

ALSO BY GEORGE LAKOFF

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with Mark Johnson

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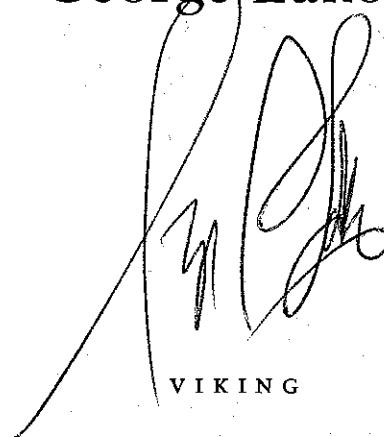
*Thinking Points: Communicating Our
American Values and Vision*
with the Rockridge Institute

Whose Freedom?: The Battle over America's Most Important Idea

THE POLITICAL MIND

*Why You Can't Understand
21st-Century Politics with
an 18th-Century Brain*

George Lakoff

A large, stylized handwritten signature of George Lakoff, written in black ink, positioned over the publisher's name.

VIKING

you can make a public issue of it, partly with ridicule and partly with moral outrage. But the discussion, the ridicule, and the outrage cannot just be a one-shot event. It must persist, and must be done across the country over and over until no one will use the phrase for fear of being ridiculed or evoking extreme anger.

This would require civic participation throughout the nation. It won't happen.

Old Enlightenment reason is too strongly entrenched in the Democratic Party, not just the political leaders, but the consultants and staff, the pollsters, the strategists, the ad agencies, even the donor community. The idea of building a sustained campaign to communicate truth and change how Americans think is unthinkable to Democrats at this point.

The military occupation in Iraq is going so badly that the Democrats might just win a big electoral victory in 2008. The broader question is, will they have changed the minds, and hence the brains, of Americans in any deep way, not just on terrorism, but on what the values of our country are and how the nation should be run?

CHAPTER 7

Framing Reality: Privateering

When an important truth is unseen because it is unframed and unnamed, you may have to construct a conceptual frame and a name, so that the important truth can be seen.

We think using conceptual frames. Words name elements of those frames. Without frames and names, it is difficult to think and talk about truths. A step toward a New Enlightenment is to recognize when frames for important truths are missing in public consciousness, and when we lack the needed words. Our job then is to construct the frame and to assign names, so that the phenomenon can be talked about openly.

To begin to shift the terms, I'd like to describe a widespread conservative practice that has not previously had a name and, being nameless, has not been publicly aired or even noticed as a single practice. I call it "privateering." You can think of it as a blend of "privatization" and "profiteering." The word previously existed with a related meaning, but has mostly gone out of use.

Privateering is a special case of privatization in which the capacity of government to carry out critical moral missions is systematically destroyed from within the government itself, while public funds are used to provide capital for private corporations to take over those critical functions of government and charge the public a great deal for doing so, while avoiding all accountability.

This not only strikes at the moral mission of government to protect and empower its citizens, but threatens to destroy democracy itself. It involves a collaboration between privateering

corporations and privateering enablers who have governmental powers of some kind. It can occur at any level of government, but the most pernicious effects are at the federal level. And it is a result of conservative ideology being carried out successfully under the public radar screen.

The Privateering frame has the following components:

- Privateering enablers: Those in the government who act to destroy the government's ability to carry out some aspect of its moral mission of protection and empowerment.
- Surreptitious dismantling acts: Acts, usually below the public's awareness, that destroy a crucial governmental capacity. For example, budget cuts, executive orders, signing statements, reassignment of regulators, purposeful lack of enforcement, putting corporate lobbyists in charge of government agencies, appointing conservative judges, arranging for no-bid contracts, and so on.
- Privateers themselves: Corporations that fill the gap in some critical governmental capacity, often using public money to provide capital to take over those functions. The money commonly comes in the form of either lucrative government contracts or subsidies. Privateers tend to make considerable profits, paid for by the public, for doing governmental tasks that are vital but that government can no longer perform. There is typically little competition among privateers, so prices are high—whatever the market will bear.
- Surreptitious privateering: Working in coordination with enablers to make privateering possible, often via lobbying or personal connections.
- Transferred functions: Those critical moral functions of government that are transferred to privateers. Examples include: military functions; intelligence functions; monitoring food, drug, and product safety; interrogating prisoners; disaster relief; and educating the public. The privateers are not accountable to the public to carry out these functions well.

