



The Statist Call-for-Civility Con

When I hear today's frequent calls for civility, I'm reminded of Rodney King's plaintive appeal, "Can we...can we all get along?" After all, King was a thug but, when he made his statement, seemed wholly sincere. This means that most contemporary political figures who call for civility share one certain commonality with King.

One of those who likely was sincere was Betty Ford, who has managed to make such a call from beyond the grave. Laid to rest this week, she had instructed two statist, Cokie Roberts and Rosalynn Carter, to send a message about conservative incivility.

Writes Michael Kimmitt at *American Thinker*, "Mrs. Ford wanted me to remind everyone of the way things used to be in Washington," said Roberts.... "I wouldn't be at all surprised if she timed her death to make sure she could convey the message of comity during this week when it seems so badly needed."

Messages of comity sound nice, but how did things really "used to be in Washington"? Well, Kimmitt points out that Robert's own father, Congressman Hale Boggs:

took to the House floor in 1971 to eviscerate the FBI, condemning it for adopting "tactics of the Soviet Union and Hitler's Gestapo." An angry President Nixon, himself the recipient of much Democrat love, called Mr. [Gerald] Ford to complain. "What's the matter with your opposite number?"

"He's nuts," Ford said of his dear friend.

... Rosalynn's hubby Jimmy is even more nasty. Long ago he cast aside the longstanding gentlemen's agreement observed by all of his predecessors to avoid criticism of Presidents who follow them.

And if civility was a firm tradition in American politics, the Founding Fathers certainly never knew anything about it. Samuel Adams wrote the "Vindex" letters, which were strikingly uncivil. Pamphleteer Joseph Callendar impugned Thomas Jefferson as a tool of the French Revolution and accused him of sexual impropriety. And, in 1804, a disagreement became sufficiently uncivil to spark a duel in which sitting vice president Aaron Burr mortally wounded Alexander Hamilton.

Of course, it's easier for some to be civil than others. It's easy to get along with the "other side" when you don't really have a side. When you have no principles, you may rarely be angered by any moral position because you see everything as just so much gray — and it then follows that you will see





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people's actions as gray. It reminds one of Robert the Bruce's scheming, leprotic father in the film *Braveheart*: He found nothing worth fighting for and instead spoke eloquently of the nobility of compromise — even when he was compromising with evil. Note that Betty Ford was a woman who supported abortion, pre-marital sex, the Equal Rights Amendment, and marijuana use.

But while civility is the highest virtue of the unprincipled, to most who call for it, it is nothing but a ploy. For instance, after the Tucson Jared Lee Loughner shooting, statisticians said that conservatives' rhetoric might have inspired the crime. We heard nonsensical warnings about how we mustn't speak of "killing" tax cuts or "targeting" political opponents. Leftist Keith Olbermann even went so far as to say that if Sarah Palin wouldn't "repudiate her own part... in amplifying violence and violent imagery in American politics, she must be dismissed from politics...." And while Barack Obama was a bit more measured, he, too, called for "civility in public discourse." Well, let's talk about that.

Shortly before the Tucson shooting, Obama said about combating Republicans, "If they bring a knife to the fight, we bring a gun." He more recently stated that the GOP was using the debt ceiling as a "gun against the heads" of fellow Americans. Also note that Obama's Attorney General Eric Holder once called Americans "cowards" in the area of race. And don't forget that for 20 years the president sat in a church in which his pastor screamed "God d*** America!" and called our nation "the US of KKKA."

Of course, this isn't unusual for the Left. If you disagree with Obama's policies, you're a "racist"; if you criticize homosexual behavior, you're "intolerant"; and if you want to eliminate illegal immigration, you're a xenophobe. For the Left to lecture others about civility is like John Gotti having complained about society's lack of respect for life.

Yet it is politically expedient, as political and cultural conflict is a type of intranational cold war. And, of course, if you're attacking someone, it's quite advantageous if you can get your adversary to pull his punches by saying, "Why are you hitting me? You're so mean!" Remember that a frequent goal of war is to reduce adversaries to subjects so that you can throw punches when they "misbehave" without encountering any meaningful resistance.

If we really want to learn about civility, we perhaps should look back even further than our nation's founding. Jesus himself had some very harsh words for many, calling certain people "hypocrites" and a "den of vipers" and telling Peter the Apostle "Get behind me, Satan!" And while today's statisticians would no doubt lecture the Lord about His words, the point here is one oft-overlooked in a relativistic time: The ultimate guide to discourse is not whether or not it is civil. It is whether or not it is *truthful*.

And it is a sad fact of man's nature that people are more tolerant of clever lies than harshly spoken truths. For example, when Representative Joe Wilson shouted at Barack Obama "You Lie!" during a presidential health-care speech, there was more talk about the congressman's impoliteness than Obama's. As to the latter, insincerity in discourse is the worst form of impoliteness. Of all moral obligations, one of the most pressing is that we must tell our fellow man the Truth. For relating it is how we bring others closer to reality and thus give them the necessary tools to make sound decisions. Lying distorts reality for others, however, and when it's distorted enough, people are out of touch with reality. Then their decisions lead them to destruction.

Civility certainly has its place. It's great when opening doors, yielding the right-of-way on the road and tipping hats to ladies. But it should not be the primary concern when fighting great political and social battles on which the fate of civilization rests. And always remember why statisticians issue only one-way calls for civility: What they want is not civility, but deference. But this is not something shown to



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statesmen in a free land. It is only something demanded of subjects by potentates.



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