

How Times Have Changed
by
Robert Rietschel, June 5, 2023

You may have heard some of these. Live and let live. It's a free country. Your rights end where my nose begins. I heard these sorts of retorts often on the school grounds growing up in the fifties. If somebody took exception to something you did or said, you hit them with, "It's a free country." No big deal. So you were different, so what. My how times have changed. I don't think the fifties were known for their tolerance. These were just considered American attitudes. We could choose to be different, and it was our right.

Flash forward to today and we have the personal choice to be different becoming a flash point for legislation banning one thing or another. A lot has to do with sexual preferences. I thought those were among our most personal of choices and that we let people do as they pleased as long it wasn't harming us. There's that bit about where my nose begins. Lots of folks seem to have their noses bent out of shape nowadays. Why? Exactly how have they been hurt? They are offended by someone's choice? Their moral code has been violated by someone's choice? Doesn't that have more to do with the person making the choice? Won't they be the ones to suffer the moral consequence? Not you who are offended. So why gin up the legislature to make laws that marginalize those making contrary choices to yours? I thought that Americans wanted the government to stay out of our personal lives as much as possible.

Ah, but you say those folks are harming and recruiting young people. They have inserted such characters into books. Let's ban those books. It seems to me that most of the people calling for book bans don't read much. They usually haven't read the book in question but may have heard a paragraph. I can't help but wonder if those parents have children who read books from the library on any subject. It seems that it is a struggle to interest children in reading books. They are more oriented to video these days. And just how gullible are those children? An adult authority figure tells them to do something, and they snap to? Hum. How about when that adult is the parent, and the order is to clean your room or eat your vegetables? Those kids just automatically fall in line. Not the ones I know. And who is controlling the stories those kids tell each other on the playground? Isn't that where you got your sex education? There was far more detail on the playground than in any book. Are we going to ban playgrounds? Maybe ban children from talking to other children lest they be recruited into some activity their parent's disdain?

Is this concern for what a child might pick up at school real or is it just an excuse used to exercise your moral authority over others? Have your children come home saying that they heard that there are people who like having sex with those of the same sex and they want to try it? I'll bet not. But isn't that what we hear folks are worried about? Are we to make laws that marginalize folks' choices in life because of someone's

irrational fear? I would hope not, but it is happening. It starts at the margins by chipping away at the acceptability of choosing to be different. Here's another old saying, "Variety is the spice of life." I know you've heard that one. Maybe even "Vive la difference." Acceptance must have gone out of fashion as I heard this sort of thing often growing up. I didn't grow up in a liberal household. Far from it. But now these ideas that used to be so middle American have become a flash point for so many. Why?

I will suggest that it is all about fear. Folks have been made to fear anything that is different. Those differences corrupt. Have you ever heard that you can't corrupt an honest man? I heard that growing up. We fear the slippery slope. Exactly what slope do you think we are on? Do you feel someone forcing you to make decisions that go against your beliefs, or do you just fear that is happening to others? Have you decided that everyone else is a tree too weak to stand? I haven't noticed a lack of backbone in folks, yet there seems to be a concern that we've all become pawns in a game controlled by some sinister force. In the fifties, we worried that Big Brother might stick the nose of the government into our bedrooms. Now folks are inviting the government to make sure we use the right bathroom. Who gets to check our underwear to see where we belong? Isn't this something that a fifties person would say is none of your darn business? Maybe even saltier language.

People whose nose has not been hit are getting their noses bent out of shape over things that have not actually happened to them. They are acting on the fear that something might happen, and they won't like it. I submit these fears are not rational and should not be something we make laws about. We managed to get this far without those laws and my fear (rational or not as you chose to deem it) is that the American ideals of live and let live and it's a free country are at stake. I rather like those values. I grew up with them. I'd prefer to see that ethos remain. I refuse to become a soldier in the cultural wars. I am part of the resistance.

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