

The background of the entire cover is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes in a draped, wavy pattern.

**THE GREAT**

**LIMBAUGH**

AND OTHER

RIGHT-WING

ASSAULTS

ON COMMON

SENSE

**CON**

*Charles M.  
Kelly*

## The Great Limbaugh Con



THE  
Great  
Limbaugh  
Con

**And other  
right-wing assaults  
on common sense**

Charles M. Kelly

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*To my wife, Marsha.  
My very best supporter, occasional critic,  
and number-one editor.*

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# Contents

PREFACE	7
INTRODUCTION:	
The great Limbaugh con and how to confront it	10

## Part One:

### The Easy and the Obvious: Famous Limbaugh Sound Bites

1. Symbolism over substance: if you live by the sword, you die by the sword	23
2. Environmentalist wackos <i>versus</i> capitalist businessmen who hire American workers	30
3. Name just one country that ever taxed its way into prosperity	35
4. Government regulations equal communism, or, at least, socialism	40
5. Straight-shooter Limbaugh <i>versus</i> the biased liberal news media	48
6. Wealth trickles down	53
7. Wealth is not a zero-sum game	57
8. Tax coal miners at 100 percent; wealthy investors, sitting on their assets, 50 percent	67
9. So many middle-income taxpayers; so few wealthy	74
10. Class warfare: <i>liberals</i> are doing it?	79

**Part Two:  
The Philosophical and the Devious**

11. Class warfare: the world perspective	89
12. What work is	95
13. Conservatives' hidden agenda: screw the real workers	104
14. Two philosophies: survivalism and stewardship	112
15. Right-wing conservatives: the anti-capitalists of the '80s	122
16. Reagan and the '80s: the best of times?	131

**Part Three:  
For the Serious Limbaugh Debater:  
A Case Study for the Decade of the '80s**

17. Spartanburg, South Carolina: Milton Friedman's model for conservative economics	139
18. The dark side of conservative economics	146
19. John Kenneth Galbraith's Spartanburg: the long-term social costs of modern conservatism	157
20. The conservative cycle: what goes around, comes around	167
21. First, the American Indian; now, the American worker	176

CONCLUSION: Morality and America's new world role	189
--	-----

ADDENDUM: The cycle continues	204
----------------------------------	-----

NOTES	208
-------	-----

## PREFACE

Some of my best friends are conservatives. Most of my favorite relatives are conservatives. Virtually all of them, both friends and relatives, are educated. By most people's standards, several are wealthy. So this was not an easy book to write.

It's a book about how conservatives, the wealthy, and the educated have created many of the economic and social problems of the United States. This is not to say that liberals, the poor, and uneducated haven't created problems. It's just that Rush Limbaugh has done a fantastic job of distorting the reality of what's happening in our society, and his arguments cry out for rebuttal.

Therefore, this book is intended to counteract many of the propaganda issues that Limbaugh has made popular. He admits that he has no obligation to be fair, balanced, or objective in his commentary. Although he also admits that he is a defender of conservatism and wealth, his words and actions betray a more historically malignant philosophy. He believes that the royalty of our society—those who make their livings by taking advantage of our least educated and hardest working citizens—should control our country and reap most of its benefits.

In many ways, I'm as critical of liberals as I am of conservatives,



especially on issues of education, law and order, and social discipline. However, the viciousness of Limbaugh's anti-liberal attacks has pushed me to the point of being anti-conservative, especially on economic issues. My reaction is, in itself, possibly a demonstration of the destructiveness of "attack politics." I've written some obviously nasty things in this book about conservatives, the wealthy, and the educated, probably to the point of being unfair.

Although conservatism, wealth, and education have contributed much to our country's success, they also have a dark side, and Limbaugh has forced it to the surface of our discussion. (I can claim some degree of objectivity about this, since I have a Ph.D. degree in industrial communication from Purdue, I certainly am not "poor," and I have very conservative views on most non-economic issues.)

My point: I can understand why wealthy, informed, responsible, and educated people can be conservatives, but I simply cannot understand how they can support an obvious demagogue like Limbaugh.