Negative effects have included the murder of civilians in Iraq; intelligence failures; poisoning the public via foods, drugs, and consumer goods; carrying out torture; letting people drown; and the resegregation of schools.

The primary mission of corporations is to maximize profits for their stockholders and executives, not to carry out the moral missions of protecting and empowering citizens. They are accountable to their stockholders, not to the public. It is inevitable that, when conflicts between the public good and corporate profits arise, the public good suffers.

In privateering, the public becomes a captive market. For crucial services, corporations can charge whatever the market will bear. In emergencies, the government itself—that is, the taxpayers—may have to pay exorbitant prices for those services, and many may not be able to afford them.

Privateering is a means of transferring wealth from ordinary taxpayers to wealthy investors, making the wealthy much wealthier, while robbing ordinary people of the security and opportunity that government should provide.

Democracy is the first casualty of privateering. Our lives are being governed more and more by private corporations. We have not elected them, cannot turn them out of office or make them accountable to us. Each act of privateering robs us of a portion of democracy.

The ultimate result could be a nightmare system of nondemocratic government, where proper government has been destroyed, where the moral mission cannot be depended upon, where there is no public accountability, where prices are exorbitant, and where the public must either pay those prices for untrustworthy services or go without altogether.

On the front page of the *New York Times* in the fall of 2007, there appeared three stories about privateering presented as if they had nothing to do with each other: the Blackwater killings of civilians in Iraq, the FDA's lack of inspectors for food and drug

safety, and the bill to fund SCHIP (the State Children's Health Insurance Program). Let us look at what joins them together.

Blackwater

The military is a branch of the federal government. It exists to protect the country in case of invasion or imminent threat. It has many functions in addition to fighting, including the training of troops, the transporting of weapons and troops, the guarding of military installations and diplomatic personnel, running technical equipment, setting up bases, transporting equipment, feeding the troops, and so on. The military is a "service"—under civilian control and made up of U.S. citizens who volunteer to serve their country by protecting its citizens. There is a strict military code of conduct and international rules for what soldiers can and cannot do.

Blackwater is a private army of paid soldiers—mercenaries—referred to as "contractors" and "security guards." It has enormous facilities and trains 40,000 soldiers a year. The Iraq War would not have been possible without Blackwater: its private army guards installations, including the Green Zone, the huge city within a city in Baghdad; transports troops and diplomats; engages in training; and so on. Blackwater says that it can put 20,000 of its troops on the ground ready to function on short notice.

Blackwater has a huge fleet of military helicopters, and has received over a billion dollars in contracts in Iraq since the Bush administration came to power. It charges the U.S. government \$445,000 a year per security guard. Its CEO, Erik Prince, is a billionaire, and a major financial supporter of the Republican Party. Ninety percent of its revenue has come from government contracts, two-thirds of which are no-bid contracts. That means that the American taxpayers have paid for most of Blackwater's capital—its bases, helicopters, weapons, and other equipment. And since its personnel are mostly former members of the U.S.

military, U.S. taxpayers have paid for their training. Yet the U.S. Congress has no control over Blackwater, and as of this writing, Blackwater operatives in other countries are neither under U.S. legal jurisdiction nor the legal jurisdiction of the country they are in. They are a law unto themselves. They also have a reputation for being trigger-happy, and in the incident that brought the company to national attention, killed seventeen Iraqi civilians, including a mother and her baby.

