

What Happened to Liberalism?

In the 1970s hit show, “All In The Family”, Carroll O’Connor played Archie Bunker, a blue-collar worker and family man. Archie’s liberal daughter Gloria and her husband Mike often mocked Archie for his conservative views. Mike and Gloria were young, bright, cool, and always in the liberal camp; Archie was stodgy, opposed change, and was generally depicted as an ignorant man of the right.

In the same decade, the television show “M*A*S*H”, set in a medical unit during the Korean War, gave us Hawkeye Pierce, a witty, compassionate, and liberal physician. His cold-hearted conservative nemesis, Frank Burns, always looked out for number one, and was a smug, hypocritical patriot.

The movie “Field of Dreams” features a scene where two mothers at a PTA meeting debate banning a certain book. The writers of this scene deliver cartoonish caricatures of liberals and conservatives, with the former representing light and reason, the latter the forces of darkness and puritanical close-mindedness.

How the times have changed.

Today it is the so-called “progressives” who are self-approving and puffed up. In a long but excellent [essay](#), “The smug style in American liberalism,” Vox editor and writer Emmett Rensin takes his fellow liberals to task for their self-righteous attitudes about their virtues vis-à-vis the vices of their conservative opponents.

Nothing is more confounding to the smug style than the fact that the average Republican is better educated and has a higher IQ than the average Democrat. That for every overpowered study finding superior liberal open-mindedness and intellect and knowledge, there is one to suggest that Republicans have the better of these qualities.

Most damning, perhaps, to the fancy liberal self-conception: Republicans score higher in susceptibility to persuasion. They are willing to change their minds more often.

Rensin cites a story about Adlai Stevenson when he was long ago campaigning for president. He's waving to a crowd when a woman calls out, "Gov. Stevenson, you have the vote of every thinking person in this country!"

Stevenson replies, "Thank you, ma'am, but we need a majority."

That anecdote sums up the attitude of many liberals today.

At one point, Rensin warns, "The wages of smug is Trump."

He wrote those words six months before the 2016 election.

In other ways as well, liberals and conservatives have switched places.

Once it was conservatives who were depicted as humorless puritans, always trying to keep the lid on a Pandora's box of changes, seeking to ban books or shows, and repressing speech.

Not today.

No – today it is liberals who want to "cancel culture" and limit free speech. Our colleges provide numerous examples of these attacks on the First Amendment. For several years now, many comedians have given up performing on university campuses for fear of offending someone in the audience. Conservative speakers at some of these universities are shouted down, threatened, and even assaulted. When's the last time we've heard of a progressive, or even a radical Marxist, refused a speaking engagement or being assailed by a mob?

Humor other than sarcasm is also in rare supply on the left. A progressive friend once gave me a subscription to *Funny Times*, a liberal monthly newspaper with cartoons and supposedly

humorous essays. In the course of my two-year subscription, the humor became more and more one-sided, more bitter, and decidedly less funny.

There's conflicting evidence online as to whether conservatives or liberals have a better sense of humor, but surely conservatives have more fun. When you make climate change, social justice, and constant indignation your gods, it's tough to enjoy a week at the beach.

And where conservatives were once regarded as moral prudes wanting to ban salacious books and movies, today it is the Left that seeks to restrict access to books and movies. *Little House on the Prairie*, *Gone With The Wind*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and others offend someone somewhere, and come under attack.

Finally, many liberals believe they are wiser and smarter than conservatives, whom they regard as rubes and rednecks. As Rensin demonstrates in his essay, they see those who disagree with them or question them as the great unwashed, ignorant bumpkins and yokels, as "a basket of deplorables."

Here Rensin cites, as just one example of this attitude, part of an essay by Hamilton Nolan, "Dumb Hicks Are America's Greatest Threat," where Nolan writes of many mayors and other leaders: "You, our elected officials, are embarrassing us. All of us, except your fellow dumb hicks who voted for you in large numbers...You are the bad cousin in the family who always ruins Thanksgiving. Go in the back room and drink a can of beer alone please."

We've witnessed this attitude during the coronavirus shutdowns. Ask that schools or churches be reopened, or that hydroxychloroquine be administered to the sick, and you will be dismissed as an ignorant fool. "We know best," our superiors say, "so go to the back room and drink a beer."

It's not a way to win an election. It's certainly not a way to unify a broken country.

But then, given the events of the last four years, these folks are clearly slow learners.

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