Do Limbaugh's deliberate distortions of facts help us understand and evaluate our options? Do we want a sophomoric kind of viciousness, even if done humorously, to be our standard for disagreeing with one another? Are ridicule, name-calling, card-stacking, and all the other techniques of the demagogue to be our tools for social change? Can his kind of daily harangue be good for rational problem solving, and for our society? If you support Limbaugh, that's what you're saying.

Our country is in trouble. Too many of us are trying to destroy those who oppose our selfish interests, rather than to solve ethically the problems of our society. To some people, politics seems to be more of a game to be won, than a serious attempt to make the United States a better place in which to live.

Actually, by exercising his right to be a demagogue, Limbaugh may yet prove the wisdom of our first amendment. His temporary popularity is encouraging many politicians to clarify their values and to expose them to national scrutiny. Many have come out of the woodwork to ally themselves with him. In doing so, they are saying more about their true values than their spin-doctors will ever be able to cover up. So far, they have probably benefited from associating with him.

## *Preface*

But times are changing. The emptiness and destructiveness of attack politics are becoming more obvious with each passing day.

People are getting fed up. The entertainment value of viciousness is wearing thin. The public is beginning to look for leaders who actually want to solve society's problems, rather than those who have perfected the art of ridicule and divisiveness.

I hope this book can help voters to distinguish between the two.

## INTRODUCTION:

### The great Limbaugh con, and how to confront it

You may think that Rush Limbaugh is unique in American history. Or that his bigger-than-life popularity is the result of an enlightened American public. If you do, think again—on both counts.

According to *Fortune Magazine*, “So far as the response of his audience is concerned, [he] is just about the biggest thing that ever happened to radio.” At one point, he had a stenographic staff of 145 to handle the tremendous volume of mail he was receiving.

Rush Limbaugh? Nope. Father Charles Edward Coughlin, the “radio priest” of the 1930s.

The similarities between Coughlin and Limbaugh are striking. In the '30s, Coughlin appealed to large numbers of the American public who wanted simple solutions for the complex economic problems of the depression. Radio listeners were eager to listen to anyone who would offer scapegoats to blame, as long as the scapegoats were “them” and not “us.”

Coughlin's villains were government bureaucrats and “big shots,” Jewish bankers and congressmen from New York City, the eastern elite and the New Deal Democrats, especially those with Jewish-sounding names. Although he charged others with being fascists, he eventually

## Introduction

defended the Nazis in their effort to “block the Jewish-Communist plan for subjugating Germany.”

For Limbaugh, today’s villains are the homeless, “Billary” Clinton, the NAACP and various black leaders, the news media, welfare mothers, Democrats, liberals, “Maarriooo,” American Indians, various indigenous peoples of the world, and anyone else who exposes, or represents, genuine weaknesses in our political system.

While charging others with being “feminazis,” “environmentalist wackos,” or fascists, he appeals to the prejudices of all those who never quite bought the idea that we need to address the historic injustices and costly problems of our country.

Those who are mystified at the successes of Father Coughlin and Rush Limbaugh need to read any of the numerous books about demagoguery. A good place to begin is *Demagogues in the Depression* by David Bennett, or *The Fine Art of Propaganda* by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis.<sup>1</sup> Both are based on the life of Coughlin and his demagogic techniques, such as “band wagon,” “name calling,” “glittering generality,” “transfer,” “testimonial,” “plain folks,” and “card stacking.”

As did Coughlin, Limbaugh uses all of them, but the most effective is undoubtedly the “band wagon.” (Limbaugh even put it into words: “If you want to be mainstream, you oughta get onto the bandwagon now.”) By screening callers, he gives the impression that there is a huge silent majority of right-thinking Americans out there who support the radical views he stands for. The rare “liberal” he lets get through the switchboard is either a sixteen-year-old student who wants high schools to hand out free condoms, or a person with a severe case of mike fright.

Anyone who has ever studied propaganda techniques knows that Limbaugh, like Coughlin, fits the classic description of a demagogue: he appeals to the ignorance and prejudices of a public that wants someone to blame for their problems. The danger here is that demagogues are never recognized as such by their supporters until they have done a great deal of damage.

