

Lee Kuan Yew — The Model Leader for the 21st Century

Ghosts on the Roof

For most of human history, the world has been led by vicious tyrants who ruled by terror, arrogant monarchs who ruled by lineage, or superstitious patriarchs who ruled by tradition. The 18th century witnessed the spontaneous evolution of leaders — from monarchs and military commanders to philosophers and statesmen. They gave birth to the idea of self-rule under the passive eye of a benign government, dedicated to protecting and preserving individual liberties under the rule of law.

The United States — the beacon of individual liberty for more than two centuries — was founded on the principle that individuals have inalienable rights. And that the citizens grant powers to the government, not the other way around. The government was meant to serve the people, not the people the government. It was to be governed by the rule of law, not the whim of elected officials or the judiciary.

Tragically, this trend towards individual liberty soon reversed itself — spiraling out-of-control in the 20th century — all the way back to the most primitive barbarism of Mao, Stalin, Hitler and Pol Pot. Even the United States succumbed and reversed its course. Its president, Franklin Roosevelt, attempted to usurp the authority of all three branches of government. He shamelessly copied virtually every aspect of Hitler's national socialist policies — to plan and control the economy — and to tattoo its citizens with nine digit numbers that would stay with them until death.

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The depth of the moral, social and intellectual collapse of individual liberty was marked — even celebrated — in the spring of 1941, with the publication of James Burnham's book, *The Managerial Revolution*. It concluded that fascism and communism were superior societal structures, and that Roosevelt's New Deal had not gone far enough in emulating them.

Burnham viewed the military triumphs of Stalin and Hitler, not as barbaric attacks on humanity and individual rights, but as a “social revolution” which proved that fascism and communism were unquestionably superior managerial structures for ordering society. He believed the future of the human race, lay not within the soul and spirit of individual liberty, but in the top-down command-and-control machine of the fascist-communist state.

Their Finest Hour

Fortunately, the end of World War II saw a reversal of this decline in political leadership, with the rise of transitional heads of state, who sought to restore order and rebuild war-torn nations into 20th century free and open societies. Konrad Adenauer of Germany and Charles De Gaulle of France will forever be icons of political leadership, for both their roles in rebuilding their nations, and in opposing the ever-present threat of socialism.

Douglass MacArthur was charged with the toughest task of all. In addition to the challenges faced by Adenauer and De Gaulle — who were indigenous to their nations — MacArthur had to win over a bitter enemy, comprised of a totally alien race, culture, language and religion.

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All three honorably ruled with the highest morals and ethics. They embodied the spirit of Alfred Thayer Mahan — founder of the U. S. Naval War College — who stated, “The [only valid] purpose of power is to permit moral ideas to take root.” It is within such circumstances of place, time and uncertainty that Lee Kuan Yew emerged as the reluctant leader of Singapore.

The Power Of The Powerless

If we judge politicians and statesmen on their ability to build and maintain a foundation that upholds individual liberty and classical liberal principles, then Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore from 1965 – 1990, should go down in history as the greatest peace-time leader of the 20th century.

Such a bold statement might be challenged by many Westerners. But given the recent history of the so-called “free world,” when you measure and score leaders on the criteria I will describe, I can think of no other political leader who stands above Lee Kuan Yew.

He is to Singapore what Mao Zedong should have been to China, what Ho Chi Minh should have been to Vietnam, and what Fidel Castro could have been to Cuba. He is the ultimate personification of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s maxim that “an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.”

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The three criteria I use to nominate Lee Kuan Yew as the 20th century's greatest promoter and defender of individual liberty are:

1. Where did you start?
2. What did you achieve?
3. And what legacy did you leave?

Criteria number one: “Where did you start?” — takes into account the social, political, legal and economic capital a leader inherits. Calvin Coolidge may be one of the greatest U. S. presidents. But most of what he accomplished during his tenure in office was the result of the constitutional government he inherited from his predecessors. Coolidge's greatest accomplishment — which unfortunately has never been replicated since — was to leave well enough alone.

Criteria number two: “What did you achieve?” — This measures a leader on his accomplishments, not on his theories or beliefs. Like a golfer perfectly hitting a ball off the tee 200 yards for a hole in one, it's easy to imagine, but next to impossible to achieve. It's relatively easy — as we all like to do — to envision the well-ordered classically liberal free society, it's virtually impossible to actually create one, and just as difficult to maintain one.

