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New York Times bestselling author



RESTORING
THE
AMERICAN
DREAM

The **DEFINING VOICE** *in the*
MOVEMENT *for* **LIBERTY**



Foreword by STEPHEN MOORE

Restoring the American Dream

*The Defining Voice in the
Movement for Liberty*

ROBERT



NGER

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Restoring the American Dream

May all our children and grandchildren
experience the wonders of living
the American Dream.

Foreword

Restoring the American Dream requires a resurrection of free market capitalism and a rejection of Obamanomics and the slow but steady socialization of America. We have foolishly allowed the left in America to destroy the dream by undermining the fundamental principles of limited government on which prosperity is fostered.

Clearly, President Reagan understood the true meaning of the term *American Dream*, and he emphasized that understanding by saying that “government is not the solution to our problem; government *is* the problem.” Unlike Jimmy Carter, he understood that high tax rates reduce people’s incentive to produce.

With Reagan’s emphasis on smaller government, lower taxes, and less regulation, the U.S. economy experienced the greatest sustained period of economic growth in its history. As explained in my book *The End of Prosperity* (coauthored by Arthur Laffer and Peter Tanous), the economic expansion under Reagan was “resilient and powerful because economic policy was radically realigned to reward risk taking and entrepreneurship and unleash the gale-wind forces of technology, information, and the new digital age.”

While Ronald Reagan’s ascendancy to the presidency was a great step forward for America, like so many things in life, his policies may have had an unintended negative consequence. The consequence I am referring to is that the success of Reaganomics may have caused Americans to become complacent about both prosperity and liberty.

Even though the explosion of high technology kept the economy robust throughout the 1980s and 1990s, something else was going on quietly behind the scenes: The progressive movement was licking its wounds from the Reagan Revolution and retooling its weapon of choice—gradualism—to slowly move the country to the left once again. And Americans seemed too busy enjoying their prosperity to even take notice.

As a result, over the past two decades America has quietly moved away from freedom and free markets and, at an increasingly accelerating pace, toward socialism. This acceleration has been especially rapid under the Obama administration, so much so that our elected representatives seem perfectly comfortable with ignoring the Constitution.

The power of gradualism is that each new generation comes to accept less and less freedom as a normal way of life, especially if children are fed false information by their teachers and the media. The once-mainstream media has become so out of touch—refusing to even cover stories unfavorable to the current administration—that it is now referred to by many as *the fringe media*. As to schools, more and more parents are becoming outraged by the purposeful disinformation that is being taught in their children's classrooms.

Thankfully, however, Americans are a resilient people who have a remarkable way of remembering, albeit sometimes waiting far longer than they should to do so, that liberty is an integral part of their heritage. For a majority of Americans, it's like riding a bicycle. Once experiencing the joys of liberty, they never forget it. It's in their blood. And never has this been so apparent than in the nationwide protest rallies that are becoming increasingly larger and bolder.

The silent majority has been awakened by an out-of-control and corrupt government. As I watched the tea parties and town hall protests begin to unfold, it occurred to me that *Restoring the American Dream* is far more relevant today than when it was first published in 1979. As a result of our current economic chaos and the cancerous corruption that has spread throughout government at all levels, I believe people are much more prepared to hear the sometimes uncomfortable truths that Robert Ringer sets forth in this book.

Much more so than in the late 1970s and early 1980s, readers can relate to his unwavering belief that government has no right to interfere in the lives of individuals who themselves do not violate the rights of others. They can relate to his view that government's only legitimate function is to protect the lives and property of its citizens, and that politicians are the employees of those citizens, not the other way around.

The Foreword to the original edition of *Restoring the American Dream* was written by the late William Simon, who served as Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Nixon and Ford. Simon, a true patriot, once said, "There is only one social system that reflects the sovereignty of the individual: the free-market, or capitalist, system."

In his Foreword, Simon wrote, "I am in total agreement with the author that our greatest hope for the future lies in teaching the facts to our younger generations. If every high school and college student were to read this book, America's presently beclouded future would begin to shine brightly once more. It is essential that the young people of this country learn to respect the right of every man and woman to seek his or her happiness with minimal interference from the government."

