



## Letters to a Young Conservative

by Dinesh D'Souza  
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### Take-Aways

- Modern American conservatives hold true to the ideals of the American Revolution.
- Liberalism and libertarianism are two completely different world views. Today's libertarianism is the classic eighteenth century liberalism.
- Today's liberals oppose American values. Libertarians share the conservative belief in a limited government, but conservatism has an additional moral dimension.
- College conservatives should adopt radical tactics to expose leftist lies like political correctness, multiculturalism and postmodernism.
- Government should be limited, preserving both freedom and responsibility for citizens.
- Capitalism and affluence, not government regulations, are the best hopes for financial equality, the worldwide prosperity of ordinary citizens and environmental preservation.
- Liberals want peace and freedom at any cost, while conservatives know that war has its uses and that with freedom comes responsibility.
- Moral standards exist and living up to them is the conservative idea of the good life.
- The Republican Party should support moral values without unduly harsh condemnation.
- Conservatives should be optimistic, because truth and right will prevail.

### Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>

## Relevance

### What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) The author's interpretation of the differences among conservatism, liberalism and libertarianism; 2) The tenets of modern American conservatism; and 3) How Republicans can keep their Congressional majority and enact their agenda.

### Recommendation

Dinesh D'Souza has produced earlier incisive, groundbreaking books. *Illiberal Education* and *The End of Racism* are both thought-provoking reads for conservatives and liberals alike, but this is one has an additional purpose: a comprehensive outline of conservative doctrine and a blanket condemnation of the opposing points of view. D'Souza revisits some previously published opinions, and if he doesn't always support them with fact, he does bring heartfelt argument to the fore. He also refers back to his other two books when illumination is needed. The book, as the title suggests, is formatted as a series of letters to a college student, complete with fond recollections of the author's days as a conservative firebrand at Dartmouth. Even constrained by this gimmick, D'Souza is an entertaining writer who delights in, "harpooning liberals," eloquently if with slight regard for fairness. *getAbstract.com* recommends this book as an ideological dessert for potential conservatives, more than as a soup-to-nuts guide to conservatism — and its no-shades-of-gray approach may even help liberals prepare their counterarguments.

## Abstract

### Conservatives, Libertarians and Liberals

Conservatives in the United States keep the flame of the American Revolution. They seek to conserve the founding fathers' dream of a society free from economic, political and religious oppression. This is a very different meaning of conservatism than the one used in Europe, where traditional conservatives oppose democracy and capitalism. American conservatives also champion a morally virtuous way of life by upholding such values as patriotism, civic pride and the importance of the family.

Libertarians share the conservative view that the federal government is too big and infringes too much on the rights of individuals. However, libertarians believe in freedom as an end in itself, while conservatives believe freedom is a means for making the proper moral choices. Thus, libertarians oppose any kind of regulation on principle, but conservatives are not above using governmental regulations to encourage certain virtuous behaviors.

Liberalism has undergone two major changes since the founding of the country. In the 1930s, New Deal Democrats created a welfare state by vastly expanding the role of government, arguing that "freedom" also meant freedom from want. In the 1960s, radical liberals expanded the definition of "freedom" again, to include moral freedom from external authority. Liberals no longer support the ideals of classical liberalism; conservatives do.

### Campus Conservatives: Today's Radical Activists

These morally permissive liberals of the 1960s are now firmly entrenched in academia, with the result that young conservatives on most American college campuses are in the

"Being a conservative in America means conserving the principles of the American Revolution."

"The liberal's high opinion of human nature leads to the view that if you give people autonomy they will use their freedom well. Conservatives know better."

“Classical liberals believe in free speech because they are confident that, in a clash between truth and error, truth will prevail. The left does not believe in free speech.”

“The open-minded person is quickly drowned in a sea of facts. Only the man with a firm rudder, only the man who has already decided where he is going, is confident enough to keep going when the political waters get rough.”

“Conservatives... recognize that whatever the government does, it usually does it badly. (I know of only one exception to this rule: the writing of parking tickets.)”