Criteria number three: “What legacy did you leave?” — This credits a leader, not just for the scope of his achievements, but by the foundation he builds to make it last long after he has gone. In the 1930s, it made no difference how free and prosperous Poland and Czechoslovakia were. Because they were surrounded, engulfed and destroyed by socialists within a few short years. It

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would take a decade for France and Germany to recover. It would take two generations for the rest of Eastern Europe.

While I will use these three criteria to explicitly prove my case for Lee Kuan Yew, I also hope to prove my case using an implicit fourth criteria of simple logical displacement: If Lee Kuan Yew has not done the most to advance individual liberty in the 20th century, than I challenge anyone to enumerate the list of those who have.

Apart from Adenauer, De Gaulle and MacArthur, my own list would not include political leaders. It would be limited to dissidents such as Václav Havel, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Anatoly Sharansky, who devoted their lives to opposing totalitarian regimes. But I am at a loss to name competitors to challenge Lee Kuan Yew's achievements at giving birth to a nation, or transforming political chaos into a model for the rest of the world to emulate.

The Road To Serfdom

Lee Kuan Yew did not merely dream and plan for a free society; he built one; he made it last; and it now stands as the most free and prosperous nation in Southeast Asia. It's not an accident, fate, or a streak of good luck that the Singapore of today looks more like the island of Hawaii, instead of the island of Cuba.

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Essentially, Singapore is what Cuba would look like if it became the 51st state, instead of being taken over by Fidel Castro. In 1959, Cuba was a modern tropical tourist paradise, while Singapore was a third world agrarian state still recovering from the devastation of its WWII occupation by the Japanese. Today the situation is the reverse.

Lee Kuan Yew and Fidel Castro are only two years apart in age. Both took over formerly colonized nations at the same point in history, and at the same point in their lives. Castro chose to follow the path of socialism, statist repression, and rule by force. Lee Kuan Yew chose the path of capitalism, individual liberty, and the rule of law.

The title of the second volume of Lee Kuan Yew's memoirs is, *From Third World to First*. The title of Fidel Castro's memoirs naturally should be, "From First World to Third," or more appropriately, "From First to Worst."

The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner

The birth of the nation of Singapore was the result of its being cast-off from Malaysia. Its fate was indelibly marked by the contrast of the simultaneous proclamations on August 9th, 1965 by Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia, which were reminiscent of the circumstances surrounding the creation of the United States two centuries earlier.

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Speaking for Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew proclaimed, “Whereas it is the inalienable right of a people to be free and independent, I ... declare on behalf of the people and the government of Singapore that ... [we] shall be forever a sovereign, democratic and independent nation, founded upon the principles of liberty and justice and ever seeking the welfare and happiness of her people in a more just and equal society.”

In contrast, Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia conceded, “In the end, we find that there are only two courses open to us: to take repressive measures against the Singapore government ... for the behavior of some of their leaders — and the course of action we are taking now: to sever with the state of Singapore that has ceased to give a measure of loyalty to the central government.”

Lee Kuan Yew held up a vision of individual liberty and independence, while Tunku Abdul Rahman could only demand loyalty and submission.

Lee Kuan Yew wrote in his autobiography, “Some countries are born independent. Some achieve independence. Singapore had independence thrust upon it.” It was born as an orphan nation, abandoned by both its father, Great Britain, and its mother, Malaysia. It was the bastard child that no one wanted. And like all helpless, orphaned, infant-nations of the 20th century, it was the target of the usual predators such as:

- Ignorant, primitive and superstitious cultures that wanted to cling to the familiar past, instead of building a dynamic future.
- Rising racist sentiments among its scattered ethnic groups, that frequently broke out into riots.
- Communist infiltration that sought to instigate violent revolution.

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- Strong labor unions and a civil servant class — steeped in an entitlement tradition — that threatened to strangle the economy and bankrupt the national treasury, and
- Failing outdated industries that sought to expand protectionist policies.

Singapore courageously fought an uphill battle against overwhelming odds. Any sane informed observer, myself included, would have bet against it every step of the way. Prospectively, it would have been hard to imagine a successful scenario for Singapore, given the Asian political, racial and regional conflicts, blanketed by Cold War politics:

- Being a tiny island nation of two million people, it did not have the advantage of size.
- It did not enjoy the security buffer of two vast oceans, as did the United States during its formative years.
- It was not supported by the military might of the United States, or any other nation committed to private property and individual liberty.
- Even worse, it had the marked disadvantage of occupying a vital strategic, economic and military location that makes the mouths of tyrants salivate.
- And it could not draw upon any store of natural resources.

