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The ongoing violence in Iraq has caused observers to reflect on the challenges of bringing democracy to tribal societies. Before the Iraq War was launched in 2003, the Bush administration assured Americans and the world that the removal of Saddam Hussein would result in the creation of a peaceful, well-governed, and democratic society. But it is now becoming clear that building a successful democracy is not as easy as many Americans had assumed. Pure democracy is a system that works well in particular cultures, and not all cultures are equally capable of building harmonious democratic societies.

If the Bush administration had been interested in studying the track record of democracy-building efforts in tribal cultures, they should have studied the experience of Sub-Saharan Africa, where the introduction of pure democracy 50 years ago resulted in disaster for the people of the region. For the purposes of this article, I am defining 'pure democracy' as majority rule under universal suffrage, in which all citizens of adult age are guaranteed the right to vote in national elections.

In 1957, Ghana became the first black African country to gain independence from European colonial rule (Sudan gained its independence in 1956, but it regards itself as part of Arab Africa, rather than black Africa). The Prime Minister of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, had won an election in 1956, campaigning on a platform of attaining immediate independence from British colonial rule. Nkrumah had served as Prime Minister from 1951 to 1956, a period in which Ghana enjoyed internal self-government, under the supervision of the British colonial governor in the country. The governor had the power to veto decisions by Nkrumah that he felt were harmful to the interests of the colony. This was the period in which Ghana enjoyed the greatest levels of freedom and prosperity in its history.

Two conservative Ghanaian politicians, J. B. Danquah and Kofi Busia, opposed Nkrumah's campaign for immediate independence. They wanted to preserve the status quo, because of the stability and prosperity which Ghana was enjoying. They preferred a more gradual path to independence, in contrast to the campaign for rapid decolonization. Both men realized that without the supervision of the British colonial power, Nkrumah would turn Ghana into a dictatorship, and impose his deeply-held Marxist beliefs on the Ghanaian people.

The opposition political party that was supported by Danquah and Busia lost the 1956 elections, and Nkrumah was able to lead his country to independence on March 6, 1957. The dire predictions of Danquah and Busia came true, and in a couple of years, Nkrumah established Africa's first post-colonial dictatorship. Danquah was subsequently arrested and jailed as a political prisoner, and he eventually died because of the terrible prison conditions in which he was held. Busia fled the country in fear of his life, and he returned to the country only after Nkrumah was overthrown in a Western-backed military coup in 1966.

Most of the Black African nations that gained independence after Ghana followed its path by establishing one-party dictatorships. Observers soon began to describe the practice of

democracy in Africa as 'one-man, one-vote, one-time'. In many of the cases, the winning political party at the independence elections used its majority in the national parliament, to pass legislation outlawing the existence of opposition political parties. This left the ruling party with a monopoly of power. This trend challenged the widely held notion that pure democracy leads to more freedom. **If anything, in many countries, Africans enjoyed greater personal freedom and prosperity under colonial rule, than they do today under independent governments.** While opposition parties have been permitted to exist in some countries in the last few years, the oppressive habits associated with one-party dictatorial rule have been hard to break.

In the 1960s, American conservatives were outspoken against the wave of decolonization and democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa, that was being pushed by the United States and the former Soviet Union. William F. Buckley, in his book, *Up From Liberalism* wrote:

"We see in the revolt of the masses in Africa the mischief of the white man's abstractions: for the West has, by its doctrinaire approval of democracy, deprived itself of the moral base from which to talk back to the apologists of rampant nationalism....Democracy, to be successful, must be practiced by politically mature people among whom there is a consensus on the meaning of life within their society....If the majority wills what is socially atavistic, then to thwart the majority may be the indicated, though concededly the undemocratic, course. It is more important for a community, wherever situated geographically, to affirm and live by civilized standards than to labor at the job of swelling the voting lists".

