



Ameritopia: The Unmaking of America

By Mark R. Levin



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In his acclaimed #1 *New York Times* bestseller, Mark R. Levin explores the psychology, motivations, and history of the utopian movement, its architects—the Founding Fathers, and its modern-day disciples—and how the individual and American society are being devoured by it.

Levin asks, what is this utopian force that both allures a free people and destroys them? Levin digs deep into the past and draws astoundingly relevant parallels to contemporary America from Plato's *Republic*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, as well as from the critical works of John Locke, Charles Montesquieu, Alexis de Tocqueville, and other philosophical pioneers who brilliantly diagnosed the nature of man and government. As Levin meticulously pursues his subject, the reader joins him in an enlightening and compelling journey. And in the end, Levin's message is clear: the American republic is in great peril. The people must now choose between utopianism or liberty.

President Ronald Reagan warned, “freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction.” Levin agrees, and with *Ameritopia*, delivers another modern political classic, an indispensable guide for America in our time and in the future.

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EPILOGUE

MY PREMISE, IN THE first sentence of the first chapter of this book, is this: “Tyranny, broadly defined, is the use of power to dehumanize the individual and delegitimize his nature. Political utopianism is tyranny disguised as a desirable, workable, and even paradisiacal governing ideology.”

Plato’s *Republic*, More’s *Utopia*, Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, and Marx’s workers’ paradise are utopias that are anti-individual and anti-individualism. For the utopians, modern and olden, the individual is one-dimensional—selfish. On his own, he has little moral value. Contrarily, authoritarianism is defended as altruistic and masterminds as socially conscious. Thus endless interventions in the individual’s life and manipulation of his conditions are justified as not only necessary and desirable but noble governmental pursuits. This false dialectic is at the heart of the problem we face today.

In truth, man is naturally independent and self-reliant, which are attributes that contribute to his own well-being and survival, and the well-being and survival of a civil society. He is also a social being who is charitable and compassionate. History abounds with examples, as do the daily lives of individuals. To condemn individualism as the utopians do is to condemn the very foundation of the civil society and the American founding and endorse, wittingly or unwittingly, oppression. Karl Popper saw it as an attack on Western civilization. “The emancipation of the individual was indeed the great spiritual revolution which had led to the breakdown of tribalism and to the rise of democracy.”¹ Moreover, Judaism and Christianity, among other religions, teach the altruism of the individual.

Of course, this is not to defend anarchy. Quite the opposite. It is to endorse the magnificence of the American founding. The American founding was an exceptional exercise in collective human virtue and wisdom—a culmination of thousands of years of experience, knowledge, reason, and faith. The Declaration of Independence is a remarkable societal proclamation of human rights, brilliant in its insight, clarity, and conciseness. The Constitution of the United States is an extraordinary matrix of governmental limits, checks, balances, and divisions, intended to secure for posterity the individual’s sovereignty as proclaimed in the Declaration.

This is the grand heritage to which every American citizen is born. It has been characterized as “the American Dream,” “the American experiment,” and “American exceptionalism.” The country has been called “the Land of Opportunity,” “the Land of Milk and Honey,” and “a Shining City on a Hill.” It seems unimaginable that a people so endowed by Providence, and the beneficiaries of such unparalleled human excellence, would choose or tolerate a course that ensures their own decline and enslavement, for a government unleashed on the civil society is a government that destroys the nature of man.

On September 17, 1787, at the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Delegate James Wilson, on behalf of his ailing colleague from Pennsylvania, Benjamin Franklin, read aloud Franklin’s speech to the convention in favor of adopting the Constitution. Among other things, Franklin said that the Constitution “is likely to be well administered for a Course of Years, and can only end in Despotism as other Forms have done before it, when the People shall become corrupt as to need Despotic Government, being incapable of any other....”²

Have we “become corrupt”? Are we in need of “despotic government”? It appears that some modern-day “leading lights” think so, as they press their fanatical utopianism. For example, Richard Stengel, managing editor of *Time* magazine, considers the Constitution a utopian expedient. He wrote, “If the Constitution was intended to limit the federal government, it sure doesn’t say so.... The framers weren’t afraid of a little messiness. Which is another reason we shouldn’t be so delicate about changing the Constitution or reinterpreting it.”³ It is beyond dispute that the Framers sought to limit the scope of federal power and that

the Constitution does so. Moreover, constitutional change was not left to the masterminds but deliberately made difficult to ensure the broad participation and consent of the body politic.