Demagoguery, however, is not the real focus of this book. One hardly needs to demonstrate that Limbaugh is a demagogue, since it is

self-evident, and most of his supporters know it. (Any college freshman who has had a class in communications could write a book on his diatribes and prove it beyond doubt.)

In fact, Limbaugh's distortions and attacks against others are so obviously hypocritical that it becomes part of his defense against criticism. In effect, he's saying, "Hey, I'm just making a parody of my own demagoguery and having fun, where's your sense of humor?"

### *Limbaugh and America's Right Wing*

Limbaugh is the most popular and visible spokesman for a corrupt and cynical political philosophy that needs to be challenged at every opportunity. Many false economic, social, and political "principles" are now accepted as true by the public simply because they have been repeated so often.

Therefore, this book is intended to give you some ammunition to confront the destructive influences, not only of the Limbaughs of the world, but also of the many well-financed conservative "think tanks" that are the sources of his ideas. Organizations such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Institute for Political Economy, the John Locke Foundation, the National Center for Public Policy Research, the Cato Institute, the Free Congress Foundation, Citizens for a Sound Economy, and a host of others too numerous to mention have been established by those in our society who believe that the wealthy and the politically powerful should control our nation and receive most of its material benefits.

When you read an opinion piece in a magazine or newspaper that suggests that

- the middle class will be better off when the rich get even more tax breaks than they already have, or
- only the middle class has enough money to support our government and to solve our society's problems, or
- we can solve our many national problems without money—because the private sector, if we let it alone, will do it for us, or
- government regulations on the unethical behaviors of business persons are bad for society, or

## *Introduction*

- protecting the environment is bad for the economy, or
- shipping jobs off to Mexico, Taiwan, Ireland, or wherever, will actually help employment in the U.S., or
- anything that obviously brings immediate benefits to the wealthy, the powerful, or the educated, but with only the promise of eventual “trickle down” to the middle class,

then look down at the end of the column for the author’s name and position. You’ll usually find that he or she is a member of one of these organizations, or an organization you never heard of, but that *sounds* as solidly American as the materialism of the ’80s.

The following chapters, therefore, will deal with their most frequent assaults on common sense, which, when not vigorously confronted, become “truths.”

### *Understanding the Limbaugh Con*

Even a broken clock is right twice a day, and Limbaugh taps many of the legitimate concerns of us all. However, his “dittoheads” (fans and supporters) shouldn’t allow his correct positions on a few social issues (relating to crime, education, foolish government regulation, welfare fraud, and so on), to distract them from his more basic agenda.

Admittedly, he’s funny and entertaining, and much of what he does is relatively harmless. When he calls Clinton a liar, or characterizes him and his staff as a bunch of pack rats scurrying around a dark alley, fleeing from the light that Limbaugh is shining on them, it’s little more than entertainment. Or when he plays a record of a group singing “The little first lady with megalomania, she’s the terror of Pennsylvania Avenue,” there is not much to worry about.

However, we must take him seriously when he deals with basic economic and social issues, because many of the prejudiced and the economically naive in our society need little more than a Limbaugh to galvanize them into a potent political movement. If he is not effectively confronted, the economic falsehoods of our ’80s decade of greed will continue gaining acceptance.

You see, the Limbaugh Con is, at its heart, a scam against workers. Under the pretext of fighting for their rights, he supports an eco-

conomic agenda that is designed to benefit the wealthy and the politically powerful—at the expense of low- and middle-income Americans. If he has his way, the growing disparity in income between the ultra rich and everybody else will only get worse—along with our national problems.

### *Three Levels of Discussion*

The book is divided into three levels of difficulty. Part One deals with ten easily understood “sound bites” that Limbaugh has made popular, and that are some of his most important and most outrageous violations of common sense.

These are Limbaugh’s favorite scams, and are fundamental to the propaganda efforts of those who want the United States to evolve to a form of plutocratic capitalism (control of our economy and government by the wealthy elite). It is important to understand how these so-called truths compare with the beliefs of those who want to preserve and protect our present system of democratic capitalism (control by an educated and informed public).