Blackwater turned up in the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, hired by Homeland Security. Blackwater was also hired by FEMA, which had its budget cut and could no longer function on its own to do hurricane relief. It had to hire Blackwater. At present Blackwater is looking to expand its operations in the domestic sphere. It is attempting to build a huge base in southern California near the Mexican border, in the hopes of getting business guarding the border and providing security and transportation in the case of earthquakes, fires, and floods, since it has equipment that FEMA does not.

The thought of a huge, well-funded, well-stocked private army run by right-wing ideologues and supporters of conservative politics is frightening enough. The idea that major parts of our country may become dependent on Blackwater and may have to pay exorbitantly for its services, while under its control, is even more frightening.

The threat to democracy that Blackwater represents was made clear in an interview with Representative Darrell Issa (R-CA), who was asked about Representative Henry Waxman's call for an investigation of Blackwater. Issa said, "If Henry Waxman today wants to go to Iraq and do an investigation, Blackwater will be his support team. His protection team. Do you think he really wants to investigate directly?"¹ And the *New York Daily News* reported:

When a team of FBI agents lands in Baghdad this week to probe Blackwater security contractors for murder, it will be

protected by bodyguards from the very same firm, the Daily News has learned.

Half a dozen FBI criminal investigators based in Washington are scheduled to travel to Iraq to gather evidence and interview witnesses about a Sept. 16 shooting spree that left at least 11 Iraqi civilians dead.

The agents plan to interview witnesses within the relative safety of the fortified Green Zone, but they will be transported outside the compound by Blackwater armored convoys, a source briefed on the FBI mission said.

"What happens when the FBI team decides to go visit the crime scene? Blackwater is going to have to take them there," the senior U.S. official told *The News*.²

Blackwater is a privateer in every respect. The government's ability to fully perform its protective function has been gutted, and the country has been made dependent on companies like Blackwater, which are huge and have been capitalized at public expense. Its charges are exorbitant, its profits enormous. Wherever it functions, it governs—it takes on the power and duties of a government—but it is ruled by profit and is not accountable to those it governs. Nobody elected Blackwater and nobody can vote it out of office. But it has huge financial, legal, PR, and lobbying resources to influence our government to act in its favor.

The Food and Drug Administration

On September 28, 2007, the *New York Times* reported that the Food and Drug Administration audits less than 1 percent of clinical drug trials in the United States. It has only two hundred inspectors, some of whom are part-time, to audit 350,000 testing sites. And when serious problems are found, FDA administrators have downgraded the findings 68 percent of the time.

As the FDA had its funding for regulators cut and as industry-friendly officials were appointed, the responsibility for drug test-

ing fell on the companies, which have billions of dollars invested in their drugs. We now know that private tests results were fudged for Propulsid (Johnson and Johnson), Bextra and Celebrex (Pfizer), and Vioxx (Merck), resulting in many deaths.

In the area of food safety, the FDA has been underfunded for years and has a lack of inspectors and trained personnel because of budgeting shortfalls. The Waxman committee in 2006 estimated that year's shortfall at \$135 million. The result is that food safety regulation falls to private corporations. The FDA had learned of a salmonella outbreak at ConAgra's Georgia peanut operation and told ConAgra that it was depending upon the company to address it. The company did not.³ The FDA received complaints of *E. coli* at spinach producers in the Salinas Valley before three deaths occurred, and had sent alerts to the producers, who did not address the problem. And when food imports increased from China and other countries, no inspectors for food safety were hired. In addition, the Bush administration and Republicans in Congress have resisted the call for even labeling country of origin for foods sold in the United States.

Food and drug safety are excellent examples of privateering. Conservatives in government cut funding for FDA inspectors, making it impossible for the agency to engage in its moral mission of protecting the country's food and drug supply. That responsibility then fell to private corporations, whose primary mission is profit, not public protection. Inevitably, profit wins out. The drug companies fudge drug test data and make billions on drugs they know will harm the public. Food producers ignore warnings for the sake of profit. Food importers do not spend the needed money to monitor food imports. Not until people—or pets!—die does the problem come to light.