I totally concur with William Simon on this point. High school and college students need to learn not only about the sanctity of freedom and

property rights, but, as Robert Ringer so eloquently explains, that there is an inextricable connection between the two. Indeed, without property rights, no other rights are possible—a concept that is today foreign to many Americans.

All this is what prompted me, when Robert interviewed me for his Liberty Education Interview Series, to say, “I want to see a new edition of *Restoring the American Dream*. That was such a great book when you wrote it in the late 1970s. We need a new version of it today.”

Little did I know when I spoke those words that Robert had been mulling around in his mind the possibility of revising and updating his classic work. To the extent that my words helped catalyze his decision to move forward with this undertaking, I am pleased, to say the least. And now, in a pleasant twist of fate, I am proud and honored to step into the shoes of William Simon and write the Foreword to this new edition of the original *New York Times* best seller, now titled *Restoring the American Dream: The Defining Voice in the Movement for Liberty*.

I am deeply concerned about the present direction in which our country is headed. I am concerned about the total disregard for the Constitution of the United States by so many of our politicians. I am concerned about the willingness—even eagerness—of our Congress and the new administration to dramatically increase the federal deficit, explode the national debt, and impose draconian regulations on business that can only worsen the economy and create more unemployment.

With this in mind, an important lesson that I hope you will take away from this book is that the survival of a democratic republic is possible only through a strong people and a weak government, not the other way around. I also hope you will understand why this principle is such an integral part of the task of restoring the American Dream.

Unfortunately, millions of Americans now believe that the American Dream is somehow tied to government favors and benefits, but they could not be more wrong. As Robert Ringer points out, the American Dream that our grandparents knew was about people, not government. It was about people declaring that they were above government. It was about individualism and the opportunity to achieve success without interference from others. Above all, the American Dream was about freedom.

It is my fervent hope that this book will help people throughout this great country of ours to better understand the real American Dream and motivate them to help restore it.

STEPHEN MOORE

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*It may be true . . . that you can't fool all the people all the time,
but you can fool enough of them to rule a large country.*

— Will and Ariel Durant

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, a surprising number of people have expressed to me their belief that *Restoring the American Dream*, originally published in 1979, was ahead of its time. They have offered a wide variety of reasons for their viewpoints, the three most common being those that follow.

First, when *Restoring the American Dream* was initially published, the average person was much less informed about economics, politics, and ideology—and, thus, far more naïve. But since the advent, then blossoming, of cable news and conservative talk radio, that has rapidly changed. Fox News did not even exist until 1996.

As a result, many of the ideas I expressed in the original edition of *Restoring the American Dream* that were considered by many to be extreme are now commonly discussed on radio and television, as well as in print media and on the Internet.

Second, until recently, progressives in Washington seemed content with gradually moving the United States to the left, slowly enough so as not to waken the average citizen out of his slumber. But since the progressives took control of all three branches of government in January 2009, all socialist hell has broken loose—and people are frantically looking for answers. I believe that many of the answers they are looking for are to be found between the covers of this book.

Third, just as progressives long ago appropriated the term *liberal* as a means to accomplish their ends, so, too, have they perverted the meaning of the term *American Dream* in an effort to pollute the minds of Americans. True liberalism believes in tolerance, but today those who call themselves liberals aim to *silence* all opposing views and take control of people's lives.

Likewise, today's liberals, who are really progressives—or, more properly, socialists—would have you believe that the American Dream was about increased government benefits and government-created “rights”—for example, the right to “free” healthcare, the right to a “decent” job at a “decent” wage, even the “right” to own a home.

But, in truth, the American Dream was about none of these things. Quite the opposite, in fact. The American Dream was about people

knowing that they were above government. The American Dream was about individualism, self-responsibility, and freedom—including the freedom to succeed or fail on one's own according to his unique abilities and his willingness to work. Simply put, the American Dream meant that each individual possessed the God-given right to his life, his liberty, and the pursuit of his happiness.

For these reasons and more, I finally made the decision to undertake the challenging task of updating and revising this book. There is no question in my mind that the Constitutional usurpers in Washington have inadvertently made this the perfect time for us to begin the arduous task of restoring the American Dream. The time has come to reject the progressive's serpent-like notion that the American Dream is about receiving benefits and cradle-to-grave security from politicians.

