

You Gotta Lie

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by Victor Davis Hanson// *National Review*

Oh! What a tangled progressive web we weave . . .

Red/blue, conservative/liberal, and Republican/Democrat mark traditional American divides. But one fault line is not so 50/50 — that of the contemporary hard progressive movement versus traditional politics, values, and customs.

The entire menu of race, class, and gender identity politics, lead-from-behind foreign policy, political correctness, and radical environmentalism so far have not won over most Americans.

Proof of that fact are the serial reliance of their supporters on deception, and the erosion of language on campus and in politics and the media. The progressive movement requires both deceit and euphemism to mask its apparently unpopular agenda.

What the Benghazi scandal, the Bowe Bergdahl swap, and the Iran Deal all had in common was their reliance on ruse. If the White House and its allies had told the whole truth about all these incidents, Americans probably would have widely rejected the ideological premises that framed them.

In the case of Benghazi, most Americans would not fault an obscure video for causing scripted rioting and death at an American consulate and CIA annex.

They would hardly believe that a policy of maintaining deliberately thin security at U.S. facilities would encourage reciprocal local good will in the Middle East.

They would not agree that holding back American rescue forces was a wise move likely to forestall an international confrontation or escalation.

In other words, Americans wanted their consulate in Benghazi well fortified and protected from seasoned terrorists, and they favored rapid deployment of maximum relief forces in times of crises — but, unfortunately, these were not the agendas of the Obama administration.

So, to disguise that unpleasant reality, Americans were treated to Susan Rice's yarns about a spontaneous, unexpected riot that was prompted by a right-wing video, and endangered Americans far beyond the reach of U.S. military help.

Ditto the Bowe Bergdahl caper, the American deserter on the Afghan front. Aside from the useful publicity of "bringing home" an American hostage, there was an implicit progressive subtext to both his earlier flight and eventual return:

Young introspective soldiers are often troubled about their nation's ambiguous role in the Middle East and so, understandably, sometimes err in their search for meaning. When they do, and when they perhaps "wander off," the government has win-win resources to address their temporary lapse — in this case, killing two birds with one stone by downsizing the apparently repulsive Guantanamo Bay detention facility and returning punished-enough Taliban combatants to their families.

What Susan Rice (ostensibly the go-to consigliere in such deals) could not say is that the Obama administration released five dangerous terrorists in order to bring home one likely deserter, whose selfish AWOL behavior may have contributed over the years to the injury or even deaths of several American soldiers tasked with finding him.

Instead, we got the lie that Bergdahl was a brave soldier who served with honor and distinction and was captured in *mediis rebus* on the battlefield, with the implication that his personal odyssey inadvertently led to the bonus of returning in-limbo foreign detainees and reducing the population of an embarrassing gulag.

We keep learning about all sorts of disturbing and leaked secret side agreements to the Iran Deal. Without them, the progressive agenda underlying the concessions was bound to be unpalatable to the American people:

- secret nocturnal cash ransoms to obtain American hostages (hostage-taking is an Iranian theocratic specialty),
- secret side deals with international agencies to define down on-site inspections,
- and secret “flexibility” on Iran ballistic-missile development.

But on a deeper level, the Obama administration apparently either did not believe that Iran was a truly belligerent, anti-American theocracy bent on a baleful Middle East hegemony through acquiring nuclear weapons, or else assumed that Iran’s regional ambitions were understandable and morally equivalent to any large nation’s desire for such strategic influence. Either way, the results were deception and lies rather than honesty about these assumptions.

The foundations for the unspoken, progressive faith in catastrophic man-caused global warming are self-evident.

Many Western elites believe that modern, free-market industrial growth and consumer capitalism endanger the planet. They bring out the worst in both the bourgeoisie and the undereducated, victimized poor:

- greed, acquisitiveness, and shallow material values.

The remedy and indeed duty for reflective and enlightened elites (who alone have transcended the rat race and by their very success have grown immune from, and wise to, the contradictions of capitalism) is to change the economic foundations of modern Western life — in a radical fashion akin to the 19th-century romantic yearning for a pre-industrial, less environmentally exploitive past.

The catch, however, is that most Americans believe that oil wells, mines, freeways, dams, cars, reservoirs, and factories — and the granite counters, stainless-steel fridges, and big-screen TVs that derive from them — are largely godsend, ensuring a good life undreamed of by their grandparents.

Or they believe that most accompanying deleterious effects on the environment, such as slight and periodic changes in temperatures, are outweighed by the benefits of industry and can be soon ameliorated by rapidly advancing scientific and technological remedies.

The result is an impasse.

To square the circle, progressive vocabulary adjusted. Global warming became “climate change,” on the theory that when droughts naturally were followed by snow and rain, snow and rain were only further proof of man-caused rising temperatures that needed immediate redress through larger government intervention.

It was not enough to warn that the industrial age might have contributed to an acceleration of natural and episodic warming of the planet (a documented cyclical pattern of the past); instead end-of-world, apocalyptic scenarios were necessary to reconfigure the very industrial base of modern life.

