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Everywhere in America, the forces of digitization, innovation, and personalization are expanding our options and bettering the way we live. Everywhere, that is, except in our politics. There we are held hostage to an eighteenth century system, dominated by two political parties whose ever-more-polarized rhetorical positions mask a mutual interest in maintaining a stranglehold on power. *The Declaration of Independents* is a compelling and extremely entertaining manifesto on behalf of a system better suited to the future--one structured by the essential libertarian principles of free minds and free markets. Gillespie and Welch profile libertarian innovators, identify the villains propping up the *ancien régime*, and take aim at do-something government policies that hurt most of those they claim to protect. Their vision will resonate with a wide swath of frustrated citizens and young voters, born after the Cold War's end, to whom old tribal allegiances, prejudices, and hang-ups about everything from hearing a foreign language on the street to gay marriage to drug use simply do not make sense.

The Declaration of Independents: How Libertarian Politics Can Fix What's Wrong with America Details

Date : Published June 28th 2011 by PublicAffairs

ISBN : 9781586489380

Author : Nick Gillespie , Matt Welch

Format : Hardcover 264 pages

Genre : Politics, Nonfiction, Economics, History



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Paul Hinman says

For a book whose title suggests actual solutions, there are very few such solutions offered.

In one sense, I respect the concept that libertarianism purports to make a stand. But in practice, I think these authors at least are just as hypocritical as the politicians they decry. Simply saying "free markets" isn't a solution. I think the financial collapse of 2007-8 is a prime example of the failure of free markets in select situations. You can claim that government rules propped up what should have been losers, etc. but the collapse happened bc there was massive fraud and an imbalance of information.

These authors extol the virtues of the Internet in "democratizing" society and information, but then make repeated off-hand dismissals of net neutrality. How do they really think that Comcast, Time Warner, AT&T and the other players who have cartelized and made regional monopolies are going to support disruptive technologies on the Internet?

There are a handful of chapters devoted to case studies the authors say support their ideologies. Yet in each case, there is a complex set of circumstances - much more so than simply "deregulating markets". There is only 1 chapter devoted to the combo of healthcare, social security, and education. Little is offered in the way of practical ways to solve our problems. And while the authors claim to be "outside mainstream politics" they spend much more time railing against democrats (particularly interesting considering obamacare was originally a conservative idea)

If libertarians spent as much time decrying the power of big business as they do big government, I might be able to take them much more seriously. But smart regulation and rules will always be much more appealing to me than "free markets". In practice, that simply lets the monied and powerful exploit the weak and poor. How does libertarian politics propose a solution for that?

Players will always attempt to game the rules. That doesn't always mean the problem is the rules, as much of a critique of the referee.

Michelle says

This was a lot of fun. The two Reason editors are witty and urbane and totally fed up with politics in America and the whole left/right Democrat/Republican thing. There was good solid information here, lots of ideas for those of us who are sick of the whole mess, and although I don't agree with everything the authors said, there is a ton of truth in this book. I was especially pleased with the "case studies" from real life of how, in every part of life OTHER than those controlled by government, life is getting better and better, with more choices, more diversity and individuality--EXCEPT government, education (run by gov't) health care (ditto) and retirement (ditto again).

David says

The writing is a bit too,...um, not sure. The introduction seems about 40 pages too long.

Great stories about Alfred Kahn and life before deregulation, Nate Silver, the Velvet Revolution, the microbrew movement, and a lot of other stuff. At the end of the day, I'm not sure the non-believers will be any closer to believing, even if they get through it.

Brian says

"The government is broke in literal, figurative, and even spiritual terms. The programs and mentality that still darken too many aspects of our daily lives are relics born of prehistoric fears that people really can't be trusted to live their own lives according to their own desires. Power, goes this line of thinking that still patrols Washington's corridors, statehouses across the country, and city halls in every zip code, must be centralized and titrated into small but immensely influential concentrations that can dictate how the rest of us should live, think, feel, and love."

The two parties are losing their grip on the voters, more people are registering independent than ever, as the authors say "there is an instinctive American belief that whatever comes next, despite the worst efforts of every bad guy out there, people will somehow figure out a way to improve things. That is the ultimate appeal of libertarian thought, policy, and prepolitical comportment to us: Unlike sour nostalgia for a golden age that never was or obsession with a restrictive vision of the one and only heaven, libertarianism always places a confident, all-chips-on-black wager on the ability of free individuals to invent more and more interesting choices for how we can live our hyphenated lives."

