same rights as humans. She has no problem with the use of animals in scientific or medical research, and does not feel guilty about eating or wearing them, provided humane and sanitary practices are adhered to in the process. She values the beauty of the peacock, the grace of the leopard, the power of the elephant, but if confronted with a choice between the welfare of an animal and the improvement of the human condition, her preference is unquestionably the latter.
- **Religion.** A conservative believes that the Bill of Rights grants us freedom of religion, not freedom from religion. The founders were religious people who wanted to guarantee all Americans the freedom to worship in any form they chose. The main objective was to ensure that no religion would be anointed the official state religion of the country. The founders always imagined, as our conservative lady believes has been borne out, that a democratic America would only survive and prosper if its peoples had strong morals grounded in religion. She sees the banishment of religion from the public square as contrary to the history of our nation, a development that will weaken its fabric. On the other hand, the liberal desires that the wall between Church and State—an idea plucked from the writings of Jefferson—should be set as high as possible. He worries that any State sanction of religion could lead us down a path toward religiously inspired sectarian conflict of the kind that plagued Europe for centuries. He cites the Muslim Middle East as a place where the intermingling of religion and State has led to militarism and fanaticism, and counsels that we are not immune from that virus if we allow the commingling of religion and government. Rather, he believes religion is purely a private mat-

ter, that the State should be completely secular, and the two should have virtually nothing to do with one another.

- **Immigration.** The liberal takes pride in the fact that the US is a nation of immigrants, believes that our strength is due in no small measure to the talented people drawn to our shores from all over the world, and sees the increased diversification of our population and culture, through the continued immigration of peoples from underdeveloped nations, bringing about a change in America from a WASP-dominated society into a truly peaceful and harmonious polyglot of the world's ethnic identities. He is not terribly troubled that much of the immigration is illegal—first, because it may hasten the onset of his future vision of America, and second because it jibes with his growing belief in the eventual demise of the sovereign nation-state. For these reasons, he favors conferring all the rights of American citizens on immigrants—legal or otherwise. The conservative is also proud of America as an immigrant nation. But she is worried about current immigration for several reasons. First, she considers the granting of any legal status to illegal immigrants as a reward to people who broke US law. Second, she worries that new and recent immigrants—legal or otherwise—are purposely not being inculcated with classic American culture and fears this will lead to a fragmentation of American unity and Balkanization of our nation. Third, the level of immigration is too high for the country to properly digest all the immigrants, even if we had the right attitude on acculturation. Finally, there is too much emphasis on family reunification and not enough on skills and education. She feels we should continue to rescue politically persecuted refugees, but instead of summarily admitting third cousins of current alien residents, we should be encouraging the arrival of people who can contribute economically and socially to the country. She endorses the continuation of America as a land of immigrants, but immigration should be measured, legal and with greater emphasis on potential societal contributions.
- **Leitmotif.** What is the basic idea, guiding principle, or recurring theme that best describes what America stands for? A conservative might sum it up in the phrase *rugged individualism*. The individual is paramount in American philosophy, history and culture. She is certain American society is set up so that the individual is free to pray as she chooses, associate with whom she wishes, vote freely, engage in commerce and finance with maximum latitude, and express her ideas without fear of retribution. In short, she is unfettered in her pursuit of life, liberty and happiness—provided of course that she does not interfere with the corresponding rights of others.

What makes it rugged is that although the opportunities are endless and the road is open, the outcomes are never certain. They depend on the individual and, to some extent, fate. The liberal would likely identify the concept of *social justice* instead. Not daunted by the conservative's labeling of that phrase as a euphemism for socialism, he believes that America has projected—although perhaps not as strongly as it could—the idea of a socially just society, which for him means that: not only are people created equal, but society ensures that they are treated equally; neither poverty nor wealth should influence one's standing before the law; since unchecked rugged individualism inevitably leads to disparities and inequities among peoples and groups, mechanisms must be put in place to level them out; and finally not only do all people and groups enjoy equal opportunity in education, business, sports and entertainment, and politics, but the mosaic of participants in these endeavors must faithfully mirror the face of the country ethnically, racially and gender-wise. The most important words in the English language are justice, mercy and compassion.

