

# Ten Things You Can't Say in America

**S**eptember 13 was a big day at the Cato Institute, with two lively Book Forums featuring three provocative speakers. At noon the speaker was Larry Elder, a talk-show host on KABC radio in Los Angeles, the judge on television's new Moral Court, and the author of *Ten Things You Can't Say in America*. Excerpts from his remarks follow.

**Larry Elder:** There is absolutely no question that there is liberal bias in the media. That doesn't mean that the media don't get the facts, and it doesn't mean that they are evil. It doesn't mean that they are out to oppress people. But the media bias can't be refuted.

Gannett News Service, which no one would call a right-wing organization, back in 1996 commissioned a poll that asked Washington, D.C., journalists, "For whom did you vote in 1992?" Forty-three percent of the American people voted for Bill Clinton. Eighty-nine percent of Washington reporters did. Thirty-eight percent of the American people voted for George Bush. Seven percent of Washington reporters did. About a third of Americans call themselves moderate, about a third conservative, and about a third liberal. Two percent of Washington reporters described themselves as conservative.

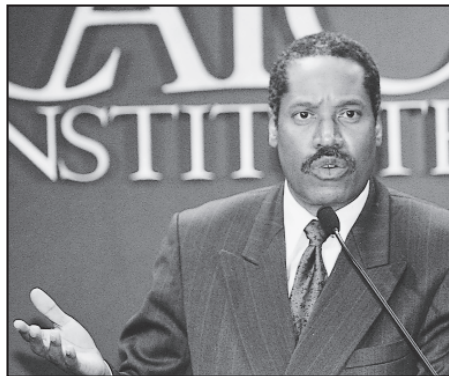
Some people argue that reporters are capable of setting aside their feelings and writing a fair story. I don't pretend to be able to set aside my emotions. And I think it is pretty unrealistic to think that reporters can write fair stories about gun control when in fact they are in favor of gun control. And there are lots of examples of that.

The Media Research Center studied the coverage of the Brady bill debate by ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN. The center looked at hundreds of hours of shows and found out that people like Sarah Brady were routinely referred to as "advocates." Brady is the head of Handgun Control, Inc., a non-profit organization, just like the NRA. Wayne LaPierre, Charlton Heston, and the NRA were routinely referred to as "lobbyists." Now, either they are all advocates or they are all lobbyists, but pick one. Obviously the term "advocate" has a much more

refreshing sound, a much more noble sound, than the term "lobbyist."

TV news accounts go to "talking heads" to illustrate a point or to give some background. How often were pro-gun control talking heads used compared to anti-gun control talking heads? The networks used pro-gun control talking heads twice as often as anti-gun control ones. That is a form of media bias.

Look at what happened with George W. Bush recently. His mike was open, you will remember, and he made some rather unguard-



**Larry Elder: "America's number-one problem is children, who cannot feed, clothe, and educate a child, having children."**

ed remarks about a *New York Times* reporter, Adam Clymer. Bush shouldn't have said what he did. Any smart politician should be aware that, whenever there is a mike in front of you, be it hot or cold, you should shut your mouth.

But does Bush indeed have reason to be irritated with the *New York Times*? It published a series of articles critical of his record as governor—fair enough. But it also published a number of articles critical of his intellectual firepower. One of the articles referred to him as an "airhead."

In our judicial system, we have what we call peremptory challenges. A lawyer can use them to reject a certain number of potential jurors. Often, lawyers reject jurors they believe to be incapable of rendering a fair decision. We recognize that certain people, despite what they say, cannot be fair. I think that applies here.

I don't know how human beings who are in favor of gun control are going to write fair articles about gun control. I don't

know how human beings who are in favor of affirmative action are going to write fair articles about affirmative action. Certainly many do, but some cannot.

America's greatest problem, however, is not media bias. America's greatest problem is not bad schools, although they are very important; not drugs, although they are very important; not crime, although that is very important. America's number-one problem is illegitimacy. By that I mean children having children. I'm not talking about Murphy Brown or any other woman who has the resources and decides, for whatever reason, that she wants to have a child on her own or about single people who want to adopt.

I am talking about children, who cannot feed, clothe, and educate a child, having children. We have provided incentives for that very thing through our welfare state. My 85-year-old father grew up in the South and was a child of the Depression. When I was a child, he worked two full-time jobs as a janitor, cooked for a white family on weekends, and went to night school three nights a week to get his GED. He does not, by the way, know who his biological father was.

My father told me that welfare is probably the worst thing that ever happened to this country and the worst thing that ever happened to black people. There was a time, after slavery, when a black man was as likely to have a child within the confines of a marriage as was a white man. Look at census data. The information we have indicates that, at the beginning of the 20th century, a black child was as likely to be born in a nuclear, intact family as was a white child. What happened? We launched Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, essentially going door to door and encouraging people to get on welfare.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, back in 1965, wrote a book called *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*. At the time, 25 percent of black children were born out of wedlock. He considered that to be a call to arms. Fast forward to the year 2000: nearly 70 percent of today's black children are born out of wedlock.