The primary intellectual quality that Lee Kuan Yew possessed and exercised to make Singapore what it is today, is his rejection of his cultural, social, economic, political and personal biases:

- Unlike Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, he held in check the cultural bias for his Chinese heritage, which is the dominant racial group in Singapore.
- Unlike the Shah of Iran, he rejected the social bias of the 19th century aristocratic British mentality that dominated Singapore during his formative years.

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- Unlike Mahatma Gandhi in India, he rejected the economic bias of the agrarian manual labor economy he grew up with.
- Unlike Fidel Castro in Cuba, he rejected the natural political bias against the British who ruled over Singapore for more than a century.
- And unlike every leader who overthrows and ejects alien occupiers, he rejected his personal bias against the Japanese, who conquered and devastated his homeland, slaughtering more than 50,000 Singaporeans during their five year occupation.

Instead of succumbing to natural human animosities, the lure of popular opinion, and the thrill of power, Lee Kuan Yew set out to create his own unique model for building a nation from ruins — which has never been used before, or copied since. He realized that for Singapore to succeed:

- It had to be a multi-racial and multi-lingual society, to accommodate the four major representative segments of the population: English, Chinese, Malay and Indian. In the United States, these distinct cultures would merge into a melting pot, uniting in their commonalities as human beings, and their desire to create a classical liberal society. In Singapore, however, they diverged into segregated bunkers, emphasizing their differences.
- It could not rely on feudal or aristocratic models of government. Nor could it maintain the social structure of privilege and class, dictated by birth and nationality. It had to grant the same rights to all citizens, regardless of race, sex, wealth or class.
- It could not continue to survive on the colonial model as a helpless people, dependent on larger, more advanced, and more powerful nations. It was a third world country that had to abruptly change course and compete with modern industrial economies on its own.

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- It could not afford to reject the laissez-faire economic principles that made it a successful British colony. Instead of saying “good riddance,” and gloating over the retreat of their former overseers, the British, he asked his people and his government to learn from them, and emulate them as their model for Singapore’s future.
- Finally, it had to be a law-biding, safe and peaceful society, as it had been during the Japanese occupation. Instead of letting natural contempt cloud his judgment, he applied the lessons he learned from the relative civil tranquility and order the Japanese maintained during the wartime occupation to the political and social tensions of the 1960s.

The Lengthened Shadow of One Man

When historians heap praise on their favorite leaders, they usually ignore the fact that the personal traits key to their success are also present in the same leaders they despise. For example, Adolf Hitler and Steve Jobs of Apple Computer are both noted for charismatically leading and motivating their subordinates. While Ho Chi Minh and Sam Walton of Wal-Mart are both noted for their Spartan discipline.

Consequently, I will not dwell on traits such as a tireless work ethic, which was undoubtedly crucial in Lee Kuan Yew’s success, but which was also shared by Josef Stalin and Lyndon Johnson. Instead I would like focus on the four personal traits of Lee Kuan Yew, that are unique to him, and are the hallmark of classical liberals:

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- Intellectual honesty
- Personal integrity
- Eclectic “best of breed” mentality over political cronyism, and
- Empirical bias and evolutionary adaptability

I focus on these traits for two reasons:

- First, because these qualities are so rare, and are absent in virtually all other political leaders,
- And second, because these very traits either (a) always preclude anyone who possesses them from advancing to any political leadership position, or (b) are the cause of their undoing.

The examples of Lee Kuan Yew’s intellectual honesty are so many that one can easily lose sight of the fact that individually they are all so amazing. Because one is hard pressed to think of any other politician who has exhibited similar behavior on even one occasion.

With respect to foreign aid, Lee Kuan Yew wrote, “I was convinced our people must never have an aid-dependent mentality. If we were to succeed, we had to depend on ourselves. I warned our workers on September 9th, 1967, “The world does not owe us a living. We cannot live by the begging bowl.”

How many politicians have attempted to rally their nations by expressing similar thoughts? And how many have the courage to express such thoughts in an unguarded moment, for fear that it would be their undoing.