There is a lot of information in this book to take in concerning the past, present and future. As editors of reason magazine, they are very astute when it comes to most everything we deal with on a daily basis, but also in analysing the failures of government, they get a harty applause from me. The chapter on Airline deregulation really shows what possibilities could come if the government stayed in its defined space. In total this book is a real educational experience and I would recommend anyone into politics, history and pop culture read this.

I gave this 3 stars even though I appreciate what they are saying on many levels, I think that the total freedom to do as you please as long as no one gets hurt is a shallow take on the idea of "getting hurt" as if someone using pornography regularly doesn't do harm to society, it is dangerous, and the hurt is upon us and will continue to present itself in full force as we already see marriages and families destroyed, kids hurt, women raped and demeaned, and men losing their grip on reality, and now the problem is extended to women. I can't help think that the same unintended consequences they see in the governments actions, they overlook in the free for all they want to pass off as freedom.

Jim says

I read this last year just after it came out, and found it to be an uplifting bit of encouragement for those, like me, of the libertarian persuasion. Since then, we've had an election, and more significantly perhaps, an

election year, when everything becomes political and one is inclined to cringe whenever one signs on to Facebook to see what inanities one's friends are spouting as assumed verities shared by all right-thinking people. (Twitter, which one can populate with people one doesn't know but who are of the same political persuasion, is a healthy antidote.) So the outside-politics optimism espoused by Gillespie and Welch tends to take a beating in an election year, and it's nice to get back to plain old life to see what one can do to advance libertarian sensibilities, if not libertarian candidates. And libertarians didn't do too badly this year.

Presidential candidate Gary Johnson got more than a million votes, the Libertarian Party's best showing since 1980. Several LP candidates in statewide races got more than the difference between the two major party candidates, a good indication of clout. It is becoming pretty well-acknowledged that the Republican party needs a debate between its social conservative and libertarian wings, because this year libertarians really did show the power they have when they choose to withdraw their support, as Gillespie and Welch predict in this book. So as time marches on this book will seem dated pretty quickly, but it's still worth a read for those who haven't yet, as a nice way to check up on the authors on how their predictions and prognoses fared in the near term, and as a set of guidelines and inspiration for the furthering of the idea of freedom over the next few years.

Chris Collins says

"Only a madman or a mental defective would take a punch for Nancy Pelosi or John Boehner."

That line pretty much sums up the book as well as the state of the current era of American politics. The so-called "two party system" is a scam. If you think "our guys" are angels and the "other guys" are rat bastards, you're missing the point. They're all (with very, very few exceptions) rat bastards. But don't feel bad. It's what they want you to believe. What you've been told to believe. Instead of feeling bad, start investigating why and how it got this way and, better still, what to do about it. Nick Gillespie and Matt Welch have written a rather good, and surprisingly upbeat (given the current state of affairs), book outlining the alternative point of view that you are capable of deciding how best to live your life. Better than the slightly different shades of top-down control offered by our current duopoly system. It's well worth reading.

On a related aside: I couldn't help think that if college kids (and the ones who think they're still college kids) weren't such a bunch of drones, well programmed by the system that spits them out at an alarming rate, they'd all be wearing Václav Havel t-shirts instead of Che t-shirts. just sayin'.

Ben says

Declaration of Independents is interesting, though far from perfect. The authors detail their belief that there is a coming independent revolution in American politics that will sweep aside the current political parties and leave America with a distinctly more libertarian and open political landscape.

Whether or not the thesis about an oncoming libertarian storm is correct, the book does make a good point that spontaneous, individual and collective action outside the realm of government control can change the lives of individuals for the better. From the underground work of the Velvet Underground to the inspiring story of Vaclav Havel to the origin of micro brewing in the United States, the authors point out that individuals, despite entrenched political opposition can raise the quality of life of everyone around them.

One problem with the book is that it is anecdotally based. The stories are compelling, to be sure, but they really don't prove much. More hard data would have made a more compelling case. That said, the book's other major flaw is that it ignores - or at least treats with short shrift- the important role that government-sponsored collective action can have. I personally follow a maxim that it is important to keep government control to a minimum, so as not to undermine the brilliant spontaneity and creativity of individuals. However, even I acknowledge a role for collective action in providing public goods, mitigating negative externalities, and ensuring slightly more economic equity than the market might provide.

In all, the book is an entertaining read and it has some important points to make. But it misses the larger picture and undermines its own credibility because of this.

John Maniscalco says

Declaration of Independents is so positive about the future of libertarian politics that it borders on the utopian. Gillespie and Welch argue that individual freedom and abundance of consumer choice has made virtually everything about life better than it was in the past. Except for politics.

