

Visionary author helped people see truth of nation's origins

by **Mark Skousen** - Sept. 19, 2010 12:00 AM
Financial economist and author

"There were giants in the Earth in those days . . . mighty men who were of old, men of renown."- Genesis 6:4

I am delighted to respond to this invitation from The Arizona Republic to pay tribute to my uncle, W. Cleon Skousen, whose book "The 5000 Year Leap" has gained notoriety by the endorsement of Glenn Beck.

Glenn told me that, even though he never met the man (who died in January 2006 at the age of 93), Cleon's book changed his life and gave him hope for America.

Unfortunately, when it comes to Glenn Beck, the established media only see red. If Beck recommends a book, the author must be suspect.

Critics look for dirt and play up errors and misdeeds to demonize a good man and his work.

In politics, it's known as a smear campaign, with one-sided negative ads. It happened to Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential campaign. And it's happening now to Cleon Skousen.

And I wouldn't be surprised to see it happen to Friedrich Hayek, a prominent Nobel Prize-winning economist, now that Beck has endorsed his classic work, "The Road to

Serfdom."

Don't get me wrong. Ad hominem attacks are made by both sides of the political spectrum. I remember a time when Martin Luther King was attacked for being a womanizer and communist sympathizer. And today, President Barack Obama is being attacked as a socialist, Marxist or worse.

It's a sad commentary on the divisive state of American politics that we can't treat people as individuals with civility and without labeling them as some extreme nut case.

Dismissed by press as extremist

The curmudgeons and supposedly objective reporters hope to keep the public from reading Cleon Skousen's books by dismissing him as an extreme right-winger. But if you read the introductory chapter of "Leap," you discover that he rejects both the extreme right wing (anarchy) and extreme left wing (tyranny) of the American political spectrum.

He contends that the Founders of our nation placed the Constitution in the "balanced center." That was the genius of the

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Founders, finding the golden mean of state power, neither too much nor too little government.

The book is meant to be a layman's introduction to the brilliance of the Constitution. Millions of copies of the Constitution have been given out to Americans by the Cato Institute and other organizations, but how many really understand it?

That's where Cleon Skousen comes in. He took it upon himself to establish the National Center for Constitutional Studies in the 1970s, offering weeklong courses and giving lectures around the country on the Constitution. He considered it his patriotic duty and his calling in life.

Cleon wrote two books on the subject. "The Making of America" is a textbook, and one that I prefer. It dissects every article and section of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the amendments.

"The 5000 Year Leap" is more for the general masses, to inspire the public by highlighting 28 "great ideas" that inspired "the Founding Fathers' phenomenal success formula." These 28 ideas are essential but not especially controversial or extreme: the need to protect property rights, defend the borders, encourage strong local government, avoid too much debt, encourage free enterprise and "elect virtuous leaders."

Cleon emphasizes several principles in the Constitution, such as the separation of powers, and checks and balances, but he remains surprisingly silent on the welfare or commerce clauses.

"Leap" introduces the reader to a great many

political philosophers, including Cicero, Montesquieu, Blackstone, Locke, Adam Smith, Bastiat, and Tocqueville, and quotes generously from Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison and Franklin.

He seeks to counter the notion that Franklin was a profligate womanizer and emphasizes that even in his infamous "Advice to a Young Man in Seeking a Mistress," Franklin tries to dissuade the young man from taking a mistress and encourages him to marry, the "proper remedy" for the "hard-to-govern" passions.

A beloved uncle and teacher

I got to know my dear uncle well over the years. I took his courses on the Constitution, attended many of his talks on religion and politics, and went on one of his popular tours to Israel. I envied his ability to speak and attract a large following, especially in the West.

In my 35 years of lecturing at investment conferences, the most frequent question I heard is: "How are you related to Cleon Skousen?" Then, these strangers would tell me how he had changed their lives for the

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better, as he did for Glenn Beck.

My uncle had a sweet spot in his heart for Arizona, and for several years, supporters provided him and his wife, Jewel, an apartment in Mesa during the winter months to do his research, give lectures, meet with friends and relax. They were overwhelmed by Arizona's hospitality.

I'm not saying Cleon Skousen was without fault. As a former FBI agent, he may have exaggerated his relationship with J. Edgar Hoover, although it was never so egregious as his nitpicking critics claim. During the long battle against the "evil empire" and communist threat, Hoover's friendship with Cleon was never in jeopardy, as his personal correspondence demonstrates. Cleon's bestseller "The Naked Communist" was vindicated when the Berlin Wall and the Soviet system collapsed.

Yes, we had our differences, and I have reservations about his conspiracy theories and defense of the John Birch Society, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Joe McCarthy. (He had a weakness for defending the underdog.)

But I love his Bible commentaries, especially his famous "thousand year" books, and his work on the Constitution, for which he will be remembered. He was a devoted churchman and family man who loved his wife and eight children. His life was so full and diverse that he wanted to call his memoirs "Six Careers" - as G-man (FBI), professor (Brigham Young University), police chief (Salt Lake City), tour director (Israel), president of a non-profit (NCCS), and author (more than 35 books).

Wise Ben Franklin's advice

When my own father died when I was only 16, Cleon became like a dad to me and my siblings. He spent time with my family and gave me good advice as I grew up. He so inspired me to write "The Making of Modern Economics" that I dedicated the book to him. I considered it an honor to be one of his pallbearers at his funeral, which was attended by thousands.

These words by Benjamin Franklin best sum up my uncle and his critics: "The best men have always had their share of envy and malice of the foolish and wicked, and a man has therefore some reason to be ashamed of himself when he meets with none of it. My good friend Rev. Whitefield once said, 'When I am on the road and see boys in a field pelting a tree, though I am too far off to know what tree it is, I conclude it has fruit on it.' "

My uncle stands tall, and his works are still bearing fruit.

Mark Skousen is the New York-based editor of Forecasts & Strategies, a financial newsletter; producer of FreedomFest, an annual festival where "

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