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On free trade and foreign competition he wrote:

“After recovery in 1975 ... when our EDB officer asked how much longer we had to maintain protective tariffs for the car assembly plant owned by a local company, the director of Mercedes Benz said brusquely, ‘Forever!’ because our workers were not as efficient as the Germans. We did not hesitate to remove the tariffs and allow the plant to close. Soon afterward, we also phased-out protection for the assembly of refrigerators, air conditioners, televisions and other consumer electronics.

Singapore’s strategy was to court American MNCs and avoid cheap labor status. We had one simple guiding principle for survival: that Singapore had to be more rugged, better organized, and more efficient than others in the region. If we were only as good as our neighbors, there was no reason for businesses to be based here.”

How many politicians of either emerging or established nations have had the insight and courage to follow a similar path? And how many politicians have been willing to listen and accept the truth about why other countries have succeeded where they have failed? Certainly none in the United States. Not even leaders in the private sector have the courage to be so honest and candid.

The lone exception is Walter Wriston, the retired CEO of Citibank, who wrote in his book, *The Twilight of Sovereignty*, “Capital will go where it is wanted, and stays where it is well treated. It will flee from onerous regulation of its value or use, and no government power can restrain it for

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long. Far more than any other form of capital, intellectual capital will go where it is wanted, stays where it is well treated, and multiply where it is allowed to earn the greatest return.”

Lee Kuan Yew’s insistence on replicating his personal integrity was recognized when the Institute for National Development voted Singapore the least corrupt country in Asia, and the seventh least corrupt worldwide. Unlike Western politicians, he never acceded to the pressure to apologize for Singapore’s success, nor did he succumb to the temptation to look the other way, and attempt to bail out his hopelessly corrupt colleagues.

When Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, General Suharto of Indonesia, and Pham Van Dong of Vietnam, all came begging to him for loans and foreign aid, he had no trouble looking them in the eye, responding with a stern, “No,” and telling them to get their economic houses in order to attract foreign capital just as Singapore had done.

Lee Kuan Yew’s eclectic hiring criteria bore little resemblance to the bigotry and cronyism that dominates the rest of the world. He wrote:

“To see how wide the net must be cast for talent, I had only to remember that the best ministers in my early cabinets were not born in Singapore. Three-quarters of them had come from outside Singapore. The net that brought in my generation of leaders was thrown in a big sea that stretched from South China across Malaysia, to South India and Ceylon. Now we were fishing in a small pond [in Singapore] and getting fewer fish.

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For years, my colleagues and I had assumed that in the ordinary political process, activists from universities, trade unions, and party branches would throw up people who would carry on our work. By 1968, we recognized this was not going to happen.”

How many politicians can you name who are willing to admit that their party and their nation cannot produce the talent to run the government?

His preference for empiricism over culture, superstition and tradition is eloquently stated in his comment that “I learned to ignore criticism and advice from experts and quasi-experts, especially academics in the social and political sciences. They have pet theories on how a society should develop to approximate their ideal, especially how poverty should be reduced and welfare extended. I always try to be correct, not politically correct.”

Can you name even one politician who so boldly defined his role in this manner? By definition, politicians compete and excel at being politically correct. It’s the path of least resistance. Lee Kuan Yew is the rare exceptional leader who realizes that he cannot afford the luxury of avoiding what is right and correct for expediency’s sake.

On the entrepreneurial traits of the Hong Kong Chinese, lacking among the Singaporeans, he wrote:

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“I made a point of visiting Hong Kong almost every year to see how they handled their difficulties, and whether there were any lessons I could learn from them. I saw Hong Kong as a source of inspiration, of ideas of what was possible in a hard-driven society.”

“People in Hong Kong depended not on the government, but on themselves and their families ... Long before Milton Friedman held up Hong Kong as a model of a free-enterprise economy, I had seen the advantage of having little or no social safety net. There was no social contract between the colonial government and them.”

“Singaporeans cannot match Hong Kongers in drive and motivation. In Hong Kong when people fail, they blame themselves or bad luck, pick themselves up and try again. Singaporeans have different attitudes to government and to life. They prefer job security and freedom from worry.