Where monolithic corporations such as Pan Am and Kodak once rules their respective industries (and, as the book shows, often through collusion with the government) the Democratic and Republican parties represent a duopoly that does not cater to the voters (or consumers). Gillespie and Welch argue that just as in all other facets of life, there is no reason why we should continue supporting two choices that no one wants. Much of the book is spent discussing how once dominant entities were eventually buried by up and coming upstarts, and subsequently made life better for the reason of us. But, while inspirational, there is really no reason to think that the American two party system will come asunder anytime soon.

While I agree with much of their policy prescriptions and the general idea that government which governs best governs least, the two major political parties have shown to be extraordinarily adaptive and can co-opt ideas of those upstarts that threaten their survival. That is, in fact, what makes up most of American political history. The American winner take all system makes circumventing the two party system a logical fallacy. Independents, no matter how libertarian-minded they may be, will always be wise to support one of the two major parties on election day.

This was an entertaining read about the promise of libertarianism, of what is possible when the iron grip of government is unclenched and freedom is allowed to flourish. It is not, however, what it claims to be, a revolutionary manifesto about the coming libertarian future.

Cathy Reisenwitz says

It's a fun, quick read that will give you a reason to feel optimistic about politics. This is a rare feat, so I give Gillespie and Welch credit. I learned a lot about political history. My favorite story was of Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution, a fun, heartening tale I'd never heard.

As a long-time Reason reader and libertarian who'd long been disillusioned with our two-party political system, there weren't many aha moments. But I did feel like I got a clearer, more detailed picture of how politics has screwed us over in the realms of health care, education and retirement.

The stark contrast they drew between how things progress in the private sector and how government management retards every sector it touches was well done.

Overall what I liked best about the book is what I like best about Reason. It's solid research presented in a fast-paced, hyperbolic, funny, witty style.

Zeb Snyder says

Read this book if you are even remotely interested in 21st century politics.

With this book, Gillespie and Welch provide an excellent explanation for general principles of modern libertarianism. Perhaps more importantly, they explain how and why many of us are inherently libertarian, even if we don't admit it, and even if we don't neatly line up with organized libertarian positions on every issue.

The most compelling argument they make is that those of us who belong to the internet generations are accustomed to libertarian communities, values, and commerce thanks to our web interactions. Little surprise, then, that independent voters are growing faster than either political party. Little surprise, too, that the political winds can so quickly shift from Obama to the Tea Party, for example. Gillespie and Welch equate the Democrats and Republicans with other legacy firms that have grown stale and withered, like say AT&T, Kodak, and General Motors. Just as a Kodak camera is no longer our default choice, just as so many businesses are unbundled to provide greater consumer choice, so too will Democrat and Republican cease to be default options. In a world in which we have thousands of movies available at our fingertips as opposed to just three at the local theater, and similar proliferation of diversity throughout the marketplace, why should the marketplace of ideas remain stalled in a binary system that only benefits the legacy firms of the political realm?

It is changing. The authors point out that upon Bush's reelection in 2004, there was talk on the right of a permanent conservative majority. Instead, Democrats scored big gains in '06, and Obama won the White House in 2008. Democrats then began to speak of how the American polity is really liberal at heart, how Obama's reelection would usher in a new era of good government, and that he was the new FDR. Instead, in 2010 the same Democratic establishment that was shocked by Obama's insurgency in the primaries was again surprised by the success of "tea party" affiliated Republicans promising to oppose the statist new New Deal-style approach that the Democrats thought everyone wanted. You could take the timeline back to Clinton's victory in '92-Gingrich '94, for that matter. All the while, people have become disinterested in the parties, and increasingly independent-minded. Voters coalesce around issues, not ideology, and the idea that many people would consistently click with the whole top-down platform put forth by one party or the other seems silly.

In other words, Gillespie and Welch predict that candidates who respond to the will of their constituents will succeed. Parties that seek to promote their brand, rather than maximize customer satisfaction, will fail.

Like I said, read this book.

Naomi says

Some who read this book may be confused at how the authors have written this book. In the beginning, until I got into the jist of how they were getting to the point in the chapters, I didn't think much of the book and almost rated it poorly. As I slowed down in my reading, I was able to figure out how they were taking the incredibly long way around to get to Libertarian tenets. Thus, the 4 stars..if it was a bit clearer and I didn't need to put so much thought into it, it easily would have been a 5 star read.

Robert says

Four or five stars? Let's start at four, but I may change my mind.

I began reading with my usual skepticism, frequently reacting to the seemingly relentless optimism with, "yeah, but..." and other expressions of my reluctance to accept the authors' simple, straightforward assertions. But what ultimately grabbed me was that what I was reading was sensible, plain, and well-reasoned; and consistently based upon principles to an extent that - well, I can't remember reading anything political that adhered so well to principles rather than pragmatics and cynical tactics.

