

Remarks at the Cato Institute Intern Reunion, May 22, 2010, in the

F. A. Hayek Auditorium of the Cato Institute

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I cannot tell you how much it warms my heart to see so many friends and colleagues here. So I won't. I'll instead reminisce a bit, as befits the oldest former intern present, and then, as befits my dotage, I'll muse a bit more about what motivates us to do what we do.

In the early 1970s, I was active in libertarian organizations and even causes that are no longer around, and managed to meet some libertarians who were more visionary than others and – and this is really the key – more effective and more linear in their thinking. One of them was Ed Crane, whom I met at a libertarian meeting in 1973 in southern California. It was an exciting time, as the world

seemed ready to embrace our ideas. The state was clearly on its last legs.

I continued my career as youthful Luftmensch, making trouble for “the state,” driving all over the state to visit high school and college campuses to spread the ideas of liberty and set up libertarian clubs, working for the marijuana decriminalization campaign, working against the draft and militarism, organizing anti-tax rallies, and so on. In 1975 I started working full-time as one of two employees of the Libertarian Party – Linda Webb was the other – in the party’s national office at 550 Kearney Street, in San Francisco, conveniently two blocks away from the office of then chairman Ed Crane. I had an apartment on Larkin Street for which I paid \$100 a month – when you opened the bed, there was literally no place to stand.

We worked together on a number of projects, the odd presidential campaign now and then, for example. In 1975 I was on the platform

committee of the party and got to work with a lot of interesting people, including Walter Grinder, Murray Rothbard, Bill Evers, and Robert Nozick, to craft what we considered a definitive statement of libertarianism. (I recall defeating a proposal to include a denunciation of circumcision, on the grounds that outlawing religious practices didn't sit well with libertarian thinking, regardless of what one might think of the practice.) Most of the topics covered were major issues of public policy, such as nuclear weapons, foreign policy, taxes, and even environmental policy, by establishing property rights in fisheries and oyster beds, for example, leading to the quip that we were defending the virtues of shellfishness. Those attempts to formulate and apply libertarian thinking to concrete issues were later much expanded and improved in the outstanding "White Papers" and position papers issued in 1980 by the Ed Clark for President campaign. Those documents, which were edited by a team that included a number of people who were later involved at Cato and other organizations, including David

Boaz, Sheldon Richman, Ed Crane, Tyler Cowen, Joan Kennedy Taylor, myself, Roy Childs, Jr., Earl Ravenel, and many others, although memory fails me, were quite important for the libertarian movement. Articulating libertarian principles is important, but not really very valuable if you can't show how to apply them, or if you can't produce a roadmap to their implementation.

I knew all of the founders of Cato, which was established in 1977. Ed had gotten to know some businesspeople who were devoted to liberty, notable among them Charles Koch, and as he was fond of telling him, "Charles, with your money and your brains, we could go far." Charles helped to launch Cato financially, with the idea that it would become independent of his funding. Ed realized that dream brilliantly, and created what I consider the single most important libertarian institution in the US and quite probably the world. I was invited to work there in the summer of 1978, as one of the first summer interns. We three, Ross Levatter, David Lips, and I, were

known as the “Cato Clones,” which caused some paranoia at the first Cato University Summer Seminar on Political Economy, which was held that summer. (I remember one participant asking “Who are the Clones, and why are they here?”)

I recall sitting in the institute’s fabulous conference room in San Francisco with Murray Rothbard and others as we came up with the reading lists for the seminar – an absurd project that generated a gigantic stack of books and photocopied readings on everything from Earl Ravenal’s writings on the contours of U.S. foreign policy, to Robert Carneiro’s sociological theory of the formation of the state in the coastal valleys of Peru, to Ludwig von Mises’s theory of the dynamics of interventionism, to a history of the usurpation of the land rights of the mestizo population of New Mexico. All had to be included. None was too minor to be excluded. It was enough to fill a gigantic box for each participant. We’ve since learned how to be a bit more selective.

I then worked with Cato's academic affairs department, which was later moved to the Institute for Humane Studies, itself then located in Menlo Park, California. I spent hours standing at the payphone at the end of the hall of my dormitory at St. John's College, in Annapolis, Maryland, calling libertarian students and professors around the country on behalf of Cato's campus speakers bureau, study guides, and other programs. It was before Facebook. Before the internet. Before the mobile phone. Before the personal computer. Before the fax. Before the era when students could have phones in their rooms. Put like that, it seems like a long time ago, but it really wasn't. It was just a few years ago.

Here's another little anecdote to tell you how far clerical work has come. Back in San Francisco, Cato had a really advanced IT department, as I suppose it would have been called, had we used contemporary terminology. They had machines that allowed you to

print out letters that were personalized, using either long paper tapes that had the letter content encoded in little holes punched in the paper, or information that was encoded on magnetic cassette tapes of the sort used in Sony Walkman machines. The manager worked two full-time jobs, of which this was one (he slept two or three hours a day). One day when I was showing visitors around I introduced them and they were told, "Oh, it's a delight to work with Tom. He's one of our best content originators." It led me to consider the division of labor, and the role of pride in one's work, a bit more closely.

By the way, Cato's San Francisco offices were cool and in one of the coolest cities in the world. I used to take the cable car to work, before they made it illegal to hang by one hand on the post and swing out as the cable car quickly turned a corner, and loved hanging out at City Lights book store and reading anarchist beatnik poetry at night and having coffee at the Italian cafes in North Beach.

