
Land of the weak; home of the losers

By: Melvyn L. Fein

You've probably heard the news. The Cato Institute found that, in many states, people can earn more money from government welfare programs than they can if they take a paying job. Evidently in Hawaii a family of four can make the equivalent of \$60,000 per annum on the dole.

What you may not be aware of is that this underestimates the amount of money the poor have available. When, several decades ago, the sociologist Christopher Jencks decided to study the "out-go," as opposed to income, of the underprivileged, he found that they spent almost twice as much as they theoretically earned.

How, you may ask, is this possible? The answer is that not every dollar received came in over the table. Nor were all of them legal. Many even came from friends and relatives. This then explained all that "bling" and those large-screen TVs.

Once upon a time, Americans took pride in their "can-do" abilities. Prepared to meet virtually any challenge, they assumed they could do whatever needed doing. Was there a continent to be tamed? They were ready to take it on. Could they construct a rocket to the moon? No sweat!

But now we seem to regard ourselves as a nation of weaklings. We require someone else — preferably Uncle Sam — to take care of us. The question is not what we are going to build — our president has already assured us that we do not personally build anything — but how we are going to divvy up the spoils.

Ours, we have heard over and over again, has become a dependency, or some say, an entitlement culture. The issue is what will we be given, not what will we achieve. He or she who can persuade the federal government to cough up the most loot is the winner in this race to the bottom.

In fact, winners must win. They must take on difficult tasks and succeed in accomplishing them. Only then do they deserve the respect that has traditionally been accorded victors. Otherwise they are losers — no matter how loudly they crow about deserving the best.

Despite this, millions of Americans apparently feel too weak to succeed on their own. They whine and wail and gnash their teeth about how unfair life is and demand that the winners be taken down a peg or two.

Not long ago our national motto was "the land of the free and the home of the brave," whereas today it is more accurately "the land of the weak and the home of the losers." It isn't that we do not boast millions of young people prepared to defend our freedoms;

rather it is that the protesters and layabouts are currently setting the national agenda.

Still, when I ask my students at Kennesaw State University how many of them aspire to be losers, not a single arm goes up. On the other hand, when there is reading to be done or papers to be written, a large proportion look for the easy way out. As long as they can pass a course, they do not worry about passing with flying colors.

Plainly, hard work is for chumps. Nevertheless, as Malcolm Gladwell observed in his book "Outliers," truly successful people dedicate years of concerted effort to becoming good at what they do. Because they want to win, they devote themselves to becoming strong enough to prevail.

We must never forget that if our objective is for everyone to do equally well, we must set standards everyone can meet. That means we must become a nation of less than mediocrities. Because half of us are always below average, this half can only be accommodated by very low benchmarks.

The truth is that not everyone can win; yet if we are to be a nation of winners, we must both work at it and acknowledge those who come out on top. The false God of victory for all merely ensures defeat for all.

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