It is my sincere hope that this updated version of my original work will resonate with many who, in 1979, were simply not ready to face up to the reality that Americans have steadily and increasingly been losing their liberty.

My Personal Evolution

The past 25 years have been an intellectual tug of war for me. Morally, my soul is still attached to the notion that the keystone of libertarianism—liberty—must be given a higher priority than all other objectives. The problem, however, is that this noblest of all objectives often collides with the most dominant aspect of secular life: reality.

Reality is synonymous with *truth*, and truth is unyielding. One can choose to ignore it, scorn it, or even curse it, but all to no avail. In the end, truth impassively stands its ground in the face of the most overpowering emotional, verbal, and intellectual onslaughts. Further, truth can be especially brutal to those who insist on worshipping at the Altar of Theory. This is because truth has a way of frustrating theory and, much like a mongoose circling a snake, ultimately wearing it down and devouring it.

More to the point, truth—or reality—seems to take special delight in thumbing its nose at theory and leaving purist libertarians frustrated in the process. So much so that the past three-and-a-half decades have brought about a personal and accelerating evolution that has brought me ever more rapidly to what I consider to be a more mature and realistic view of life.

I believe that this view has made it possible for me to see the world as it actually is rather than the way I would like it to be. Instead of seeing life as a black-and-white objectivist or unyielding, purist libertarian, I now view it through the eyes of a hybrid ideologue: theoretical libertarian/practical conservative, or, more simply put, libertarian-centered conservative.

A government's primary function—many would argue its only function—is to protect its citizens from aggression. More specifically, it is to protect their lives and property. In today's post-9/11 world, the overriding question is whether government can, in fact, succeed in protecting lives and property without restricting certain freedoms.

Unfortunately, aggression from brainwashed fanatics from other countries is not the most ominous threat to our country. Far more threatening is the enemy from within. Or, more properly, the enemies from within. I am referring to people in this country who are sworn enemies of the very heart and soul of Western civilization: a generally accepted code of civilized conduct. Plain and simple, no civilization can continue to exist, let alone flourish, without a moral foundation that is not only clearly understood, but also accepted and practiced by a large majority of its citizens.

To employ a parody, the barbarians are not at the gates; they are *inside* the gates. The enemies from within include a wide array of forces clearly intent on undermining all that is decent, pure, and civilized in Western culture. Make no mistake about it, the enemies of freedom and Western culture have no qualms about lying, deceiving, and, if necessary, using force to achieve their ends.

I should point out that I do not see this threatening situation so much as good versus evil, because the debate over good and evil—and, indeed, whether good and evil even exist—is an intellectual and religious hornet's nest. Rather, I see today's worldwide conflict as one between civilized and uncivilized people. Framing the problem in this fashion removes from the equation such emotive factors as religion, skin color, sex, and nationality.

Millions of Americans have bought into the lie that diversity is what makes our country great. But the truth is that diversity is not a strength; it's a weakness. This is so self-evident that I am tempted to posit it as an axiom. History makes it clear that diversity is not a good ingredient for keeping a civilization intact. Diversity has always proven to be a divider of people.

It is important to understand that diversity has nothing to do with skin color. It has to do with culture. There is a great cultural divide between those who revel in all that is repugnant to civilized people of goodwill and those who make a sincere attempt to abide by Western civilization's generally accepted code of conduct. The haters of Western culture are among the worst of the barbarians dwelling inside our gates, and it is clear that nothing short of a total destruction of our long-accepted mores will satisfy them. Because they are rebels without a moral cause, to attempt to reason with them is folly.

If the 9/11 factor and the internal decay of Western culture over the past 50 years have taught us anything, it is that the great paradox of

democracy is alive and well. The paradox to which I am referring is that in order to preserve freedom, freedom must, to some extent, be restricted.

In theory, unlimited freedom is a good thing. No one believes this more than I do. It is, in fact, my ultimate fantasy. In reality, however, a society without a clearly defined social structure is not a civilized society. The lack of social organization opens the gates to barbarians whose main purpose in life is the spread of death, and encourages the barbarians from within to destroy what is left of the true American Dream.