“When the state exceeds its proper functions, when it moves outside its sphere, it invades the domain of the citizens, depriving us of both freedom and responsibility.”

unusual position of opposing the *status quo* instead of preserving it. Today’s college students can and should adopt the radical methods of liberal activists while remaining ideologically conservative. Humor is a powerful political tool, and college campuses contain many targets that are ripe for conservative ridicule. Some examples include:

- Political correctness — This is a blatant leftist attempt to muzzle free speech. Today’s liberals seek to silence dissenters, which means conservatives have the First Amendment on their side in fighting for public debate and free expression of opinions.
- The liberal version of multiculturalism — This distorts and lionizes minor works from other cultures at the expense of Western classics like Shakespeare. A true multiculturalist approach would study major non-Western works, like the *Quran* and the *Tale of Genji*. However, liberal multiculturalists ignore such important works because they happen to be politically incorrect and they expose the intolerance practiced by many other cultures.
- Postmodernism — This incoherent school of thought is an excuse for liberal academics to publish articles with impressively long titles, but no real content. It is the epitome of ivory-tower academia that is chronically out of touch with the real world.

### The Reagan Revolution

The Reagan presidency introduced a new generation of young Americans to conservatism. Although his detractors portray him as unsophisticated and dishonest, he managed to end the Cold War and lay the groundwork for the economic boom of the 1990s (for which Clinton later falsely took credit). He accomplished these massive changes because he stuck to his convictions and focused on a few goals — being closed-minded was an advantage. Another strength was the fact that he paid no attention to others’ negative opinions of him.

Unlike previous Republican presidents including Eisenhower, Nixon and Ford, Reagan attacked the welfare state that had been created in the liberal revolution of the 1930s. He cut taxes even in the face of a growing budget deficit, a move that was criticized even by conservatives, at the time. However, it started the economic engine that produced such strong growth from 1983 into the late 1990s — and eventually resulted in a budget surplus.

### The Role of Government

In the 1980s, Reagan knew what few conservatives at the time were willing to say publicly: big government was a big problem. While it serves vital functions such as national defense, public education and law enforcement, government should not be allowed to expand outside its proper sphere, because it is inherently coercive and usually inefficient.

This is especially true when it comes to redistributing wealth, whether in the form of subsidies, pork-barrel spending or the tax code. Liberals complain that tax cuts unfairly benefit the rich, but that is only true because the rich already pay more than their share of taxes. Also, the U.S. has a more efficient method of lowering inequality than the misguided idea of progressive income taxation: technological capitalism. Thanks to innovative businesses and new technology, the poorest Americans are much better off than they were 100 years ago. And, contrary to the protests of anti-globalists, multinational corporations and free trade hold the best hope of spreading this prosperity to the rest of the world.

In the twentieth century, life expectancy has risen dramatically and food production has increased. Yet development and affluence are also the best recipes for preserving the

“Racial preferences are a sort of Special Olympics for African Americans. Such preferences devalue black achievement, and they intensify doubts about black capacity.”

“The great intellectual challenge facing conservatives is to make the case for morality at a time when many in the West have ceased to believe in an external moral order.”

“We like trees, rivers, and baby seals as much as the next guy. Indeed, as conservatives, we should be dedicated to conserving God’s green earth, and we are.”

“Most American children are born into families in which both parents work outside the home. I cannot help but suspect that this is a dysfunctional system.”

environment (poor people chop down endangered trees for firewood, while rich ones join the Sierra Club). America’s creation of a large affluent class is an amazing achievement, and serves as an example to the rest of the world of what democracy can do.

### Freedom Demands Responsibility

Another reason the role of government should be smaller is that the role of personal responsibility should be larger. Government cannot and should not protect its citizens against every real or imagined danger or offense. One tenet of classical liberalism, and hence of modern conservatism, is that with freedom comes responsibility. This viewpoint has implications for many hot-button issues, including:

