

“The Pillow Talk of Politics”

Every four years, Americans navigate the snares of political action. Slogging through the primaries toward November, too often the politically active assume that the surest gambits in America’s We-Versus-Them climate are distrust and dissension. In other words, honor and embrace those who think like us; vilify and alienate those who do not. As a counterpoint to such popular divisiveness, Franklin posited a refreshing alternative: “Love your enemies, for they tell you your faults” (Franklin 1). Franklin’s alternative to traditional political thinking is as far-sweeping as his resume’. From the pen of an inventor, publisher, ambassador, and scholar, Franklin’s aphorism evokes the type of quaint counsel readers might find embroidered on a grandmother’s pillow.

The period during which Franklin penned these words, like today, was one of political discord. Power brokers and thinkers like Jefferson and Hamilton were weaving disparate threads of philosophy, theology, politics, and economics into a constitutional framework. Imagine the suspicion, each man harboring a divergent opinion on how this bold experiment in governance should be conducted. Make no mistake, rivalry warmed the seats that brought the country together. How could ideological rivals establish the foundations of government amid such vast differences?

Ironically, their differences of opinion as much as their shared vision helped form consensus. During the Constitutional Convention, debates simmered over whether congressional representation should be based on population or equal representation. Relentless bickering and crumbling alliances almost destroyed any chance of compromise. However, when both sides realized the pitfalls of their own beliefs, friend and foe united and established equal

representation in the Senate and one representative per 30,000 citizens in the House of Representatives. By considering the viewpoints of their adversaries and admitting how their partisan plans for government were flawed, opposing factions were able to overcome their differences and synthesize their talking points into the document that governs America today (Constitution 2).

It is easy to forget that the Founding Fathers were political radicals in their day; centuries hence, not much has changed. Those who oppose the status quo invariably brook accusations of treason and sedition, as did Edward Snowden. In the fallout of 9-11, Washington demanded tighter national security. In response, American citizens demanded fundamental protections to their privacy. The political clash encapsulated the age-old conundrum that Ben Franklin once expressed: that anyone who trades freedom for security deserves neither. A government tasked with keeping its citizenry safe requires more than a modicum of surveillance. What happens when enhanced surveillance goes unchecked?

Voices like Edward Snowden's are born.

On June 6, 2013, the American public learned of a government surveillance program that tracked its calls, texts, emails, and photos through popular social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube. After leaking this information, Snowden asked only that American citizens learn about the overreach of their government's security program. While political rivals from both sides of the aisle clamored for Snowden's immediate arrest for treason, President Obama adopted Franklin's wisdom by embracing the "enemy" and ordering a politically treacherous investigation of the nation's surveillance policy. Unblinded by his own administration's policy, Obama recognized its inherent flaws. Subsequently, Congress enacted legislation that limited the

amount of data that could be collected, curtailed how long it could be held, and ensured that foreign countries could not abuse intercepted data (Edward 4).

Stomaching the criticisms of one's enemy can be humbling, but the consequences of ignoring an enemy can be humiliating if not deadly. Iran, for example, massacres its civilians at the slightest signs of protest. Its oppressive theocratic regime abhors democracy and adopts a closed-minded stance antithetical to Franklin's suggestion that we heed our enemy's arguments and indictments. While their protests have recurred over the decades, in the past few years Iranians have clamored for basic human rights, more representative government, and the eradication of oppressive retaliation. Franklin would urge the Iranian leadership to heed the critics rather than smother the protests. Such a stance would foster trust between its citizens and the parliament. Unfortunately, there is little room for trust between an executioner's sword and an AK-47. Governed by dogmatic ayatollahs and fear-mongering theocrats, Iran needs a leader receptive to criticism and unchained by ideology—one who will liberate people engaged in warfare against their own government (Iran's 1).

Love your enemies.

It is as trite as a cliché on a grandmother's pillow, but Franklin's adage promotes the kind of intellectual "pillow talk" that can shape nations as well as marriages, heal policies as well as hearts, and expand ideologies as well as souls.

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