The FDA is only one such case of privateering. The Consumer Product Safety Division has similarly been underfunded for years by conservative policies. The result was a scandal: because of a lack of inspectors, millions of dangerous toys from China containing lead paint had been coming into the United States for

many years, and millions of children had been directly exposed to them, presumably with harmful effects. Because of conservative privateering policy, the Chinese manufacturers and the American importers became responsible for product safety when inspectors were cut. For the sake of profits, those corporations did nothing to protect millions of children playing with the toys containing lead.

Privateering is central to the conservative plan for America. Conservatives nonetheless keep calling for "smaller government" and "spending cuts"—except for the military, the Energy Department, corporate subsidies, and any parts of government that fit the conservative worldview. What conservatives mean by a "strong defense" is bigger government where the military is concerned, with more spending on the military, and a considerable percentage of the money going to private corporations that are large military contractors and make high profits on those contracts. In both the call to cut spending on corporate regulators and the call to spend more on military contractors, conservatives are engaging in privateering.

Health Care

Privateering is at the center of the health care issue.

First, let us distinguish between health care and health insurance. Health insurance companies make their money by denying health care: either refusing to insure people with preconditions, turning down recommended procedures, or limiting the amount to be paid out for some condition—say, paying a maximum of \$20,000 for cancer treatments, after which you have to sell your house to get them.

This is the opposite of the way most markets work. In a typical market, companies that provide more of their product tend to make more money. In health insurance, the product is health care. But the more care an insurance company provides, the less profit it makes. In a normal market, greater competition helps

consumers. But with health insurance, competition is competition for profits, not for delivering care. Greater competition for profits thus means competition to deliver less care, which harms consumers. Health insurance is thus an anti-market phenomenon.

Second, health insurance greatly adds to the cost of care. While Medicare has administrative costs of 3 percent, HMOs have administrative costs of about 25 percent. Most of that money is spent on determining ways to deny care. On top of that, HMOs make a considerable profit, so that administrative costs plus profit amount to more than it would take to insure everyone under a Medicare-for-all or single-payer plan.

Third, health care falls under the moral mission of the government to protect its citizens from the ravages of disease, or injury, or the natural decay of the body as one ages. Sooner or later all our citizens will need health care.

Other forms of protection for the public do not require insurance. The police don't ask whether you have insurance and are up on your premiums when a burglar breaks into your house, nor does the fire department when your house catches fire. Basic protection is, or should be, a function of government, and that includes health security.

But conservatives favor privateering—eliminating the capacity of government to provide health security through Medicare and then placing health care in the hands of insurance companies whose main mission is making money and who make their money by denying care. Conservatives do not believe that everyone should have health care. For them it is a commodity. If you aren't making enough money to pay for the commodity, then you don't deserve to have it.

Neoliberal democrats, who might think that Medicare-for-all or single-payer would be the best plan, sense conservative opposition and surrender their moral position in advance. Neoliberals still see markets as a means to a progressive moral end, whereas conservatives see the market as being a moral end in itself. Neoliberals believe that they can achieve the effects of empathy by working for the interests of others—that is, other demographic groups

(uninsured poor children, veterans, the elderly). They believe that with appropriate regulation and laws, markets can achieve most material or economic needs. That's why "pragmatic" Democrats are supporting insurance-based health plans with some federally funded insurance for the poor. The result of such plans would be that insurance companies will continue trying to deny as much care as they can get away with—only there will be 50 million more people to deny care to.

The conservative policy is a privateering policy. Keep the government from being able to, say, buy drugs at a huge discount and pass the savings on, so that drug companies can make huge profits. Keep the government from insuring all poor children, lest they grow up wanting government health care the rest of their lives.

Health care is different from the first two cases. Here government functioning is prevented from coming into being, not destroyed. But the phenomenon is the same: government is kept by privateering enablers from doing its job, and private companies make lots of profit as a result, often on government contracts.

Is privatization always bad? By no means. But to see if it's appropriate, I ask some simple questions. Will the moral mission of government, the protection and empowerment of citizens—otherwise called the common good—be served or undermined? Will democracy be served or undermined?