- **Treatment of Criminals.** The liberal man sees criminal behavior as a failing of society. Conditions of poverty, discrimination or social injustice have driven an individual past the breaking point resulting in the commission of a crime intended by the perpetrator to ameliorate those circumstances. The best way to attack the crime problem, according to our liberal, is on the one hand, to alleviate the conditions that caused the criminal behavior and on the other hand, to rehabilitate the criminal through training and education that will help him to cope with society's failings. He sees mandatory stiff sentences, harsh prison conditions, and plea bargains that incarcerate people for longer than is warranted, as counterproductive and unfair to people who have fallen prey to the traps laid by an often unjust society. The conservative woman has a more simplistic view of criminal behavior. The rules are clear for everyone, she asserts, if you break them you must be punished. She has more concern with the rights of victims than the rights of criminals—especially as the latter routinely deprive the former of their right to life, liberty or happiness. She promotes vigorous police protection of the citizenry, aggressive prosecution of criminals, and long prison sentences for violent offenders. She believes that one of the prime functions of a just society is to provide maximum protection for its law abiding citizens and the swift and prolonged removal from their midst of those who disturb domestic tranquility.

- **Capital Punishment.** Given her attitude toward the treatment of criminals, it is not surprising that the conservative supports capital punishment. She believes that society has the right to exact the severest punishment on those who commit the most heinous crimes. She sees capital punishment not so much as a deterrent to future acts, but rather as a form of retribution against those who have been convicted of committing vicious, premeditated murder. She would gladly throw the switch on Osama bin Laden. But the liberal is strongly opposed to capital punishment. He feels that the practice is barbaric (state-sanctioned murder) and inconsistent with the morals of an enlightened society. He is appalled at the thought of the execution of an innocent person and argues that just as our legal system is geared (through the requirement for unanimous jury verdicts) to risk the acquittal of 10 guilty people if it will prevent the conviction of an innocent one, similarly, we must forego executing 100 people who are “obviously” guilty of capital offenses if it will avoid the killing of an innocent person. Executing Osama bin Laden will not restore to life the 3,000 innocent lives he snuffed out. Capital punishment is indeed not a deterrent and vengeance is a backward motive.
- **Gun Control.** One way to combat crime, advocates the liberal, is to take away the criminals’ weapons. If strict controls were placed on the manufacture and sale of guns and rifles, it would drastically decrease the number of these weapons on the streets and reduce crime. Equally importantly, it would cut down on the number of dreadful gun incidents that occur in homes and businesses, either accidentally or in anger because a weapon was available. He points out that we license cars and drivers, marriages, and many other common activities and arrangements; we should license and strictly regulate dangerous weapons as well. Sounds good, says the conservative, but there is a dangerous flaw in the argument—namely, all studies show that the cities in America with the strictest gun control laws have the highest rates of violent crime, and that the jurisdictions that have legalized the holding of concealed guns have seen their crime rates plummet. She cites this as proof of the trite sounding phrase, “if you outlaw guns, then only the outlaws will have them.” Moreover, we are granted the right to bear weapons in the Second Amendment to the Constitution, a right that cannot be taken away by well-intentioned liberals. The founders feared that an unarmed citizenry would be easy prey for a well-armed government. We would be foolish to test the theory by surrendering our weapons.
- **The Constitution.** The conservative views the Constitution in a biblical way, somewhat like an Orthodox Jew regards the Old Testament. It may