The result is that today, any natural climatic extremity — ice to searing heat, snow or drought, both mud and dust, receding or advancing waters, normal or abnormal temperatures — becomes media fodder for the narrative of man-caused, excessive carbon releases that can be remedied only by costly reduction of the West’s modern commerce and industry that fuels extravagant, self-indulgent consumerism.

Yet imply that, and the public would revolt.

Instead, it is wiser to suggest that the climate is being altered by human shortsightedness and extravagance and that the change can be stopped by altruism and moral sacrifice.

Inefficient and subsidized solar and wind power therefore become ethically and culturally preferable to more practicable but retrograde nuclear power, hydroelectric, and natural-gas generation.

As for a publicly green Bono, John Kerry, or Al Gore, who in his private life might gulp down an inordinate amount of aviation fuel or hoard too many square feet of living space, we appropriate the implied Soviet argument of the apparat and the dacha:

Only by revolutionaries faring well can the revolution itself fare well.

No one wishes to discuss candidly that universities are no longer free bastions of inquiry but are descending into would-be boot camps to train progressive shock troops.

Careers, reputations, and lots of money are invested in stifling free expression, a project predicated on changing the nature of students, the curricula, and the very atmosphere of the traditional university.

The predicable result is again linguistic subterfuge.

If unprepared students are frustrated that special admittance does not de facto equate to college success or graduation, the university must make the necessary Animal Farm-like adjustments.

Segregation by race and gender becomes “safe spaces.”

Ancient stress, the stuff of cramming for finals and paper deadlines, gets embedded into politics, as snowflakes are “traumatized” by a culturally appropriated earring or a gendered pronoun.

Free speech that can be challenging and liberate young minds becomes “hate speech” and is banned.

Odious censorship is redefined as mere “trigger warnings.”

Confederate nullification that reminds us of the chaotic consequence of states’ defying federal law becomes “sanctuary cities,” as if illegal-alien lawbreakers were 21st-century versions of fugitive slaves seeking sanctuary from plantation bounty hunters.

When “sexual liberation” of the 1960s eventually led to a crass and crude dating atmosphere that disadvantaged young women (the male was assured that mutually consenting sexual congress demanded not even momentary commitment or even postcoital gentlemanly behavior and deference),

it was recalibrated as “sexual assault” — as if occasional female naïveté and frequent male boorishness and selfishness in matters of sex were now criminal matters (though exempt from the bother of the Bill of Rights).

Nowhere was the progressive project more in need of stealth than the proverbial War on Terror that followed the mass murdering on 9/11.

Apparently, it was impossible for the Obama administration to concede that terrorism and indeed global conflict in the 21st century were largely dividends of the radicalization of Islam, and fueled often by the inability of traditional Muslim societies to adjust to the radical globalization — and indeed Westernization — of the planet.

Conceding that would imply the culpability of autocratic and theocratic Muslim leaders (along with traditional and endemic gender apartheid, tribalism, anti-Semitism, religious fundamentalism and intolerance, and statism).

It’s far easier to fault the pernicious legacy of 19th-century European colonialism.

Empiricism would have allowed discussions of inherent differences between a post-Reformation Western Christianity and a pre-reformation Islam;

instead, progressives adhered to boilerplate multicultural moral equivalencies.

Identification of widespread abhorrent practices in Middle Eastern societies — female genital mutilation, honor killings, state violence against gays, and racism — would lead to difficult intellectual and political truths.

But keeping the focus on the West’s supposed post-colonialism, imperialism, and exploitation provides easy fodder for the race, class, and gender appetites of careerist Western elites.

To square that circle, terrorism then became “man-caused disasters” (as if Buddhist and Christians were on a rampage in Europe).

Anti-terrorism was “an overseas contingency operation” (as if hunger in Haiti was morally equivalent to the battle in Anbar Province), while jihadism became a mere personal odyssey or journey (who is to say that bin Laden was not misunderstood by followers seeking spiritual growth?).

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was rendered “largely secular,” as if Mohamed Morsi sought to bring what he learned at USC to good governance in Cairo.

“Workplace violence” was murdering 13 soldiers in cold blood at Fort Hood while shouting “Allahu akbar,” on the theory that deranged employees sometimes have shot many on the job, though without the loud religious proclamations.

History got into the act as well.

President Obama assured us on no evidence that a Cordoba without Muslims in the late 15th century, at the time of the Christian Inquisition, was a bastion of Islamic tolerance (and later added that we “high-horse” Christians should remember the Crusades of a millennium ago).

For the progressive project, history is not tragic.

It’s a melodrama to be used for contemporary political agendas, through separating bad people from good people of the past, as ascertained through contemporary progressive standards retroactively applied to earlier centuries.

In fairness, what is the anti-multicultural, anti–morally equivalent, anti-utopian pacifist alternative?

To tragically confess that religions are not mostly alike?

That blowing up somebody on the pretext of ending oppression does not mean there is real oppression rather than inherent selfishness and evil?

To assume that those who most damn the West are themselves the most eager to flee to the West?

To accept that deterrence sways behavior more than does concession, given the unchanging nature of man?

Without ruse, there can be no progressive project — as was true in the past of any illogical and unappealing ideology.

In short, you gotta lie.

<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/447231/why-progressives-lie-leftist-agenda-requires-deception>