This is where libertarian-centered conservatism comes in. It is an ideology that concedes, however reluctantly, that we live in an imperfect world inhabited by imperfect human beings. Thus, it is a pragmatic ideology that believes in adherence to the tenets of pure libertarianism to the fullest practical extent, but also believes in the use of force, when and where it is absolutely necessary, to not only protect the lives and property of citizens, but also preserve the traditional American code of conduct. Having said this, however, the overriding rule must always be: When in doubt, the nod should be given to liberty.

Just as democracy is not a perfect political system, neither is libertarian-centered conservatism a perfect philosophy. Restricting freedom is not a subject to be taken lightly. The age-old question of whose freedom, and how much freedom, should be restricted to protect lives, property, and Western civilization looms as large as ever.

The only thing we know for certain is that under today's democracies throughout the world, people are increasingly losing their freedoms, and they certainly are losing their once-cherished civilizations. Above all, the rights of producers and people who abide by the generally accepted code of conduct of Western civilization are increasingly being trampled by special-interest groups, nonproducers, and relativists who revel in sloth, vulgar behavior, theft, and violence.

If They Understood the Situation

When you first realize you possess the innate ability to reason, you have an inkling of what slaves throughout history must have felt when finally released from their shackles. Not that you think you're free. In fact, for the first time in your life you realize just how unfree you really are. But your mind is free—free from the enslavement of confusion, doubt, and irrational rhetoric.

"The noblest pleasure," said Leonardo, "is the joy of understanding." The pleasure of understanding produces a high that no artificial stimulant can provide. An indescribable exhilaration comes over you. You're so

excited that you want to spread the word. For the first time, morality and ethics and virtue and love have meaning to you.

Then it begins: the sheer frustration. When you try to share your newfound ability to think rationally, people either stare blankly at you or return your words with abstract clichés.

You talk about liberty; they answer with incoherencies about social justice. You enthusiastically explain why everyone benefits from the virtues of individualism; they retort that your ideas are antiquated. You persist with the morality of mutually beneficial, non-coercive relationships; they shake their heads patronizingly and mumble about the need to control man's greed.

After a while, they wear you down. Your excitement fades and you get back to the realities of everyday life. Then, hopelessness sets in as you realize that *Atlas Shrugged* has arrived. The United States is strangling at the hands of a draconian, progressive government that grows more out of control each day.

Civil rights are routinely violated by the irrepressible Washington behemoth that is now reaching into every area of our lives at an accelerating pace. *Freedom* is only a convenience word used to justify a thousand different violations of freedom. Ayn Rand's warnings about the future are applicable to the present. As recent town hall attendees have discovered, ordinary citizens do not tell their elected officials what to do. Government tells them what to do—and backs it up with force.

Then, just when you're about to give up hope, you run smack into a rational individual in the least likely place. You can't believe it: He knows all about Natural Law and natural rights. He understands the difference between equality and freedom. He understands why laissez-faire capitalism improves the well-being of all people of goodwill. You pinch yourself and find, to your amazement, that you aren't dreaming. Reluctantly, you admit it: You're hooked again. You're excited.

These moments of enthusiasm come and go over the years as you bump into other oddballs who believe in man's right to be free, in his right to own his own life and pursue his own objectives so long as he does not violate the rights of others.

In his book *A Time for Truth*, William Simon described the hundreds of congressional hearings he was required to attend as Secretary of the Treasury, none of which accomplished anything positive. He cited personal accounts of Richard Nixon's and Gerald Ford's rationalizing away economically disastrous decisions in the hope that such appeasement might pull in more votes at election time.

Simon virtually stumbled into his post in government and, after viewing the horrors of Washington from the perspective of a lofty position in the hierarchy, he stumbled out as fast as he could, returning to his home in New Jersey, in his words, "a very frightened man."

But it's the very facts that Simon addressed—the maze of irrational government policies, the restrictions on freedom, the self-destructive regulation, and the depressing economic realities—that frustrated me. The problem of big government is so big that I was doubtful it could be reduced to comprehensible components in a single book and explained in such a way as to make the causes and consequences crystal clear to everyone. But these doubts represented a challenge I could not resist.