What does cognitive science have to do with the issue of privateering? Plenty. Neoliberals who stick to Old Enlightenment reason have not raised it as an issue because their mode of arguing doesn't permit it. Universal reason says that you only have to give the facts and figures and everyone will reason correctly using them and be convinced. But one can only have facts and figures about special cases of privateering—about Blackwater, or about the FDA, or about health care. You have to see the general case in order to fight against it. Cognitive science takes you beyond Old Enlightenment reasoning and forces you to notice the common structure in the privateering cases. Only when you grasp the idea

of privateering can you even think of amassing facts and figures about it.

And cognitive science tells you something else. The only way the public can become conscious of privateering is if it is framed correctly and powerfully. Anything anyone learns is a matter of brain change. You can't learn anything without your synapses changing. And the brains of the public change only when a given frame is activated over and over. That's why progressives should be pointing out cases of privateering and discussing it in public every day. Influential newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* or the national televised news programs could introduce the idea into our culture if they noted the widespread causal influence of privateering in story after story, and identified it as conservative policy.

Conservative theorists are well aware of privateering, and have been writing about it in glowing terms, pointing to a celebrated history. The original privateers were state-licensed pirates who preyed upon the merchant ships of other nations, especially in war, but also in peacetime. They were as vicious as pirates, but they not only took all the valuables being transported, they also brought the victim ship back to port and sold it for profit. They could do so because they were state-licensed. And they were financed by investors, who often made a very hefty profit on their investments.

Larry J. Sechrest and Alexander Tabarrok of the Independent Institute have written tracts detailing a romantic history of the privateers. Starting with conservative assumptions about the free market, they suggest that private contractors be used in battle, not just as security guards, and that having mercenaries fight wars for profit is good thing.⁴

The old privateers were state-sanctioned to take for themselves, by force, the wealth of people in other nations. During wartime, their acts were justified as weakening the enemy's economy and strengthening one's own. The question is now being raised as to whether "free trade" pacts permit new forms of such

privateering. In a postcolonial era, our government, which promotes “democracy,” cannot simply take over another country, enslave its people, and take its resources. Have we created a modern equivalent of old-fashioned “privateering”?

Our banks invest in corporations that use the money to buy access to the resources—the wealth—of the citizens of other nations, resources like oil, natural gas, minerals, agricultural land, water rights, and cheap labor. To protect those investments, called our “vital interests,” we send troops and private for-profit “security guards” like those from Blackwater. Is this modern international privateering? I think it is worth a public discussion.

In a New Enlightenment, the question must be asked and taken seriously.

CHAPTER 8

Fear of Framing

Progressives too often fall into conservative framing traps. Avoiding them takes a new consciousness. The way out takes insight and courage. Old Enlightenment reason was supposed to be universal, literal, and unemotional. It did not admit that alternative worldviews are normal, that we think in terms of frames and metaphors that fit our worldviews, and that language can be chosen to activate frames, metaphors, and worldviews.

Many Democrats in Congress are so accustomed to Old Enlightenment reason that they don’t know how to effectively use framing to strengthen the hold of their worldview. The Republicans have become expert at it, and the Democrats often don’t know what’s hitting them and how to respond. The longer they wait to respond, the harder it gets—and they don’t understand why. They fall into traps and have no idea how to get out. They fear that Republicans will frame them in an unsavory light. As a result, they unintentionally do it themselves. The Democrats need a New Enlightenment.

Here’s a typical example. A headline on the *New York Times* front page on October 9, 2007, read, “Democrats Seem Ready to Extend Wiretap Powers... Fears of Appearing Soft on Terror.” The Democrats, the story said, were “nervous that they would be called soft on terrorism if they insist on strict curbs on gathering intelligence.”

In a New Enlightenment, the Democrats would disrupt the link between freedom and “softness.” They would “Stand up to the President,” “Remain Strong on Liberty,” and “Say No to

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