

# Love It or Leave It

The End of Government as the Problem

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For Sofia and Isabella.



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# 1 FREEDOM FROM GOVERNMENT

Do you believe that government is the problem? Do you believe in the free market? Do you believe in freedom? Do you want the government off your back? I have a question that each of us needs to answer: **If you were offered the chance at total freedom from taxes and total freedom from government in your life, would you take it?**

A bullet-proof and realistic argument can be made that this should become a real option for every American. But first, you should know that this book *is not* what you probably think it is. This is not about me trying to convince you that I am right and you are wrong. It is not an argument about anything that is theoretical or abstract. I don't care about debating whose ideas are right or whose are wrong. I'm bored with it. You weren't born yesterday and you already know what your beliefs are. Who am I to try to convince you to change anything? Why would I even want to?

Instead, let's talk about *reality* for a change. Despite all of the well-reasoned, yet abstract, political debates of the past few decades, ideas are only interesting or meaningful when they have something to do with the *actual reality* that we *actually experience* in

our *actual lives*. Ideas, arguments, and debates mean almost nothing when they are either unrealistic or are so pure that they have little relevance to the way the world actually works. What about reality? When I *say* the word “reality”, I’m talking about the reality that each of us knows *in our own lives*...what we actually do, see, experience, and feel.

But big ideas are also important because sometimes they affect reality. Here’s one big idea that has shaped the world over the past 35 years:

“The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, ‘I’m from the government and I’m here to help.’”

*-Ronald Reagan, future US President, 1975*

Does this statement ring true to you? This way of thinking has become so much a part of our lives that I probably don’t even have to explain what Ronald Reagan was talking about. We know that he was talking about the evils of government and the benefits of free-market economics. Any student of Econ. 101 or any American citizen paying any attention to the news or to political talk-shows over the past few decades can explain the conventional wisdom about the benefits of laissez-faire, free market economics.

It isn’t even necessary to explain the invisible hand of supply and demand; how, in the absence of any external control or intervention, market forces will naturally set the right prices and ensure that the right amounts of the right goods are produced. There is absolutely no reason for me to spend much time explaining the idea that the market is capable of solving all problems. The same forces which work so well at the grocery store, at the mall, or at the farmer’s market should certainly work the same way when it comes to the labor market, healthcare, transportation, education, and every aspect of modern life. That’s how the theory goes, right? The market is self-correcting and solves all problems.

This way of thinking was introduced long ago by Adam Smith and was, more recently, revived by Milton Friedman. In the 1950's, Friedman started the modern-day free market economics movement at the University of Chicago's Economics Department. At the time, his ideas were considered extreme and radical. Today they are completely in the mainstream. Indeed, the ideas behind this "Chicago School Economics" movement have been spread to nearly every part of the planet and are now inseparable from most modern political thought.

If we do, in fact, believe that the free market is perfect and solves all problems, we also know what prevents the free-market system from working in the way that it should. Ronald Reagan alluded to the answer to this question in the above quote: *government*. Government messes up the perfect functioning of the free market by (among other ways) establishing minimum wages, workers rights, retirement pensions, healthcare programs, and even public schools. Government controls the money supply, establishes laws restricting free trade, tries to control monopolies, and levies taxes (which unnaturally redistribute wealth). The ultimate goal is a laissez-faire government that does not influence or control the economy. In the simplest terms, if we want things to "work properly", then *less government is always the goal*. All of what appears to be a failure in the market is really just a sign that the government has interfered in the free market and the situation could easily be remedied if the government would just stop interfering.

One wouldn't have to make too large of a leap to conclude the obvious: that if government is indeed the problem, then the role of government should be minimized or even completely eliminated from our economy and from our lives. Conservatives since Reagan have run for office on this message. Interestingly, supporters of these conservative, right-wing, or libertarian politicians are not actually voting to put someone in government who is there to represent their best interests *through the mechanism of government*. Instead, supporters of these politicians actually hope that their guy or gal gets elected to *undermine* and to *destroy*

government. Many of their supporters believe that the extent to which these politicians are able to destroy or undermine government, itself, is the extent to which they are indirectly *helping us* by letting the free market work as it should.

I offer this background not to educate you, the reader. I only wanted to point out that *I get it*. I get the argument put forth by Friedman, by his followers, and by conservatives of all sorts...but especially self-identified Republicans, Libertarians, and anybody who sympathizes with the Tea Party movement. But, as I mentioned, this book is not so much about theoretical ideas as it is about *reality*. It isn't really possible for anyone to talk about reality without bringing his own, personal perspective that has come about as a result of his own life experiences. But every attempt will be made to force myself outside of my bubble, to think long and hard about the different kinds of people I've known, and to think about the lives I've observed in all of the communities I have been a part of.

I grew up on an all-American diet with healthy helpings of strong family values, religion, and the kind of patriotism that could only come from The Heartland of America (central Wisconsin, to be exact). I guess my family was lower-middle class. My parents couldn't afford to help me pay for college, so my dad always told me that the only way I could afford to go to University was to become good enough at basketball (a sport I was pretty good at) to earn a scholarship. I practiced basketball practically every day, at least two hours a day, year-round from 7<sup>th</sup> grade until I graduated High School. Just as my dad had hoped, on a basketball scholarship I managed to find my way into University to study Business. I earned my Bachelor's in Marketing and then earned an MBA in Technology Management from the University of Colorado. I now have more than 15 years of experience working for some of the most successful (and unfortunately for me even a few unsuccessful) corporations.

So first of all, I get it: business is a good thing. It provides us with jobs that make the American Dream possible. How could

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