

Preface

I have spent a tremendous portion of my adult life in two worlds. One world is academia, the university, and the inhabitants I have associated with most intimately in that world are, like me, mathematics faculty. The other world is that of Jewish America. My family, my neighbors, my friends, my social contacts, even many of my colleagues, have been Jewish in large proportion. I am extremely comfortable in these worlds. One of America's great gifts is that it allows its citizens a freedom of association that affords a wide latitude to choose among myriad possibilities. It is possible to pursue one's associations in depth without compromising one's place as an upstanding member of American society. I vote, shop, travel, pursue a career, discharge my civic responsibilities (e.g., serve on juries), attend sporting and cultural events, all alongside my fellow Americans, most of whom inhabit other worlds (e.g., law enforcement officials, construction trades people, evangelicals, stamp collectors, political bloggers, NASCAR enthusiasts, etc.) and we all cohabit easily, simultaneously treasuring this great country that embraces us all.

As I said, I am comfortable in my two worlds. I love mathematics and the academic life in which I pursue it. Like my fellow mathematicians, I enjoy patterns, logical thought, abstraction and computation. Like my fellow professors, I value the search for truth and beauty, and I cherish the freedom to pursue the strands of investigation that I choose—which is the hallmark of an academic life—rather than be assigned to a project team investigating a specific scientific phenomenon as I would be in the corporate or industrial world. I am comfortable in my academic milieu and I exhibit behavioral patterns and thought processes that are typical of my academic colleagues.

I also treasure my Jewish life. From as early as I can remember, I enjoyed learning about Jewish history, participating in Jewish festivals, taking pride in the achievements of Jewish people, and reveling in the fact that America has provided the warmest home and greatest opportunity for the Jewish people in our millennia-long wanderings around the Earth. Gentiles are skeptical when Jews claim that they can recognize other Jews on the scantest of physical evidence. Neverthe-

less, it's true. And it helps to account for the comfort zone I feel in their presence. As with my academic world, my Jewish world is filled with characters that think and behave like me—we celebrate the same holidays, uphold like values, esteem the same traditions of scholarship and worship the same God. It is indeed very comfortable.

But there is one corner in both of my worlds in which I am out of kilter with my cohabitants—political philosophy. Scores of my friends and associates, in both worlds, see me as an anomaly. They are overwhelmingly liberal—and I am conservative. I wasn't always. Until roughly the age of 30, I was in lockstep with my two brethren politically. What happened? Why didn't it happen to them? Moving from a liberal to a conservative philosophy as one grows older is a fairly commonly observed phenomenon—at least in many (perhaps most) of the different worlds in America. But not in my two worlds. I will attempt to explain why that might be so in this book.

Having said that, I actually will not provide the explanation until the third and final part of the book. In the first two parts, I will examine more generally whether my political trek from port to starboard is indeed a typical journey for Americans as they age, and why or why not one might expect it to be typical. In short, I will examine the legitimacy of a correlation between age and political philosophy. And although I won't examine that correlation as it applies to my two worlds until the final chapters of the book, I will, throughout the book, constantly adopt three perspectives—academic, Jewish and personal—as I present my arguments, test my hypotheses and draw my conclusions.

CREDENTIALS

Recently, I published *YOU CAN DO THE MATH: How to Overcome your Math Phobia and Make Better Financial Decisions*. The book, a financial self-help manual for the math-challenged people of America, was my first foray outside the realm of academic publishing. In fact, I am Senior Associate Dean and Professor of Mathematics at the University of Maryland. In addition to *YOU CAN DO THE MATH*, I have published eleven other books dealing with mathematics and computing, and I am the author of more than 70 scientific research articles and the editor of numerous mathematical research volumes.

How does this qualify me to write about political matters? Strictly speaking, it doesn't. But in fact, I have always been interested in political and social issues. Long recognized, and chided incessantly for being one of a handful of political conservatives in the vast liberal academic regime that dominates American universities, I have extensive experience defending the conservative viewpoint in informal writings and conversations on campus. Now I test those convictions in my first entry into formal political literature. During my academic career, I have been storing up many of the ideas expressed in this book. It is a pleasure and a relief to finally let them out. I believe their poignancy and originality, and the passion with which I express them, will more than compensate for my "rookie status." And, by the way, I use a little mathematical reasoning to help me reach my conclusions in the second part of the book.

OUTSIDE THE STANDARD MODE

Most contemporary political books promote exactly one of the liberal or conservative agendas. This usually entails an attendant attempt to explain why the other agenda is misguided. This book will differ from that mode in several respects. First, it will offer a, hopefully, fair comparison of the agendas. Next, although it will quickly be evident that *my* poker chips are on the conservative side of the table, I will at least entertain the notion that I am betting a losing hand. Also, the book presents a rather comprehensive and coherent enumeration and compartmentalization of the current central tenets of the two agendas. And finally, I will explore the correlation of these agendas with age. All of this is rather different from the usual book that either examines specific political battles, eras, individuals or events, or evolves quickly into a political diatribe on the superiority of one philosophy over the other.

SPECIAL FEATURES

- **Fairness.** I will suspend value judgments from the main presentation of the liberal and conservative agendas in the first part of the book. Although I freely admit that I am an adherent of the conservative philosophy, I see no purpose in allowing that potential bias to color my outline of the two agendas. I will confine the expression of *my* personal preferences largely to those portions of the book that are ...

- **Personal.** Throughout the book, in sections that are clearly marked, I will trace my personal experiences as I made my own journey from the liberal to the conservative side of the ledger. The personal vignettes and stories will often, but not always, have a Jewish or academic underlying theme.
- **Style.** I seek to avoid the appearance of a weighty political tome, replete with cross references, annotations and data from statistical surveys. I prefer to present the book more in the style of a long op/ed piece rather than as an academic government and politics text. Thus, there is only an occasional footnote, a relatively short bibliography and virtually no citation of polling data. This makes for easier reading and a more lively and entertaining experience. Nevertheless, the treatment is ...
- **Comprehensive.** Fundamental statements of the two competing philosophies are developed, the philosophies are identified by two dozen specific issues that define the respective agendas, issues which are then organized into five broad compartments around which is studied ...
- **Correlation.** The relationship between the agendas and the age of their adherents. The idea of such a correlation is not new, but its exploration in the context of the developed issues and compartments allows for a systematic examination of the correlation and affords the possibility of a prediction of our political future.

A NEW AGE?

Most conservatives believe that the country's political and cultural agendas have been driven *almost exclusively* by liberals from the time of the Roosevelt era—and many would specify that of Teddy, not Franklin. That statement becomes false with the advent of the Reagan presidency, but only to the extent that the exclusivity is over, the liberal dominance continues in many ways to this day. Now, some might argue that we are on the verge of a historic shift, indeed that the tide has already turned. After a century in which liberal thought and practice has governed our politics, dominated our cultural institutions, and called the social tunes, we stand at the dawn of a nascent conservative age in America. Is it so? Through an examination of the liberal/conservative divide and its relation to age, I will attempt to answer that question.