Lee Kuan Yew’s eclecticism and empiricism showed no bias. He meticulously copied populist agit-prop methods of the communists, as well as the leadership structure of the Catholic Church, all taken with a healthy respect of historical outcomes. Of a visit to Rome he wrote:

“It reminded me that all empires wax and wane, and that the British Empire was on the wane, like the Roman Empire before it. I was left with one even more vivid impression. One morning, I walked to St. Peter’s Basilica and was pleasantly surprised when the Pope appeared, carried on a palanquin by his Swiss guards ... As he was brought down the center aisle, the press of people immediately around him started to cheer and shout ‘Vive

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il Papa.’ The nuns standing near the palanquin almost fainted with joy. After my experience with communist rallies, I instinctively looked for the cheerleaders. I found them above me, choirboys on circular balconies. The Roman Catholic Church had used such methods of mass mobilization long before the communists. The church must have got many things right to have survived for nearly 2,000 years.”

The New Realities Of Modern Times

The traditional method of writing history is to weave a story of great nations, armies, cultures, religions or individual personalities as the focus of the plot. In contrast, the trademark of the British historian, Paul Johnson, is the retelling of history through the lens of economics, where the cultures, religions, armies and nations that survive, grow and thrive, are not those with mystical qualities that make them destined for greatness, but those that align themselves with the basic laws of economics, which are derived from the laws of nature.

For example, Erwin Rommel is regarded as the greatest of the German WWII generals. However, he was “too successful” in his North African campaign and outran his supply lines, often leaving his army short of fuel, supplies and ammunition. And no army general, no matter how great his strategy and tactics, can win battles without fuel, food and firepower.

The logistics of shipping materials to the front lines in North Africa for the German Army are just as important as shipping auto parts to a plant in Kyoto for Toyota. If you fail to get the basic

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economics right, any presumed advantages of personality, culture, religion, nationality or race become irrelevant.

Johnson argues that it's not a coincidence that every nation or people that adopted and operated on Marxist economic principles came to ruin, while those that adopted and operated on laissez-faire economic principles grew and thrived. The German people and culture aren't superior to the French. But the East Germans were obviously inferior to the West Germans. What separated them wasn't language, culture, nationality or religion — but basic economics and the rule of law.

Culture Is Destiny

While it is instructive to measure Lee Kuan Yew's accomplishments by contrasting how Singapore went from Third World to First during the same period that Cuba went from First World to Third, it is just as instructive to note the simultaneous contrasting fates of Detroit, Michigan USA and Tokyo, Japan from 1945 to 1980.

The astonishing rise of Tokyo — under the U. S. occupation forces — is just as much of a miracle as the pathetic demise of Detroit during the same 35 year period. While one can speculate on the causes of the respective fates of these two cities, two basic facts are undisputed: The people of Tokyo rebuilt Tokyo; and the people of Detroit destroyed Detroit.

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If Detroit had been bombed unopposed by the Japanese in the 1970s for weeks on end — as Jimmy Doolittle's air raids had done to Tokyo in the 1940s — its fate could easily be explained. And if Tokyo in 1980 closely resembled the Tokyo of 1945, the obvious explanation would have been its inability to recover from the vast devastation of WWII.

Yet Detroit's decline and Tokyo's rise cannot be explained by conventional logic. But both can be explained by Paul Johnson's interpretation of history through the lens of economics, as well as Lee Kuan Yew's classic observation that "Culture Is Destiny."

Similarly, it's instructive to compare Japan in 1970 — after 25 years of domination by its American conquerors — to the Japan laid waste in 1945, with Vietnam in 2000 — 25 years after the invading Americans were evicted — to the Vietnam in 1975. In Japan, Douglas MacArthur — its conqueror and subsequent *de facto* dictator — is revered as a hero, while in Vietnam, the United States is an anathema.

If the Americans were so great at nation building in Japan, why couldn't they save Detroit? And if Americans were such evil, racist and oppressive colonialists, why didn't Vietnam surpass Japan during the same timeframe after the "bloodsucking American imperialists" were evicted?

The transformation of post-war Singapore is just as remarkable and admirable as the transformation of post-war Japan. In short, Singapore started with the least, accomplished the most, against the longest odds.

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Stand and Deliver

Another testimony to Paul Johnson's economic view of history, and Lee Kuan Yew's "Culture Is Destiny" legacy, is an American book published in 1930 titled, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, which is an academic defense of the pre-Civil War, pre-industrial South. It vociferously argues for the familiar ignorance and bigotries of the past, which the authors felt must override any empirical experimentation with progress and the future. This sentiment runs just as long and deep in American culture as any backwards third world nation.