not be the word of God, but it is the fundamental document, drafted by our wise and prescient founders, that established legal, political and social rules which have sustained and nurtured our nation for 220 years, that established a system of government which is the envy of and the model for the civilized world, and that is amendable, but only by a precise process that requires a broad political consensus among the populace. It is not a “living document” that grows legal limbs and hidden branches, which await discovery by modern lawyers and judges. It is the job of jurists to interpret how the original laws of the Constitution are to be applied to new and difficult legal and political challenges that emerge, not to use the Constitution or phantom clauses in it to create law from the bench. The liberal does not agree. While he acknowledges that the Constitution is an inspirational, seminal and revolutionary document that created a new kind of nation, one must recognize its limitations. First, it was written long ago and did not foresee the enormity and complexities of twenty-first century American life. Second, it is flawed by its accommodation of slavery, neglect of women’s rights, and imposition of arcana like the Electoral College. It is extraordinarily helpful in providing first principles, but it also supplies hints and guides to new interpretations that arise naturally more than two centuries after its original conception. In short, its genius and value lie not in its immutability, but in its flexibility and adaptability.

- **The Origin and Nature of Rights.** Both conservatives and liberals accept that the basic political rights of all Americans are stipulated in the first ten amendments to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. They differ in their emphasis on which of the rights enumerated therein are most important, their interpretation of the meaning and implications of those rights, exactly to whom the rights are granted—individuals or groups, and granted by whom. The liberal tends to focus on the first, fourth and eighth amendments. From those he extrapolates rights to: decent housing, a fair-paying job, freedom from the influence of religion, immunity from any intrusion by the government on any aspect of what he sees as his private life, and the right not to be treated too harshly by his government in the prosecution of crimes. The conservative’s attention is directed more toward the second, fifth, ninth and tenth amendments. From these she expects the rights to: defend herself from aggression, pursue business interests and acquire property free from unwarranted government supervision or intervention, equal treatment as an individual before the law in every way, protection from an overly intrusive government that should be concerned only with the specific powers granted to it in the Constitution. Although the Constitution and the Bill of Rights speak of the “right of

the people,” liberals often interpret this to mean in a group sense, whereas conservatives are insistent about it meaning individual rights. And finally, the liberal sees the rights granted by the Constitution itself, and therefore by extension, by the government. Some conservatives understand the rights granted in the Constitution to be, as indicated by Mr. Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, “endowed by their creator,” that is, ultimately the rights are conferred by God. Other conservatives focus on a different Jeffersonian phrase, “consent of the governed,” to conclude that the rights are granted by the people themselves.

- **American Culture.** The conservative feels a deep attachment to traditional American culture. By that she means an affinity for and an allegiance to: the British tradition of law, a Calvinist work ethic, a strong role for religion in private and public life, traditional marriage and family, pride and trust in the military, respect for private property, a limited government that is as invisible as possible to the individual, pursuit of the fine arts, literature and music of Western Civilization, and an economic and social system that is devoid of classes and in which an individual encounters a level playing field that allows her to advance as far as her talents permit. The basic tenets of the culture were established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and held firm throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth. During that time vast waves of immigrants from Western and Eastern Europe, as well as from other parts of the world, adopted and practiced the culture as strongly as the descendants of the Mayflower did. It is a marvelous culture that has helped to sustain American democracy, prosperity and freedom. Not only should long-standing Americans not turn their backs on it, it is entirely reasonable to expect new immigrants, wherever they originate, to adopt it as fervently as their predecessors did. The liberal believes somewhat differently, namely that as America grows and its composition continues its reorientation from white to peoples of color, from Protestant and Roman Catholic to other religions, from European extraction to Asian, African and Latin American, its culture must evolve if it is to remain a viable and vibrant nation. In particular, its culture must incorporate and celebrate elements of: non-Christian religions, secular humanism, homosexual lifestyles—including marriage, forms of art, literature and music whose origins are outside the Anglo-European sphere, international law, commitment to non-violence and peaceful negotiation, the complete freedom of the individual to pursue his private interests—even if they offend his neighbor, as long as they don’t harm his neighbor, and a wise and benevolent government that helps to perfect society by elevating its weakest components and by checking the excesses of corporate power. The liberal asserts that proponents of

the traditional culture too easily gloss over its transparent flaws: its willingness to look the other way when black Americans were—and in some quarters still are—treated as second class citizens, its assignment of subservient roles to women, its countenance of discrimination against Jews up to the middle of the twentieth century, and its aggressive and hostile components that have caused many people around the world to hate us. The infusion into the USA of peoples of color and the different cultures they bring have changed America for the better—but not nearly enough. We must hasten the day when not only is our political system admired around the world, but so too is our culture. We can achieve that by making it more ecumenical, less business-oriented, more humanistic, less militaristic.