I read the penultimate chapter, "The Permanent Nongoverning Minority", with a rousing level of enthusiasm, and eagerly read through the excellent "Notes and Sources" (!) for additional reading, especially the hyperlinks.

Very enjoyable reading. Highly recommended.

Matthew says

I'm not a Libertarian, but I do hold to the libertarian view that the government should be very limited. So, when I saw that Nick Gillespie and Matt Welch, from Reason Magazine, had put together a book on how Libertarianism could save America, I decided to give it a go.

They begin by building a case that in America consumer choice and our personal affiliations have changed dramatically over the past 60 years. Few people work for the same company for the duration of their career, and many people now identify themselves through some subset of society. There are so many options out there today for folks with different likes and interests. There are many options when it come to how people live, shop, and work that the logical question is, "why not in politics?"

They then point out that in areas where there isn't much choice, maybe two competing companies(MCI and AT&T or Kodak and Fuji are examples they use) something comes along to upset the "balance" and bring choice to the consumer. In the area of politics Republicans and Democrats are a duopoly controlling all the choice. One or the other, those are your choices. I will admit that the political spectrum is very narrow. We are given two choices, that for all practical purposes, are marginally better than the other.

I found the book to be hopeful but a bit naive. Basically their position is that with all the choice consumers have that they will demand more choice in politics. I'm not so sure. Even they point out that change is coming but it appears to be coming in the two parties via the Tea Party and other such political groups. Even

though they praise these groups that are bringing the change to the two parties, they encourage people to take their political ball and go home. Quit playing or cheering for one "team" or the other. But then where would the change they are praising come from?

Over all I liked the book. It was easy to read, informative, and had logical arguments for many of their positions. I did think that the language was a bit courser than necessary. But in spite of those good elements I likely would not reread it. It's a one time through and say that was good and something to think about but certainly not political life changing.

Erika says

I read this because I'd enjoyed the authors' "Ask a Libertarian" YouTube videos and I was hoping to get more insight into Libertarianism, a political philosophy about which I am not very knowledgeable. However, the snarky tone that worked well in the videos was only irritating on the page. Additionally, the authors spend the majority of the book bogged down in marginally illustrative, pop culture-focused case studies that do little to explain their philosophy and that fail to make compelling case for it.

The questions that I had when I opened the book were still unanswered at the end. Nowhere did the Gillespie and Welch address the issue of poverty, and I still lack an understanding of what would happen to poor people in a Libertarian society. Is the market meant to take care of them somehow, as it is apparently meant to take care of everything else? The fact that this question isn't addressed at least gives me an idea of where it ranks on the authors' list of priorities, and maybe that's answer enough.

Not a satisfying read for an open-minded newbie, though it may be more enjoyable to Libertarian believers. I did get the impression throughout that the authors were preaching to the choir.

Donna says

The Declaration of Independents is an important book for anyone interested in politics or seeking to understand the mindsets of America's political "third rail," the libertarians. By the editors of *Reason Magazine*, it sets forth the basic premises of libertarian argument, stating that they "have responded to the stale theatrics of Republican and Democratic misgovernance by making a rational choice. We ignore politics most of the time and instead pursue happiness."

Clearly, the libertarian value system is based on the right of people to pursue, as best they can, their own *individual* "happiness," however they choose to define the term. In general, they view government, first and foremost, as an impediment to personal freedom—one that limits the choices individuals can make in pursuit of their own happiness.

As a progressive, I would argue that in society, there *must* be limits to personal freedom. All too many people are inclined to pursue their individual happiness at the expense of others' happiness and wellbeing. Without the strength of government, individuals could be—and, as history shows us, would be—forced to work long hours for slave wages, unprotected from workplace and environmental dangers, exploited by

financiers and product manufacturers, and sidelined or abused by discrimination of every kind. (These things happen now, of course, even with the hundreds of ways in which the government acts to protect individuals.)

Faced with the ignorance and radical irresponsibility of conservative extremists (and it appears that *all* Republicans these days fit into that category), it makes good sense for rational citizens with hopes for American progress to engage in constructive debate with libertarians—where they at least have a prayer of meeting with reasonable and informed argument. While the libertarian faction in America is making a positive difference in terms of many social issues, its support of the absolute values of small government and supply-side economics is hurting America.

For those of us fed up to our eyebrows with the farce of “compromise” between Democrats and Republicans, this book is a great tool for jump-starting the conversation between the camps people in America who actually think: namely, libertarians and progressives.