A decade after its publication, an American journalist, Charles Wiley, toured all 48 states with the USO as a teenager. Reflecting on his travels through the southern states in the early 1940s, he remarked that, "much of the South was still trying to recover from the Civil War." In other words, what Japan was able to accomplish in 25 years after WWII, was absent in the American South after even 80 years.

Although the American South had an 80 year head start, I suspect that Singapore (with similar racial problems) has a higher standard of living. Even today, much of the American South is obsessed with rewriting and reliving the past, while Singapore is focused on adapting, evolving and building its future.

In her book, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, sociologist Jane Jacobs documents the complete failure of the U. S. government to develop the desperately poor southern region of Tennessee —

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with its monumental 1930s, communist-style, public works project, known as the Tennessee Valley Authority. In 1970, more than 30 years after its creation, the same U. S. Government ranked the Tennessee Valley at the very bottom of the country in personal income and public health deficiencies.

Jacobs concludes that the United States can't colonize and develop an economy within its own borders, any more than it can colonize and develop a third world nation. And in the case of Detroit, it can reduce most productive economic force in the world — what was once the greatest manufacturing city of the Industrial Age — into a crippled basket case within a single generation. To quote Jane Jacobs, “economic development cannot be given. It has to be *done*. It is a process, not a collection of capital goods.”

A Warning to the West

Instead of being justly recognized for its success, Singapore is the Rodney Dangerfield of the free world — because it's most noted for all the wrong reasons. It should be acclaimed as the most free and prosperous nation in Southeast Asia. Instead, it's noted for:

- the list of things you can't do: spit, chew gum, and read *Playboy*,
- the things that are difficult to do: criticize the government, publish a newspaper, and buy a copy of the *Economist*, and
- the things that you must do: flush public toilets, grant the government the “right of reply,” and serve in the military.

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Of course, like any normal person, I can cite a list of quirks unique to Singapore that are disagreeable and offensive to me. But then again, I'm sure that even Lee Kuan Yew's wife has a list of her own. However, for every aspect of Singapore that annoys me, I can cite two or three about the United States. Here I return to my fourth criteria for nominating Lee Kuan Yew as the greatest 20th century peacetime leader: his competition. That is to say: Who has done better?

Remember, Lee Kuan Yew's competition is comprised of a woefully sorry lot, of which I will provide a small sample: Woodrow Wilson, Pierre Trudeau, Nicolae Ceausescu, Enver Hoxha, Idi Amin, Paul von Hindenburg, Wojciech Jaruzelski, Haile Sellassie, Kim-Il sung, Leonid Brezhnev, Daniel Ortega, Clement Atlee, Ian Smith, Benito Mussolini and Francois Mitterrand.

None of these leaders will have any more meaning or effect on the 21st century than the hula hoop. Neither will the admonition of the British ex-patriot, Alistair Cooke, when he reprimanded the United States in 1980, "I recognize here several of the symptoms that Edward Gibbon maintained were the signs of the decline of Rome, and which arose not from external enemies but from inside the country itself. A mounting love of show and luxury. A widening gap between the very rich and the very poor. An obsession with sex. Freakishness in the arts masquerading as originality, and enthusiasm pretending to be creativeness."

Such is the typical cant of every generation, which bemoans what has become of its children. One notably pious and arrogant manifestation of this phenomenon was an official report, issued in 1983, by the United States Department of Education titled, *A Nation At Risk*. This report

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declared the quality of its own government schools to be atrocious (which is true), and that we were in the process of begetting a generation of illiterate children. This amounts to little more than a barroom boast that we are superior to you; and worse, you are incapable of carrying on our traditions, are ungrateful, and unworthy of inheriting them.

As with the Soviet Union, the fate of the United States will be just the opposite. It's not the decadence of the next generation that will bring about its pitiful collapse, but the sins of the previous generation:

- Instead of intellectual honesty, this generation believes it can live by the begging bowl, and that it has an inalienable right to freedom from want, and a freedom from fear.
- Instead of personal integrity, this generation perpetuates the greatest Ponzi scams the world has ever known: Social Security and Medicare.
- Instead of a "best of breed" mentality, this generation rejects the free importation of the finest people and products from around the world.
- Instead of empiricism, this generation blindly prefers to proliferate countless government programs proven to be failures — from Amtrak, to farm price supports, to government schools.

History will record this, not as "The Greatest Generation," but as the generation that exposed the fatal flaw of Western democracies: which is the belief that it can vote itself the revenues from the public treasury, and which has debauched the democratic political process into an advance auction on stolen goods.