The earliest political memories I have are from the summer of 1953. The Rosenbergs were executed in June and the Korean War armistice was signed in July. Actually, I have listened to family stories all my life about how my parents trained me to stick out my tongue at the radio during the presidential campaign of 1948 whenever Governor Dewey was mentioned and to sputter, “Phooey on Dewey.” It was thought cute, but to be honest I don’t remember doing it—it was just too long ago. I recall being an attentive student in school when American history and/or government was taught but I don’t really remember thinking about politics until approximately age 15, when I was a sophomore at the Bronx High School of Science in New York. It was at this time that my father’s brother bought me a subscription to the New York Times. It was his bible (and would remain so for the rest of his life, which lasted until 2002).

I read the Times daily throughout high school, then college (at the City College of New York), and graduate school (at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and finally during my postdoctoral years at Yale University. I finally gave it up when I moved in 1969 to suburban Washington in order to assume a faculty position at the University of Maryland. Of course I replaced it with the Washington Post so I barely broke stride. In any event I was a Times devotee for nearly a decade and a half.

In all that time I don’t ever recall reading any story and thinking that it was slanted, biased or other than totally objective and completely on target. Nor do I remember ever reading any column or editorial and thinking what I was reading was anything but enlightened, eminently sensible, and worthy of consideration. How could it be otherwise? The New York Times was as reliable as the Bible, probably more so.

The messages I recall receiving from the Times during those years were that: (i) retrograde southern Democrats and corporate-controlled Republicans, both of whom were bigots and reactionaries, had held the country in their iron grip for generations and were holding back progress; (ii) their grip was broken in the 1960s and the new order was ushering in a more just and humane society; (iii) the Cold War declared by Churchill was nothing more than a competition between competing ideologies as to how best to organize society and the economy, that it was not clear that we had the superior or winning position, and that we had better be careful in prosecuting this “war” as we might be the cause of a nuclear holocaust and the annihilation of the world. It was never pointed out: that Roosevelt’s New Deal was implemented despite the aforementioned iron grip, nor that the Eisenhower administration made no effort to undo it; that the Soviets were as evil and murderous as the Nazis; that John Kennedy, charming and glamorous as he and his wife might be, was a womanizing, pain-pill popping, mob-acquainted lightweight, who was probably not nearly as “progressive” as they made him out to be, and may very well have been in over his head; and finally that Lyndon Johnson was a vulgar megalomaniac whose Great Society Ponzi schemes would likely bankrupt the nation when the bills came due several generations hence. They still haven’t fessed up on that last one.

To be honest, I accepted every word I read in the Times as if it was from the mouth of God. In doing so I was only imitating my uncle, and just about everyone else in my family. We were immigrants and first and second generation Jewish Americans with a propensity to accept what the New York Times fed us unquestioningly. We were a classic ethnic family in the best sense: close-knit, food-oriented, raucous in our celebrations, demonstrably Jewish, ambitious, and quarrelsome about a lot of things—although mainly sports and business. However, our political worldview, on the other hand, was pretty homogeneous—across the generations. I shan’t say too much about this historical and ongoing Jewish affinity for the Left; that irrefutable allegiance has been addressed by many. But I will examine later why it perseveres across the generations, as that is particularly germane to the topic of this book. Suffice it to say here that, in my New York Times phase, I was idealistic, passionate about social justice, convinced that the oligarchy that ran the country in the 1950s had to be overthrown, and deliriously happy when it was overthrown in the 1960s. I was thinking with my heart at the time—just as one would expect of a politically-minded young person.