

Observations on Citizenship

Robert L. Nuckolls, III

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I wrote an article⁽¹⁾ some years ago about two newspaper stories, one on aviation safety - the other on loss of 100,000 lives per year in American hospitals due to medical "accident". I made the case that government solutions to perceived problems are always a "systems approach." However more often than not, we find that government systems designed to protect liberties of a few have an adverse effect on liberties of a greater number of citizens. Government will assure us that whatever new systems are put in place . . . to "protect" us from hazards of great degree - the loss of "small" liberties to the masses is justifiable and correct.

I could not disagree more.

Whether the perpetrator is a terrorist or an agency of government, any attack on liberty is evil. Every skill for good or evil has a learning process. One can imagine that the hijacker's teachers used any number and kind of little evils in the early days of a curriculum for which they took their final exams on September 11. . . . Now many of our nation's leaders have become students to the hijackers. In their short sightedness, expending anyone's liberties in the name of a "greater good" is justified.

Extrapolating present trends in government growth and loss of liberties into the future, we may easily predict that a breaking point WILL be achieved . . . it's just a matter of apathy and time. Terrorists were able to bring down the World Trade Center in hours with large scale attacks. Politicians will chip away at the foundations of our republic with tiny little hammers that go barely noticed. But the towers of our country's achievements will fall just as certainly as the WTC . . . chip away enough tiny pieces and the crush of weight from above will finally prevail.

Solution? An absolutely brilliant point of light shining from all the smoke and chaos of September 11 came to us in the form of a Mr. Jeremy Glick⁽²⁾, a Thomas Burnett, and undoubtedly other fellow passengers. Only a few of what must be thousands of heroes that emerged from the ranks of our citizens on September 11 - people who probably viewed themselves as ordinary citizens. People who found themselves among the

unfortunate passengers on United's Flight 93 that made an untimely arrival with the earth in Pennsylvania.

I'll suggest that systems don't protect liberties, PEOPLE protect liberties. The Jeremy Glicks of the world are unwilling to cry on the shoulder of government and be assured, "Don't worry, everything is going to be okay, WE'LL take care of you." The facts suggest that Jeremy and his companions chose NOT to sit in their seats and acquiesce to authority of individuals with weapons and a mission. Jeremy and his like minded companions had the clear headed thinking to deduce their situation and to make a collective decision that the actions of the hijackers was not going to be allowed to go forward. They recognized their duty as honorable citizens to do whatever was necessary to protect the liberties of others . . . and did it.

Immediately after the events of September 11, I'll suggest that airlines got a lot safer and it had nothing to do with any act of government. After Sept 11, what is the probability that a misbehaving individual on an American airliner will be able to move any agenda forward? Yet government in its inimitable Keystone Cops routine is scurrying around making pronouncements about situations in which they have no expertise, making promises they do not have the power to grant, spending lots of money to generate hoards of new bureaucrats, and crafting new regulations and laws that have more negative influence on honest, law abiding citizens than they do on crooks and terrorists.

What can we do? Like the teachers of small evils to future terrorists, we can be teachers of small goods and virtues for present and future citizens of a country who's liberties are great and CAN become greater.

Liberty is a precious condition. While embraced by many, it's my sad observation that few truly understand it. For the purpose of this discussion I would like to offer the following definitions:

Liberty: A condition that allows an individual to conduct their life free of force or fraud upon their

persons or property.

Honor: *A condition of citizenship that binds an individual to place the liberty of others above that of his own.*

English is an amazing and powerful communications tool . . . it has the ability to expand as needed to help people interact in useful ways. Like any flexible tool with great power, it can be distorted to support the will of the ignorant and evil alike. Be wary of those who use "liberty" and "honor" in ways that propose to expand upon these simple meanings.

Dictionaries have more to say of liberty and honor but be wary of dictionary definitions . . . recall that dictionaries reflect the meanings of the times. It is the purpose of a dictionary to reflect the language of a culture. When the linguists and editors in charge of updating a dictionary find a sufficient number of people use a word in a particular manner, a "new" definition is added to the dictionary's next edition. For the purpose of applying a universally useful meaning I'll invoke the memory of William of Occam⁽³⁾, a 14th century logician and Franciscan friar. William's words of wisdom have been interpreted and applied in a variety of ways . . . most of which can be boiled down to a form which takes its own advice: "Keep things simple!"