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The cause of the decline and decay of the United States will not be its next generation's inability to read and write; but instead, it will be the result of its previous generation's inability to add and subtract — and to have any understanding and respect for individual liberty and the rule of law.

The Decline of the West

The United States is suffering though a century-long drought of leadership in all three branches of government. Instead of protecting the freedoms and rights of its citizens, politicians and judges ignore the Constitution, selfishly seek to grab as much power as they can, and will continue to do so until someone stops them.

A poignant illustration of this ugly reality was the verbal exchange among Supreme Court justices in 1994 during the oral arguments of the Lopez case. Solicitor-general Days — arguing the case for the government — stated that Congressional power is plenary. Justice O'Connor expressed shock and asked, “Do you mean to say that Congress can do anything it wants?” Justice Ginsberg persisted, asking the solicitor-general, “Tell me one thing that Congress cannot do.” Justice Scalia then immediately interrupted — begging in horror — “No! Don't! Because Congress might want to try it.”

When the highest ranking judges of the United States cower in fear of Congress's crass arrogance, lust for power, total contempt for the Constitution, and the rule of law, what hope is left for the ordinary citizen? Tragically, pathetically, and almost comically, the United States has

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surpassed even the Soviet Union and now claims the title of “Gulag Nation,” with the highest per capita rate of prisoners in the world.

A mere decade after Alistair Cooke pontificated on the decay and decline of the United States, the Soviet Union and its satellites all imploded. Yet none of them exhibited any of the signs he decreed to be an indicator of doom. And none of these signs — even more prevalent in the United States and the Western world today — will play a part in its collapse. In previous eras, nations, cultures and religions were either defeated in battle, or wiped-out by plagues. Today, they simply declare bankruptcy because they can’t service their debt.

In the late 1930s, Great Britain, the most successful nation of the 19th century, that boasted of an empire on which the sun never sets, came cap-in-hand to the United States — pleading bankruptcy — begging on its knees for financial and military aid to fight-off one upstart enemy that had decimated itself a decade earlier in a bloody civil war, and another that didn’t even have a standing army when the decade began.

The United States and its allies that make up the so-called Western “free world” will not be defeated in battle by invading hordes of barbarians. Nor will they morally rot from within as they succumb to the vices of drugs, sex and rock-n-roll. They will cease to exist when they can no longer meet their interest payments.

While we may not be able to predict this inevitable date with precision, we know that it won’t be too long after the cash flow of the Social Security system turns irretrievably negative. When that

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day comes, both capital and people will begin to stampede out of the United States, instead of into it — reversing a 500 year trend. The institution of slavery lasted in America for 250 years. Social Security and Medicare won't even last for 100.

The Borderless World

For all practical purposes, Lee Kuan Yew ran Singapore like a Silicon Valley start-up that had a very active board of directors, and always had to attract new rounds of venture capital. He took to heart a comment from Milton Friedman that went, “The foreign currency exchange markets are where the mistakes of governments are exposed for all the world to see, which they (the governments) would prefer to hide, or refuse to acknowledge, and which are daily laid bare for everyone to take advantage of.”

In a speech to the 18th Philippines Business Conference, Lee Kuan Yew said, “I do not believe that democracy necessarily leads to development. I believe what a country needs to develop is discipline more than democracy.” And in his memoirs he wrote, “If I have to choose one word to explain why Singapore succeeded, it is *confidence*.”

Lee Kuan Yew is a rare exception of “a man ahead of his time” in the sense that he was able to realize his dream on a small scale in the 20th century, which will serve as a model for the rest of the world in the 21st. He was not the 18th century philosopher-statesman like Thomas Jefferson; rather he was more of a 20th century CEO of a corporation like Alfred Sloan.

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Sloan's book, *My Years With General Motors*, describes how he built GM from a collection of small auto makers, which is a classic management text that is still in print. Note that the subject of the book is a decentralized corporate structure, not a people, a culture, a tradition, a religion, or a language. Yet prior to the 20th century, such themes represented the story of every nation, except the United States.

This is not a coincidence. As we enter the 21st century, 53 of the largest 100 economies are not nations, but multi-national corporations. The General Motors of Alfred Sloan's era was comprised of even more cultures, religions, traditions and languages than Singapore. The same can be said, even more so, of the General Motors of today.

