

PREFACE: WHY I USED TO BE A LIBERAL

CALL ME OLD-FASHIONED but I still like to read the print copy of my daily newspaper, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, Ohio's Largest Newspaper. What I like about the print copy is often times when I'm reading one story I stumble across another one of interest. It's hard to do that on a tablet.

Back in 2007 I happened upon a story buried in the back of the paper. It was about a group of students at Oberlin College trying to start a Young Republican club. You might have heard of Oberlin's reputation as one of the most liberal campuses in America so they were underdogs to say the least.

Well, there was a photo with the story that immediately caught my eye. The Young Republicans put up a sign about an organizational meeting and some of our "best and brightest" young students painted swastikas on the sign.

Hopefully, if you are intelligent enough to be reading this book you know that swastikas were the symbol of Adolf Hitler's fascist Nazi Party. They were responsible for killing millions of people who didn't agree with their views before and during World War II.

So these students were trying to equate the Republican Party with fascism. Well, I am a registered Republican voter so I was immediately upset by the reference for a number of reasons.

First of all, my father was a soldier during World War II, the war that put fascism out of business. He parachuted into France on D-Day, a heroic feat that I think about every day.

Can you imagine jumping out of an airplane in the middle of the night, not knowing where you are landing, while carrying a rifle and about one hundred pounds of crap on your back? And then you land in the middle of a cornfield surrounded by enemy soldiers wanting to kill you? What my father did still amazes me to this day. And since this book is a lot about a father's role in our modern society I hope you keep his memory in mind as you read it.

Yet my father did not act alone. Any student of World War II understands that there were thousands of stories just like his. The sacrifices that my dad and his whole generation made to keep the world safe for democracy were huge.

My dad also ended up as a prisoner of war in a German concentration camp. So I also think of him any time the subject of the Holocaust is raised. He did not have it as bad as the Jews under the Nazis but he had little food and warmth during one of Europe's coldest winters on record. The suffering he must have endured every day still tears me up. He returned to America weighing only 90 pounds and with a bad case of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I wouldn't recommend his weight loss program to anyone.

So when I read that these students were comparing America's Republican Party, the party of Abe Lincoln, to Hitler's Nazi Party, it upset me greatly. I thought to myself, "What are they teaching these kids?" They are in desperate need of a history lesson and I am just the person to give them one.

I called the student who was trying to organize the Young Republicans and offered to visit campus and give a talk titled: "Why I Used to Be a Liberal." And I told him that I did not just want to preach to a bunch of future Republicans who agreed with me. I wanted to meet with the enemy camp as well. I asked him to publicize my speech as an open challenge to all of the students on campus who disagreed with my premise.

Much to my surprise about 50 students showed up on a bitter cold winter's night. In fact, the college did not give me a large enough space and we had standing room only. We had a lively discussion that I enjoyed thoroughly. Here are some highlights I still remember.

First, I asked them all to stand and say the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America like we used to do every day when I was in grade school. I could tell it made many of them uncomfortable but they went along with it just to humor me. I was curious what their reaction would be.

Secondly, I told them that I wanted to record the meeting with my video camera for my own personal reference only. I wanted to look back on my performance and see what I could learn from it. But many of the students objected. From what I gathered they felt the Pledge of Allegiance was pushing it but the fear of being seen with a bunch of Republicans was too much for their young psyches.

It could permanently damage their liberal reputations. I thought it was quite strange from my point of view but I acquiesced and turned off my camera. Looking back I wish I was more forceful. I would love to watch it again today. But they did give me a nice write-up in the campus newspaper, *The Oberlin Review*. (You can find a link to the article at my web site: www.peterjedick.com)

So I gave them a quick speech on how I was a lot like them when I was their age. How I came from a family of Democrats in Cleveland where Republicans were branded as the rich people's party and the Democrats represented the working poor like my family.

How when I was in college we hated Republican President Richard Nixon because he represented the Vietnam War, even though it was two Democrat Presidents who put our troops on the ground there, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. I explained to them how most of us baby boomers were taught to be Democrats and how since most of their professors shared my college pedigree their profs were probably teaching them the same mantra.

But—and here was the big BUT—my views changed as I grew older. I basically gave them the capsule version of this book. I told them their views might change also once they went out into the real world, got a haircut, got a real job, raised a family and paid taxes. And more importantly, once they discovered what the government was doing with their tax money.

Then I added how it was really two of my many jobs that made me not only a Republican, but a dreaded conservative Republican. I told them how as a substitute teacher in the Cleveland public school system I was forced to deal with the school busing experiment, a brainchild of the Democrats. I explained how much it hurt me to witness the destruction of a once great public school system, especially since I was a Cleveland public school graduate myself.

Then I told them a few stories from the Cleveland Fire Department about welfare families and Affirmative Action, two more Democratic darlings that I had been forced to deal with during my career.

After that I opened the floor to questions.

We went back and forth and had a rousing discussion. I enjoyed it thoroughly. The students were intelligent and well educated but they were quite naïve, which is what I expected. It was all going very smoothly until one non-Republican accused me of being a closet racist.

I was a bit taken aback but before I could defend myself one of the new Republicans came to my defense. She was a black student from the Bronx in New York City, the exact opposite of what you would expect to be a Young Republican.

She grew up in one of the Big Apple's huge public housing projects and she told the white kids how all her black girlfriends from high school just wanted to have a baby and go on welfare.

BINGO! I was in heaven. This young girl was talking my language. It was like the parting of the sea. As you will discover throughout this book, my main thesis is that unwed moms receiving loads of free stuff is the biggest threat to our nation's health and future. It is also the reason our inner cities are still wracked with poverty and crime.

Since this defense came out the mouth of a young black woman the white kids had nothing to say in response. They were flabbergasted. The reason the white kids were in shock is that they mostly grew up in sheltered suburban environments where they did not have to deal with the consequences of their liberal beliefs.

I rested my case and invited the students who still wanted to talk to meet me at the local watering hole. Once again I was surprised by how many of them showed up. We closed the joint on a cold winter's evening. It was all good. I came back to Cleveland with a grateful sense of accomplishment and an idea for a book, this book.