When you hear these issues brought up in casual conversation, on TV, or over the radio, you instinctively know they are in error. However, they are sometimes difficult to challenge if you’ve never thought them through, so a little thought and preparation can help.

Part Two goes beyond Limbaugh’s sound bite propaganda, and explains how conservatives and liberals view important subjective issues. They both arrive at their philosophical conclusions because of the different “gut level” feelings they get from the same kinds of life experiences.

Our definitions of work, the ways we view the rights of workers, our understanding of the essentials of capitalism, and the ultimate purpose of our lives on earth—all these are very much the result of how we interpret our own personal experiences. Because of the subjectivity of the issues in Part Two, they will require more discussion and illustration.

Part Three makes the transition from the philosophical and judgmental to the concrete and the practical. You can appreciate the importance and true motivations of a Rush Limbaugh only if you

## Introduction

understand how he fits in with the major political movements of America's twentieth century.

He openly defends those who historically have always benefited when workers' wages are kept low and profits high, when jobs are exported out of our country, when the environment is raped, when a new tax system favors the rich—and so on. He has artfully covered up the fact, however, that *he also is from the same economic school that has fought every attempt to improve the lives of working class American families*—child labor laws, overtime laws, audited financial statements, safe working conditions, medical benefits, pension funding safeguards, etc.

Part Three, therefore, begins with a case study of Spartanburg, South Carolina, and its relationship to the rest of the country. Spartanburg is a microcosm of the United States, both in terms of its successes and its growing problems. In other words, it is an excellent place to begin a systematic analysis of what conservatives have been doing to this country during the current century.

Part Three then expands beyond Spartanburg to include the conservative South, as well as the rest of the world. The disastrous impact of conservative politics on middle- and low-income workers—and taxpayers—remains the same, whether studied on a local basis or world-wide basis.

Once you understand the cause-and-effect relationships between conservative political ideology, and its inevitable economic and social consequences—national or international—the nature and true objectives of the right-wing political movement, and Limbaugh's role in it, become obvious.

Oh, and if you are not all that concerned about working class Americans, watch out. What happened to them in the '80s is now happening to engineers, professionals of all descriptions, middle- and lower-level managers, and anyone else whose job can be eliminated for any reason whatsoever.

A study by the American Management Association showed that 54.6 percent of jobs cut by some 400 large corporations during the twelve months ending in June 1993 were in supervisory, middle-management and professional/technical positions.<sup>2</sup> So, if you feel comfort-



## THE GREAT LIMBAUGH CON

able in your job, and feel good about what the Limbaugh conservatives have done to workers in this country, wait awhile. They will eventually get around to you.

### HOW TO CONFRONT THE LIMBAUGH CON

This book is primarily an aid for confronting the sound-bite clichés that Rush Limbaugh and his right-wing extremists have made popular. *It is a book about issues.* So, let's get some of the mechanics of confrontation out of the way in the very beginning.

#### *Tactics*

As though there were a shortage of right-wing propaganda mills, Republican presidential candidates Jack Kemp and Bill Bennett have created yet another one, called Empower America.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, it has a budget of over \$4 million, and a mailing list of over 100,000 donors, "worth millions in future contributions and able to sustain staff and big salaries for the organization's founders."<sup>3</sup>

Empower America's fax machines "spin out weekly reports for a network of 500 radio talk-show hosts across the country." Using microchip technology, they can even feed *taped quotes* to radio stations. They have plans for an 800 number so that conservatives can call in to get professional help on current issues that America's right wing wants to attack.

Think of it! Limbaugh and his conservative talk-show cohorts are now getting high-tech, state-of-the-art, pre-packaged propaganda pieces to relay to the public. They have, indeed, elevated the science of attack politics to an art form.

Unfortunately, to confront their distortions of reality, we must use some of their own tactics against them. Although we don't have the financial backing that conservative think tanks do, we have a tremendous advantage: history and logic are on our side, and we don't have to deliberately lie (while swearing we are telling the truth) in order to get our points across.