Richard Cohen, a columnist for the *Washington Post*, explained that the Constitution is an amazing document, as long as it is mostly ignored, particularly the limits it imposes on the federal government. He wrote, “This fatuous infatuation with the Constitution, particularly the 10th Amendment, is clearly the work of witches, wiccans, and wackos. It has nothing to do with America’s real problems and, if taken too seriously, would cause an economic and political calamity. The Constitution is a wonderful document, quite miraculous actually, but only because it has been wisely adapted to changing times. To adhere to the very word of its every clause hardly is respectful to the Founding Fathers. They were revolutionaries who embraced change. That’s how we got here.”⁴ Of course, without the promise of the Tenth Amendment, the Constitution would not have been ratified, since the states insisted on retaining most of their sovereignty. Furthermore, the Framers clearly did not embrace the utopian change demanded by its modern adherents.

Lest we ignore history, the no-less-eminent American revolutionary and founder Thomas Jefferson explained, “On every question of construction, carry ourselves back to the time when the constitution was adopted, recollect the spirit manifested in the debates, and instead of trying what meaning may be squeezed out of the text, or invented against it, conform to the probable one in which it was passed.”⁵

Thomas L. Friedman, a columnist for the *New York Times* and three-time Pulitzer Prize recipient, is even more forthright in his dismissal of constitutional republicanism and advocacy for utopian tyranny. Complaining of the slowness of American society in adopting sweeping utopian policies, he wrote, “There is only one thing worse than one-party autocracy, and that is one-party democracy, which is what we have in America today. One-party autocracy certainly has its drawbacks. But when it is led by a reasonably enlightened group of people, as China is today, it can also have great advantages. That one party can just impose the politically difficult but critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the 21st century.”⁶ Of course, China remains a police state, where civil liberties are nonexistent, despite its experiment with government-managed pseudo-capitalism. Friedman’s declaration underscores not only the necessary intolerance utopians have for constitutionalism, but their infatuation with totalitarianism.

It is neither prudential nor virtuous to downplay or dismiss the obvious—that America has already transformed into *Ameritopia*. The centralization and consolidation of power in a political class that insulates its agenda in entrenched experts and administrators, whose authority is also self-perpetuating, is apparent all around us and growing more formidable. The issue is whether the ongoing transformation can be restrained and then reversed, or whether it will continue with increasing zeal, passing from a soft tyranny to something more oppressive. Hayek observed that “priding itself on having built its world as if it had designed it, and blaming itself for not having designed it better, humankind is now to set out to do just that. The aim ... is no less than to effect a complete redesigning of our traditional morals, law, and language, and on this basis to stamp out the older order and supposedly inexorable, unjustifiable conditions that prevent the institution of reason, fulfillment, true freedom, and justice.”⁷ But the outcome of this adventurism, if not effectively stunted, is not in doubt.

In the end, can mankind stave off the powerful and dark forces of utopian tyranny? While John Locke was surely right about man’s nature and the civil society, he was also right about that which threatens them. Locke, Montesquieu, many of the philosophers of the European Enlightenment, and the Founders, among others, knew that the history of organized government is mostly a history of a relative few and perfidious men co-opting, coercing, and eventually repressing the many through the centralization and consolidation of authority.

Ironically and tragically, it seems that liberty and the constitution established to preserve it are not only

essential to the individual's well-being and happiness, but also an opportunity for the devious to exploit them and connive against them. Man has yet to devise a lasting institutional answer to this puzzle. The best that can be said is that all that really stands between the individual and tyranny is a resolute and sober people. It is the people, after all, around whom the civil society has grown and governmental institutions have been established. At last, the people are responsible for upholding the civil society and republican government, to which their fate is moored.

The essential question is whether, in America, the people's psychology has been so successfully warped, the individual's spirit so thoroughly trounced, and the civil society's institutions so effectively overwhelmed that revival is possible. Have too many among us already surrendered or been conquered? Can the people overcome the constant and relentless influences of ideological indoctrination, economic manipulation, and administrative coerciveness, or have they become hopelessly entangled in and dependent on a ubiquitous federal...

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