

Synopsis of Garland Tucker's presentation

"Conservative Heroes". ICON Lecture Series event of 6/16/15.

Dear Friends,

This is the second event for which ICON has constructed a post-event synopsis. It is our intention to continue to do so after future events, and since these synopses are still a new work in progress, we are particularly interested in your opinion of the result. Send us a note if you wish.

The title of Tucker's talk was "Conservative Heroes". That is also the title of his historical study of selected heroes, and since the book had been published just shortly before the event nobody in the audience had had the chance to read it yet.

Tucker crisply summarized the five foundational principles of a conservative as follows: First, conservatives have a realistic view of human nature and an absence of belief or attempt to perfect humankind. The flawed nature of humans is fully accepted. We humans are fallen creatures. That reality must always be accounted for in the construction of a political system. Second, because of the flawed nature of humans, the two primary roles of government are to establish order and to preserve liberty. The tension between the two is recognized, and a conservative attempts maximal liberty consistent with maintaining order. Third, a conservative works toward a limited government and so further federal governmental roles other than liberty and order are to be resisted. Personal liberty requires that the over-reaching encroachment that the federal government is always attempting, due to human avarice and folly, must be continually resisted and restrained. Fourth, property rights and human rights are inseparably connected; the work of John Locke was very influential in this regard. Security of private property is intimately linked to personal freedom. For a conservative, achieving economic equality is not a proper goal of governmental policy or action. Finally and fifth, likely the most central core concept is that the social and political life of a community depend on private virtues. Those virtues are most often derived from specific cultures, and for most of our nation's conservative heroes

that culture and those virtues have been transmitted to U.S. citizens in large part through the observances and teachings of Judeo-Christian religion.

Tucker selected 14 leaders to focus on, and one of the pleasures he had in the writing was that he could choose to write about his own heroes. Some of the points he made are as follows:

1. Many of the great leaders had very long-standing and close friendships with other conservative leaders, and it was through the intense, long-term, and careful discussions of the small and great questions of that time that they were able so greatly to clarify issues and to influence the country's direction. Jefferson and Madison were both founders, had a 50-year friendship, and their very voluminous correspondence has been of great help to interested citizens and historians. They both had backgrounds in studies of Locke and Burke. They advocated for strictly limited and identified powers for the federal government, whereas the states were to have broader powers that were also less tightly specified.
2. Macon and Randolph shared a similarly long and important friendship, and lived in the same boarding house in DC for decades. They were one of the "small band cohort" who were central to the preservation of a limited government at a time that the government was attempting a wide expansion of initiatives and powers. Macon cast opposition votes greatly in excess of any other legislator of that time, and Randolph's speeches were essential to the survival of the concept that a small government is an essential goal. Senator Helms admired him. Macon believed that strict limitations of governmental power and taxation were moral issues of denying inherently evil humans the opportunity to exploit others.
3. Grover Cleveland was a Democrat at a time that the Republicans were the advocates of Big Government. He was a firm champion of limited government and vetoed over 500 bills for being profligate and spendthrift. He was followed by Calvin Coolidge during whose administration the federal government was actually SHRUNK, which was and is a unique event. Even Reagan failed to shrink the federal government. Coolidge was intensely focused and ruthless on cutting governmental

spending. Every Friday afternoon he worked with Andrew Mellon, his exceedingly able treasury secretary, cutting items from the budget. For Cleveland and especially for Coolidge taxation was a MORAL issue. They believed it immoral to deprive anyone of the fruits of their labor by taxing an amount any greater than was absolutely required. Further taxation was only “a species of legalized larceny”. Their policies of tax reform and governmental frugality led in the early 1920s to unparalleled prosperity at all levels of society. Paul Johnson stated: “Prosperity was more widely distributed in the America of the 1920s than had been possible in any community of this size before.”

4. Josiah Bailey (from North Carolina) was another towering Democrat conservative who led the successful opposition to FDR’s attempt to pack the Supreme Court, and who crystalized conservative concepts in a letter to Americans containing 10 points and entitled the “Conservative Manifesto”. Another of the major Democrat conservatives who was of that era was John Davis, who also opposed the New Deal as unconstitutional. Because of his able defense of constitutional limitations, FDR labeled him “Public Enemy Number One”.
5. Tucker makes a trajectory from Goldwater to Buckley to Reagan, describing the work of each as necessary for the final successes of the Reagan era. He cited a vignette from Reagan’s childhood in which at a very young age his mother made him face the neighborhood bullies. Reagan did, and his sense of confidence from that early success was life long. Tucker identifies courage to be an essential attribute of a conservative leader. Reagan said of himself: “I am not a great man. I am a man committed to great ideas.”

The discussion was energetic following the talk. Issues included questions about how a failed political agenda, liberalism, is still so firmly advocated by so many. Tucker mentioned the attraction of having power over others. Historically, what has set conservatism back most severely? Tucker thought the New Deal was a heavy blow, with the damaging discovery by masses of people that they could get things from the government. Many in the audience were surprised at the number of pivotal conservatives who had been

Democrats. Are there any conservative Democrats in high positions now? Tucker said there is not a single one.

For me, four take-away aspects of this event stood out especially sharply. First, it was wonderful to have explained the power of long-term friendships in formulating one's own understanding of our nation., and I was reminded of the many deeply insightful people I now know because of my association with ICON. Second, the pivotal role of religion and religious virtues was affirmed. In that regard, please note the ICON event scheduled for Oct 27. Third, Tucker's assertion that courage is a basic requirement of leadership is a timely reminder of that reality. Finally, it is very sobering to hear (which I had not before understood) that in the past so many of the most stalwart defenders of conservative principles had been Democrats, and that that is not currently the case.

"Conservative Heroes" would be a great read at the mountains or beach while you are on a well-deserved vacation. Please also keep in mind that the next ICON event is a free showing of the documentary film "**Honor Diaries**", made by the Clarion Project. That will be at 7:00 PM, Extraordinary Ventures, July 28. That showing will start ICON's third year of events. Then, in the early Fall we are honored to have John Guandolo speaking on **Shariah Law** as the driving force behind Islamic aggression, that event to occur on Sept 15.

Best wishes for a lovely summer, everyone.
Laura Gutman, ICON Board