



Inalienable Rights versus Abuse

R. Q. Public

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“This book presents evidence that the United States is on fire,” roars the opening salvo of R. Q. Public’s *Inalienable Rights versus Abuse: A Commonsense Approach to Public Policy*. Public’s comprehensive discourse on America’s decline covers a wide range, from poverty and poor parenting to police brutality and globalization.

The approach is methodical. The author works hard to define his concepts, the most important being those of “inalienable rights”—those we are born with and that can’t be rescinded—and of abuse. Abuse, he explains, is when “any group, government, or individual ... deprive[s] a citizen of his or her opportunities to experience inalienable rights.” Inalienable rights, in turn, include those enshrined in the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Abuse of these gifts, says Public, is “widespread” in America.

Among the abuses listed are police misconduct, military sexual abuse, landlord abuse, intimate partner violence, criminal abuse, property crimes, gangs, human trafficking, and economic disparity. Public proposes a common-sense, man-on-the-street approach to tackling such abuses through social policy. His target audience is older, white Americans who, like him, grew up during a time of pervasive respect for authority.

These “traditional” folk, he says, need to open their minds “just a crack,” with passages such as: “The way to make the country great is not to prioritize the economy of the upper 1 percent of earners and to convince the rest of us that it is noble to accept abuse willingly so that the richest can become wealthier.”

Single-payer health insurance, he asserts, would be “ideal” for America. Public thinks government regulation of business is a no-brainer, and believes the public sector should create jobs for the disadvantaged and downtrodden.

But for all of the above, Public is no red flag-waving collectivist. If the older conservative cohort can manage to keep their dinner down through the first few chapters, they will learn that his layman’s analysis tends to break with dogma at both ends of the the political spectrum.

Progressives may be horrified at the suggestion that lower-income parents who prove unable to provide their children with a “healthful” life should forfeit those children to the state, while those from the conservative school of tough love may find a rare like-minded voice in similar sections and chapters.

More than a political essay on abuse, this is a broad, prescriptive policy program for healing what is sick about the American body politic. It is far from wonkish, with solutions that are the ruminations of an everyman who has observed his country’s progress, or lack thereof, for more than half a century.

The text is clean and organized, written in a voice that is earnest and authentic. Public cites a healthy number of respectable sources, yet there is something homespun, an element of *vox populi*, to the work that begs consideration—it is simple, and the complex stuff isn't working so well.

The ultimate goal here is to encourage politics that prioritize “everyone’s individual rights.” What Public’s prescriptions might mean for American policy depends on those willing to weigh his ideas in the same earnest spirit in which they were written.

STEPHEN SICILIANO (June 2, 2017)

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