Amidst all of the incisive material in *A Time for Truth*, there is one statement by William Simon that stands out in my mind even today: "I am confident that the American people would demand massive reforms *if they understood the situation.*" [Italics added.]

For years, I believed that the majority of Americans did not, in fact, understand the situation (i.e., they did not understand that we were gradually winning our own enslavement by continually electing politicians who saw themselves as our rulers rather than our employees). This lack of understanding reached its zenith during the last presidential election when people voted for change without demanding to know exactly what kind of change was being proposed.

Many people feel that subjects such as inflation, unemployment, regulation, entitlements, and fiscal and monetary policy are mysterious and complex topics that can be understood only by intellectuals and politicians. And from the government's point of view, such a mindset is ideal. Why? Because, as Montaigne pointed out, "Men are most apt to believe what they least understand."

Over the years, I have found that the corollary to Montaigne's statement is also true (i.e., the better one understands government, the less he is inclined to believe anything politicians say). In my own case, the more I learned about the realities of government, the more I realized that I had thought it to be complicated only because I was accustomed to thinking in rational and logical terms. But logic and rationality are incompatible with government policies because such policies are based on a hopeless potpourri of contradictions, illogical premises, and irrational actions—all mixed together with a great deal of corruption.

The truth is that government is not really complicated at all when reduced to its simple components. All that is required to understand the effects of government on one's life is the willingness to reject beliefs that cannot stand the test of facts and logic. That part is up to the reader. My job is to cut through the intellectual aura surrounding government and explain, in simple terms, topics often thought to be complicated.

I am well aware that one runs the risk of criticism when he tries to simplify subjects jealously guarded by intellectuals. There is a snobbish element that prevails not only in literature, but also philosophy and political science. Quite simply, the public is not supposed to understand

the complex workings of government. "Woe to him," said Will Durant, "who teaches men faster than they can learn."

It seems that the intent has been for the world of the intellectual and the world of the layman to remain forever separated. The socially progressive intellectual thrives on terms like *consumer price index*; the layman just wants to know why he can't purchase as much with the same dollars as last year. The socially progressive intellectual explains the economic intricacies of the gross national product; the layman just wants to know why he has to pay taxes to support services he neither wants nor uses, not to mention bailouts of major corporations. The socially progressive intellectual speaks in abstracts such as *the common good*; the layman just wants to know why no one seems to care about what's good for *him*.

I am a believer in Occam's Razor Principle (also known as the Principle of Parsimony), which states: Never multiply explanations or make them more complicated than necessary. An explanation should be as simple and direct as possible. Obviously, Occam's Razor Principle is not popular with people who earn their livings making simple problems appear complicated by creating crises that either do not or need not exist and by talking in abstractions.

I also feel duty bound, at the outset, to remind you that no system or philosophy is perfect because man himself is imperfect. That, however, does not lessen the value of knowledge and truth. This book does not pretend to be an end all, be all. My intent would be better described as giving the reader a broad insight into the evolution, operation, results, and future of government. And to best accomplish this, I have tried to avoid getting sidetracked by statistics and details that detract from one's understanding of the underlying philosophy of freedom. This underlying philosophy is the key to restoring the American Dream, and, unfortunately, it is a philosophy that I believe far too many Americans do not understand.

I seek the truth in this book fully recognizing that history has rarely made truth and popularity bedfellows. Obviously, to investigate the facts, basic premises and traditional thinking must be challenged. Often we are made to feel uncomfortable by reality. Words like *socialism* frighten us. We don't like to hear things that make us feel uncomfortable. We don't like our neatly structured notions to be disturbed. But preconceived, set-in-stone beliefs are incompatible with truth. People say they love truth, but, instead, they try to make true that which they love.

Perhaps it is right that "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow, and in much wisdom is much grief." Perhaps it is not so much that people do not understand as they do not want to understand. Perhaps that is what Aldous Huxley had in mind in *Brave New World* when Mustapha Mond, the supreme government power holder, said to the awed and confused Savage from the Indian reservation, "The optimum