- Affirmative action — While it’s a nice idea to level the playing field for minorities who have been historically discriminated against, affirmative action is simply another form of racial discrimination. It questions the abilities and qualifications of the minorities who benefit from it, an impossible outcome in a true meritocracy. Liberals claim that America has so trampled upon minorities and women that their self-esteem is irreparably damaged and requires government resuscitation. In fact, self-esteem does not promote achievement, but achievement results in higher self-esteem.
- Gun control — Not only do gun-control laws fail to prevent criminals from obtaining guns, a society of armed citizens is statistically safer. Government regulations are not a replacement for responsible decisions by educated gun owners.
- Constitutional interpretation — Liberal Supreme Court judges have twisted the U.S. Constitution to their own ends in the past 50 years. For example, they have created a right to privacy and a separation of church and state, neither of which are constitutionally mandated (contrary to popular liberal opinion). This abuse of the judicial branch robs the American people of the right to be ruled by the officials they elect.
- Immigration — Immigrants are not to blame for America’s moral decline; we have only ourselves to blame. An influx of hard-working newcomers makes good economic sense for the country, and provides the immigrants with a wonderful opportunity. However, immigration policy should be selective to avoid giving “free rides” on our welfare wagon.

### The Moral Side of Conservatism

Conservatism is more than a philosophy about the proper role of government and the scope of personal responsibility. It also has a moral dimension. Conservatives believe that moral standards exist and that upholding them benefits individuals and society. Liberals always cast this view as a desire to restrict freedom, arguing that freedom is an end in itself. But what good is a society of people who are totally free but miserable and disconnected from their communities? These issues illustrate the conservative emphasis on virtue:

- Feminism — Feminists’ misguided desire to compete with men in the public sphere has led them to completely devalue the importance of the private sphere. The work of raising children and running a household is crucial to the integrity of the family, and should be honored as important work, instead of being denigrated, as feminists do.
- Gay rights — Homosexuality has become more than a personal choice; it is now a political ideology. Gay activists want to break down moral resistance to their lifestyle, which directly subverts the central role of heterosexual relationships and the family in Western culture. If “we love each other” is a sufficient reason to allow gays to marry, then similar arguments can be made for polygamy, incest and more.
- Abortion — This illustrates the absurdity of liberal positions on freedom. For pro-choice activists, autonomy supersedes other considerations, like the sanctity of human life.

“How do we foster those virtues of intact families and close-knit communities when the circumstances that gave rise to those virtues have changed? This is our dilemma.”

“Liberals are always ‘shocked and appalled’ by something. By contrast, the predominant conservative emotion is the horselaugh.”

- Family values — The welfare state in America has subsidized illegitimate children, so it is, sadly, no surprise to find that the family is no longer the central, stable unit of society. Even in intact families, nannies and day care centers raise children, not parents.

Conservatives espouse the values that America holds dear, while liberals often cross over into a pathological-sounding anti-Americanism. Liberals argue that the Constitution was a racist document and claim America is a brutal oppressor of human and civil rights while ignoring the fact that Western democracy is the only governmental system that guarantees individuals equal treatment under the law, thanks to that Constitution. They automatically criticize any American foreign policy for demonstrating self-interest, while whining that those same policies trample on other nations’ self-interests — a blatant double standard. They claim that peace is always a better strategy than violence despite massive evidence to the contrary (just think of World War II).

### **The Conservative Agenda**

The old stereotype is that liberals are young at heart, fun-loving hippies, while conservatives are stodgy killjoys. Today, the reverse is often true: Leftists are grim, humorless and self-righteous, while conservatives take themselves less seriously and enjoy a good laugh.

And conservatives have plenty of reasons to be cheerful. The Internet and cable news channels shattered the liberal monopoly on the news media. Republicans control both houses of Congress and the presidency. Several issues that seemed to be off the table, such as affirmative action, have been revived thanks to a few dogged conservative critics, and it is once again possible to imagine the truth prevailing.

Make no mistake, the Republican Party faces challenges. The first is to win the soccer-mom (affluent suburban) vote by remaining the party of American values without coming across as too moralistic and harsh. The second is to build a base of multiethnic support, built on meritocratic ideals, without black voters, who will continue to extract promises from the Democrats. These challenges will require work but they are surmountable, and when they are surmounted, the Republicans will be the majority party of the twenty-first century.

## **About The Author**

Dinesh D’Souza, the Rishwain Research Scholar at Stanford’s Hoover Institution, served as senior domestic policy analyst in the Reagan White House in 1987 and 1988. He is the author of *Illiberal Education*, *The End of Racism*, *Ronald Reagan*, *The Virtue of Prosperity* and *What’s So Great About America?*

## **Buzz-Words**

Classical liberalism / Conservatism / Liberalism / Libertarianism / Welfare state