Do you want to know why there is a drug problem in the inner city? Do you

want to know why there is a crime problem in the inner city? Do you want to know why schools are bad in the inner city? Start with illegitimacy.

I'd like to tell you a story I read in a book by James Robeson, *My Father's Face*. In the first chapter, he talks about a federal prison chaplain who decided to increase

morale. He went to one of the major greeting card companies and said: "Look, Mother's Day is coming up. Why don't you, as an act of goodwill and PR for you, give us 500 free Mother's Day cards?"

The company thought that was a good idea, and it was extremely successful. Every single inmate filled out a Mother's Day card

and sent it to good old Mom.

Father's Day rolled around. The chaplain thought he would duplicate his success. He went back to the card company and got 500 Father's Day cards. Not a single inmate, not one, wanted to send one to his father. Are there any questions about the extent of the problem? ■

## The American Anti-Statist Tradition

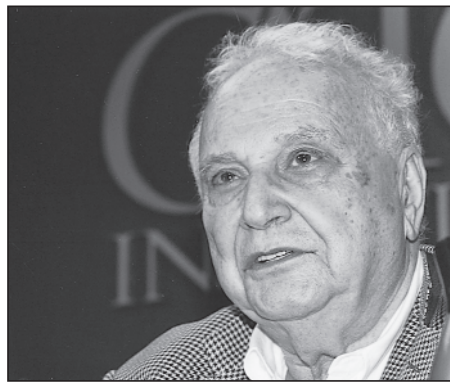
**O**n the afternoon of September 13, participants gathered for another Book Forum. Seymour Martin Lipset, the Hazel Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University and coauthor of *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States*, and Aaron L. Friedberg, professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University and author of *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy*, discussed "American exceptionalism." Excerpts from their remarks follow.

**Seymour Martin Lipset:** The term "American exceptionalism" was coined by Alexis de Tocqueville in his justly celebrated *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville talked about America's being exceptional, by which he meant "different," qualitatively different in all kinds of ways from Europe, particularly France.

When I talk about "American exceptionalism," I sometimes get objections or criticisms from two sources. On the one hand, some conservatives say that there's a lot of socialism here—government ownership, control, taxes. On the other hand, socialists don't like the notion that somehow socialism couldn't have developed in the United States and won't develop here in the future.

The major obstacle to the possibility of socialism or statism is the fact that this is an anti-statist country. It is a country that is suspicious of the state. Anti-statism goes back to the American Revolution, which was a revolution against a strong state. The Declaration of Independence is a libertarian document. The man who wrote it, Thomas Jefferson, once said that that government governs best which governs least.

Well, this tradition of the United States that flows from its politics was reinforced by its religious tradition and institutions, because there again America has a unique pattern. Christianity in this country is quite different from Christianity in any other country. Tocqueville was struck by the strength of religion in the United States. He said religion was much stronger here



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than in Europe, and it was and is. And in America religion was always anti-statist.

The American religions—the Methodists, the Baptists, the Quakers, and others—in Britain were referred to as the nonconformists, or the dissenters. They were nonconforming with or dissenting from the Church of England, the state church, and they were persecuted by the state, and hence they were very much against the state. So the American religious tradition has been an anti-statist tradition, whereas the religious tradition in Europe, and even to a considerable degree in Canada, has been a state-related, a state-supporting religious tradition.

So, you have these factors—the religious tradition, the political history and values, and the political institutions—that all sustain what I call the libertarian orientation of the United States. You know, on the political side we have checks and balances. We talk about gridlock in this country because one party has the presidency and another party the Congress, but this is precisely what the Founders would have liked. Basically, you can say they didn't want an efficient government. They wanted a government that was gridlocked. They may not have thought it through in party terms, but they wanted the sectors, the politicians, the political forces to check each other, to make it difficult.

Socialism and socialist parties developed in other countries where statism was legitimate, where both the conservatives and the left were statist. In the United States, statism was illegitimate, or at least not part of the dominant culture, and hence the socialists were terribly disadvantaged.

One of the forces that was involved in founding socialist parties and still supports them in other countries has been the trade union movement. Some of the socialist parties, like the British Labour Party and others, were founded by the trade unions. Well, in this country, the dominant trade union movement, the American Federation of Labor, opposed the socialists. It and the radical Industrial Workers of the World were anti-statist. There were a lot of socialists in the labor movement, but they never were able to get majority control.

If it weren't for the collapse of communism, the big political story of the last decade or two would have been the end of social-

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