If we allow ourselves to be convinced that definitions are complex, then we're bound to the advice and counsel of those who claim to understand them better than we do. If our counselors are ignorant, evil or both, our acceptance of their definitions only compounds the effects of their shortcoming. Worse yet, if their definitions are accepted by sufficient numbers of ignorant or evil persons the dictionaries will ultimately affirm a "new" meaning as part of the public lexicon. The only protection is to insist on simplicity and understanding that requires no interpretation.

Politicians, preachers, lawyers and others can expound at great lengths upon the definitions of words. They must do this to maintain a level of superiority over those who choose to listen. Shrouding a simple concept with intellectually fraudulent fog of their own creation is a necessary condition power.

LIBERTY has a duty associated with it. Liberty is not a permission to do as one chooses but a RESTRAINT upon evil. Liberty is not a right or a privilege bestowed by government. However, government's prime

responsibility is to protect the liberty of its citizens.

A gang member's sense of "honor" requires him to protect the turf of the little society to which he belongs, even to the point of inflicting great harm upon others. Ask any citizen the definition of honor and I'm sure you're get a constellation of answers.

May I suggest that under the simple definition, honor has a duty associated with it. A duty that (if observed by all), raises a society to new strength based on the power of its citizens irrespective of acts or systems put in place by government.

I'll suggest that use of simple definitions of liberty and honor to conduct our lives and to teach others is something that anyone and everyone can do to improve on the odds of our future as a nation. Further, it does not require a great effort.

There's a heart warming movie on the shelves right now called *Pay if Forward*. In the movie, a school teacher assigns his students to devise some activity in which they can personally "make a difference." One student deduces that if he does a good thing for somebody, the best reward for that deed is to obligate his benefactor into passing the good deed along . . . to three others. Further, one is obligated to extract the same promise that each act will be multiplied by three. It's easy to see how this can catch on. Do honorable things in the name of liberty and make sure that folks know why you are doing it, what it's all about and get them to consider the modus operandi for themselves. It's simple, easily understood and benefits both present and future.

Dictionaries are full of slang words that grow from simple roots on the streets. Here, our task is not to coin new words but to finely focus on meanings of two perfectly good words that already exist. The task is to put simple foundations under these words. Simple foundations are incorruptible by people who create artificial complexity - people who craft a curtain of false usefulness and integrity to shield their ignorance and quest for power from view from those who might become obstacles to their purposes.

Suppose the hijackers knew and believed that any action on their part in an airplane full of people like Jeremy Glick was sure to get them hurt and to put a swift end to their evil intent aboard the airplane? How might their plans for September 11 been different? Obviously, we cannot stop the determined terrorist but

it's not difficult as a nation to put them on notice that their purposes are opposed by something far more effective than posturing and policies of a host of bureaucrats.

If every new assault on our liberties currently being planned by our government had been in place on September 11, I'll suggest that the events of that terrible day would probably not have been different. Mere hours later, *knowledge* of what happened now insures that events will never unfold like that again: A plane-load of pissed off citizens with a sense of honor is a far greater hurdle than thousands of airport

policemen poking through people's bags and wishing they could peer into the hearts of millions of passengers who pass before them. A terrorist's hate is no match for the anger of a few patriots.

I'll suggest that the gift given to us by Jeremy Glick and his companions goes far beyond thwarting the intent of hijackers on his airplane. He and his companions gave us a gift, a lesson of what it means to be honorable in the protection of liberty - There are simple things we can do to propagate that gift in ways that can only benefit us all - far into the future and long after their names are forgotten.

(1) Nuckolls, "A Tale of Two Crises", January 30, 2000
<http://209.134.106.21/articles/comentary/taleof2crises.pdf>

(2) Newsmax.com, "Brave Passengers Fought Terrorists", September 13, 2000,
http://209.134.106.21/articles/comentary/Jeremy_Glick.pdf

(3) Gibbs/Hiroshi, "What is Occam's Razor", July 23 1997,
<http://209.134.106.21/articles/comentary/OccamsRazor.pdf>