This is precisely why the term "indigenous peoples" today is not used in the manner in which the dictionary defines it: which is a people "originating and living or occurring naturally in an area or environment." Instead it refers to a group of people who insist on defining themselves by a race, a culture, a tradition, a religion, or a language. And any group with this bigoted "I'll Take My Stand" bias is destined to live in third world poverty.

Lee Kuan Yew's greatest achievement is not the creation and building of the nation of Singapore, but the successful exportation of the classically liberal American heritage to the non-western world. And that American heritage is of a nation, like a multi-national corporation, that is built on an ideal, instead of a race, a culture, a tradition, a religion, or common language.

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Note that the Irish are more successful abroad than in Ireland. Jews are more successful abroad than in Israel. Blacks are more successful abroad than in Africa, And Chinese are more successful abroad than in China. It's not the native ethnic cultures of these peoples that have prospered, but their universal economic cultures. When Lee Kuan Yew states that "Culture is Destiny," he is not referring to his ethnic Chinese culture. He is referring to the classical liberal economic culture of Singapore and Hong Kong.

Today and Tomorrow

The most misused, overused and trite quote of the 20th century is George Santayana's warning that "Those who fail to remember the past are condemned to repeat it." This is no more accurate than saying, "Those who fail to call heads lose the coin toss." Because equally valid is the corollary statement that, "Those who remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Because they are unaware of any alternatives, and are afraid of diverting from established traditions.

When you're a pioneer blazing an un-chartered trail without a blueprint — as Lee Kuan Yew and the American Founding Fathers did — you are forced to live by Henry Ford's maxim, that "History is bunk; the only thing that matters is the history that we make." Lee Kuan Yew would agree with Ford. He didn't look to past history and tradition to build Singapore, as much as he looked to the future potential that he could shape, mold and build from scratch.

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One famous historian, Winston Churchill, also agrees with Ford. After finishing his six volume history of the Second World War, which he wrote during the period he was out of power, Churchill remarked to his editors and researchers, “We've spent the last five years writing history, when we should have been making it.”

The common wisdom among those who write history, as opposed to making it, is that the 19th century belonged to the British, the 20th century belonged to the United States, and the 21st century will belong to Asia.

The 21st century will not belong to Asia, as much as it will belong to multi-national corporations; the multi-national corporations that best serve the customers of the global economy. Because of the law that Walter Wriston wrote, and that Lee Kuan Yew lived by: “Capital will go where it is wanted, and stays where it is well treated. It will flee from onerous regulation of its value or use, and no government power can restrain it for long. [And] far more than any other form of capital, intellectual capital will go where it is wanted, stays where it is well-treated, and multiply where it is allowed to earn the greatest return.”

The Calculus of Consent

During the Cold War, William F. Buckley posed the following political-philosophical puzzle: Suppose at the conclusion of the Reykjavik nuclear arms summit, Mikhail Gorbachev surreptitiously slips a note into the hand of President Ronald Reagan. After Reagan boards Air

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Force One and starts his journey back to the United States, he opens the note, which reads: “I am a prisoner in my own country. I fully comprehend the horrors and absurdity of Soviet Communism and am quietly doing all I can to dismantle it. However, as soon as I make one overt move in the direction of a free and open society, I will be immediately arrested and shot as a traitor. The result is that I will be replaced by a more rigid hard-line communist regime much worse than now. Please help save me and my country. But how?”

In the not-too-distant future, an American president will be forced to plagiarize Gorbachev’s note and hand it to the leader of a 21st century nation such as Singapore. His note will say, “I am a prisoner in my own country. I fully comprehend the inherent weaknesses of Western socialism, the tyranny of the majority, and the absurdity of the entitlement mentality. I am quietly doing all I can to dismantle it. However, as soon as I touch the political third rail of entitlement, challenge the fascist police of political correctness, and make one overt move in the direction of a free, open and fiscally sound society, I will immediately be deposed. The result is that I will be replaced by a more rigid hard-line entitlement regime much worse than now. Please help save me and my country. But how?”

When that unnamed future president comes begging, cap-in-hand, to the leader of a nation such as Singapore, to bail-out the United States from its century-long drinking binge of socialized entitlement, prostitution of the democratic process, and debauchery of the rule of law, those of us who are classical liberals — who love and cherish a strong, free and open society — have only one request: that he has the courage, honesty and integrity to take the advice of the great 20th century American philosopher ... and JUST SAY NO!