Ed didn't hang out at City Lights, but he also loved San Francisco and, after moving Cato to D.C. in 1981, he remarked that satellite photos of the US landmass clearly showed his fingernail marks as he was dragged eastward.

After that cool summer, I did a lot of other things, as I noted above.

Just to put some context for your own work as interns, let me describe how we sent out letters to people to get them there right on time. When I worked for the Clark campaign as assistant director for communications, we had a "Mailgram machine" that was huge. In those days, to send out a press release or to reach people quickly, you sent them letters. You typed a letter, folded it, put it in an envelope, added a stamp, and then gave it to a uniformed agent of the United States government. Eventually, it would arrive at the right address. With this machine, you could send a letter over the phone lines (!!) to a Western Union office in or near the city of the intended recipient and they would print it out, fold it, put it in an

envelope, add a stamp, and give it to a uniformed agent of the United States government. That cut delivery time down, so it was worth the effort. That machine had a big screen and you would type very laboriously every name and address, along with the letter you wanted to send. It had no memory – at all. So if you bumped it or jiggled the power cord, it would “lose” all of the information you had so painstakingly entered. Hours and hours of work. Gone. Never to be retrieved. If anyone went near the power cord, he or she was in mortal peril.

All that time, wherever I was, I kept in touch with Cato and wrote lots of book reviews, various studies on “industrial policy,” indicative planning and national foresight capability (Newt Gingrich had proposed a special government office tasked with predicting future technologies, a job which, I pointed out in a *Wall Street Journal* article, was absurd, since if you know what knowledge you will have in the future, you already have it now), public goods,

infrastructure and private roads, public choice analysis and regulatory policy, U.S. foreign policy in El Salvador and Chad, and so on and so forth. I worked as a lobbyist, a writer, a reporter, an editor of newsletters on tax policies, politics, government, and the libertarian movement, a troublemaker, a smuggler (of books, fax machines, and photocopiers into Communist states), an academic organizer for IHS, and a few other odd jobs. When I lived in Austria I helped Cato set up the first Cato conference in the USSR, which was held in Moscow in 1990. Those were interesting times. Upon returning in 1995 to the U.S. from England, where I was working on my doctorate, I was offered a very cool job: coming to work full-time at the Cato Institute as Director of Special Projects. I could tell you what I worked, on, but, of course, I'd have to kill you all later.

I got to work with outstanding colleagues to introduce a number of new Cato products and programs, among them the educational elements of the internship program, with which I have been very

proudly involved ever since. I got to work on expanding Cato's influence worldwide, in Russian, Chinese, and other languages. We moved those programs on January 1, 2009 to Atlas, where they are flourishing, and still working closely in partnership with Cato.

If all goes well, I'm off for 30 or so hours of travel on Monday to Kabul, then Mazar-e-Sharif, then Dushanbe, to work with our new libertarian think tanks, Cato's granddaughters, in Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

I'll meet people in government, the media, and academia and I'll give lectures on individualism, civil society and pluralism, toleration, the political theories of limited government, property rights, externalities, economic development, and the successes of the Georgian economic reforms and how they did it.

But all of you ... already know all of that. You were Cato interns.

You know how to explain the benefits of liberty. You do it with friends and family and co-workers. You support Cato and our allies – Institute for Justice, Institute for Humane Studies, Reason, and many others. You know why you want to be free.

What is harder to explain is why we promote liberty for others, often at great cost to our selves. We donate to causes and to organizations such as the Cato Institute. We work long hours. We rock boats. Did I mention that we donate to causes and organizations?

We're promoting a classic public good – even the paradigm case of a public good. It's non-rivalrous in consumption; when you have more liberty, it doesn't mean that I have any less; and it's difficult or costly to exclude people from it; indeed, taking actions to exclude

others from liberty is precisely the opposite of what a libertarian would do.

So why do we do it? It's a harder question to answer than might seem to be the case at first.

Here's a stab. We value our identity. Each of us wants to become and to be a certain kind of person. We establish our identity through our acts and our affiliations. Cato Sponsors I've met around the US and even the world typically identify themselves like this: "I'm a member of the Cato Institute." To speak precisely, Cato doesn't have memberships, but that's one of the ways in which they have constituted their identities. They're the kind of people who stand up for freedom, who stand up for peace, who stand up for the persecuted, who not only live, and not only let live, but who persuade or stop those who won't let live that live and let live is

better. It's not only good; it's right. And that act of standing up for liberty as right is a part of their identity. It's who they are.

I think that that's true of each and every one of us here.

Liberty is our cause. It is our passion. We will live free. And we will die free. Our cause is the cause of Justice. Of truth. Of peace. Of life itself.

I was introduced to the ideas of the Brazilian liberal abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco by former Cato intern and now Atlas colleague Diogo Costa, who channels his energy, his intellect, and his passion for justice through the OrdemLivre.org project we started at Cato and transferred to Atlas. Nabuco dedicated much of his life to eradicating the evil of slavery from Brazil. Here is how he put the matter:

“Educate yourself, educate your children in the love for the freedom of others, for only in this way will your own freedom not be a gratuitous gift from fate. You will be aware of its worth and have the courage to defend it.”

I am proud to be here with you, who are educated in the love for the freedom of others. I am proud to count myself among your number.

Thank you for coming and for making all of us so proud of you.