

# Truth, Justice, and the American Way

By David Chandler

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As I was growing up, every T.V. episode of Superman had an introduction that described our hero as a defender of "Truth, Justice and the American Way". The pledge of allegiance talks about "Freedom and Justice for all". Thomas Jefferson, in the Declaration of Independence declared, "We hold these truths self evident, that all men are created equal". I grew up taking the values America stands for very seriously. I always thought of this country as special.

I am not for America because we are the richest nation or the most powerful nation. We may not always be the richest or most powerful nation. Rather, I believe in what America stands for.

Why do America's values seem so right? Is it because we are better than the rest of the world? No! If we truly believe in equality, then we have to realize that we are no better or worse than anyone else anywhere. We are not the only people in the world who value freedom. We are not the only ones who recognize when justice is done or not done. We do not have a monopoly on the truth. Equality, Freedom, Justice, and Truth are not just American values, they are fundamental human values. They seem right because they are right, and they are recognized as being right by ordinary people the world over. All human beings, wherever they are born, are worthy of respect, the right to live in peace with their neighbors, the right to make choices that will affect their lives, and the right to fair treatment. If we really believe all men are created equal, we can't draw boundaries in our minds between ourselves and the rest of the world.

Because I believe in these fundamental values I am concerned when our country does not live by them. In some very basic ways America does not live by them.

Most Americans are proud of the role we played in overthrowing Hitler in World War II. Hitler was an absolute dictator. When absolute power is concentrated in the hands of one man or a small group of men the inevitable result is violence and corruption. They act in their own self interest, not in the interest of the people. Yet despite our democratic ideals, we support dictators around the world today. Our government is responsible for installing many of them in power. We supported Somoza in Nicaragua, Marcos in the Philippines, the Shaw in Iran, Pinochet in Chile, Batista in Cuba, a series of military dictatorships in Guatemala, and on and on. The list is longer than you would believe. All of these dictators have practiced torture and murder of political opponents, imprisonment without trial, and disappearances, where a prisoner's family members don't know if their loved ones are dead or alive. We justify supporting these tyrants because they are friendly to American business interests and oppose Communism. I wonder though: would you rather be tortured by a Communist or an anti-communist dictator?

The Declaration of Independence is a detailed and carefully reasoned document that spells out the right of a people who are oppressed to overthrow the government that is oppressing them. We did it, and most Americans think the result was worth the effort. Yet in the world today the United States seems to oppose every revolution that comes along. Revolutions don't just happen because someone lights a match. To get a revolution going, conditions have to be pretty revolting to begin

with. Opposing revolutions goes hand in hand with what I said a moment ago about supporting dictators. People don't like dictators. Why, then, are we out there supporting the oppressors rather than the revolutionaries? More to the point, why are we interfering with other people's affairs in the first place? Why are we so afraid every revolution will "go Communist"? We are really hung up on Communism. If Communism is seen as the ultimate evil, then opposing it can be an excuse for justifying just about anything else, no matter how evil. On the other hand, if what we have to offer is really better and we stand for what is right and just, won't other people see the light and come to us rather than the Communists?

Democracy is based on the confidence that ordinary people have the wisdom to act in their own best interest. If we feel we have to step in and decide the outcome of every conflict in the world, we don't really believe in Democracy. We are out to build an empire.

As a final point I want to talk about Truth. There is something very fundamental about truthfulness. If we are not living the truth why bother? If our policies are based on lies, how are we better than Stalin or Hitler? The problem comes up with the issue of national security. It seems that everybody seems to think lying is O.K. when national security is at stake. And national security seems to be at stake every time you turn around. Oliver North used national security to justify lying to Congress, not to mention shredding a few tons of evidence. The C.I.A. conducts covert operations in such a way as to maintain "deniability," the ability to lie their way out of any questions that may come up.

I think everyone recognizes that in a war it is important to keep secrets from the enemy. We could never have pulled off D-Day if the critical secrets had gotten out to the Germans. But who was being kept in the dark when president Nixon conducted the "secret" bombing of Cambodia? It certainly wasn't secret from the Cambodians whose villages were being bombed! It wasn't even secret from the Russians. It was a secret kept from the American People to prevent dissent. When there were secret arms shipments to Iran, it was no secret from the Iranians! It was a secret from the American people, because the president and his men knew the American people would not approve.

Lies are increasingly becoming a tool of American policy. They are not limited to just Democrats or Republicans. It's being accepted as a fact of life on all sides, and it makes me cringe. If there is not Truth, there can be no Democracy. I am afraid we are buying security at the expense of losing everything we value as a nation.

My political prescription is to get informed, to expose yourself to ideas, to read, to be skeptical of the official line, to use good judgement in searching for the truth, to be active in making this country what you know it should be, and to hold to the ideals America represents.