Buckley tried to make the distinction between universal suffrage and freedom, in his analysis of the conditions in the American South before the passage of Civil Rights legislation, which he compared to colonial rule in Africa:

"Does the vote really make one free? I do not believe it necessarily does....Being able to vote is no more to have realized freedom than being able to read is to have realized wisdom. Reasonable limitations upon the vote are not recommended exclusively by tyrants or oligarchs (was Jefferson either?). The problem of the South is not how to get the vote for the Negro, but how to train the Negro – and a great many whites – to cast a thoughtful vote"

Buckley was however careful to distinguish his position in opposing universal franchise in the American South, from that of the southern segregationists who advanced genetic arguments in opposing black voting rights in the South:

"There are no scientific grounds for assuming congenital Negro disabilities. The problem is not biological, but cultural and educational"

Today, if one was to argue in favor of restrictions to the right to vote, one would be labeled as an enemy of freedom. But, as we have seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Venezuela, and in much of Black Africa, democracy does not necessarily lead to freedom. With hundreds of thousands of Iraqis fleeing their country as a result of the violence that has engulfed that nation, can anyone seriously suggest that Iraqis are freer today than they were under Saddam Hussein?

Are the nations of Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo freer today, than

they were under colonial rule?

The state governments that existed in the American South during the Jim Crow era discredited the respectable and honorable Western tradition of placing reasonable restrictions on who to allow to vote. Putting restrictions on the vote using poll taxes, literacy tests, and property ownership qualifications, has helped many Western nations to preserve liberty and order for centuries. But Southern state governments in the post-Reconstruction era applied such restrictions unfairly, in a manner which was blatantly discriminatory on the basis of race. In the early part of the 20th Century, Booker T. Washington called on black Americans to work hard to improve their educational and economic status, in order to more fully participate in the American political process. But by denying educated and financially successful Blacks access to the ballot, the state governments of the South destroyed Washington's vision of building racial harmony in America. As a result, divisive demagogues like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton have risen to prominence, and shape the agenda on race relations in America today.

Universal suffrage is a very recent development in the West. Britain attained universal suffrage only in 1928, when all adults over the age of 21 were allowed to vote. A century earlier, voting in Britain was limited to a tiny percentage of the adult male population. The Tories held power from 1783 to 1830, a 46 year stretch that was only briefly interrupted in 1806-1807. Charles Grey finally took over as a Whig Prime Minister in 1830. He passed the Reform Act in 1832, which significantly expanded the percentage of male citizens who were allowed to vote. The 1832 reforms gave one in five adult males the right to vote. The property qualifications for voting were gradually lowered over the decades, enfranchising more and more people, before they were finally abolished in 1928. During this time, the educational, social, and cultural level of the British masses was gradually raised, which enabled a successful transition to majority rule without destabilizing the social order.

In the United States, the founding fathers set out to create a constitutional republic, not a pure democracy. At the time the Constitution was adopted, half of the white adult male population could not meet the property qualification for voting in elections. Because women could not vote, that meant that only 25 percent of the white citizens of the US were entitled to vote. The U.S. finally gained the universal franchise in 1965, where adult citizens of both genders and all races were given the right to vote. By this time, the majority of American families were middle-class people who owned their homes—and therefore, such a measure did not threaten the stability of the market economy. Given that Britain and the US took so long to build well-functioning democratic systems, it is unrealistic to expect African nations to have set up successful democratic societies, given the high poverty rates and the low levels of civilization of most of the population.

Classical liberals have long said that one cannot build a free society without putting in place a political system that protected property rights. The 17th Century English philosopher, John Locke, asserted that the prerequisites for a free society were the protection of life, liberty, and property. Locke did not limit his definition of property to material goods, but included as a form of property the ownership of one's labor. Twentieth century Communists understood that, by abolishing private property through nationalization, they would completely strip private citizens of their means of self-support and independence, reducing them to the status of slaves. This led

to a situation where people living under Communism were completely dependent on the government for their very survival, which allowed the government to control every aspect of their lives.

With this understanding of liberalism, Ian Douglas Smith, the former Prime Minister of Rhodesia, can be rightly regarded as Africa's first classical liberal revolutionary. In 1965, he led a revolution for freedom, when he initiated the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) of Rhodesia from Britain. The UDI was intended to preserve Christianity, freedom, and civilization. For that courageous action, Smith became one of the most vilified men in history, and his country was subjected to comprehensive United Nations economic sanctions in 1966. He was falsely labeled as a racist and white supremacist. But, unlike the architects of apartheid in neighboring South Africa, he has never supported claims that blacks are inherently inferior. However, like Buckley, Smith recognized that the low levels of education and cultural development of most of the blacks, made the establishment of a successful pure democracy a difficult undertaking.

In addition, there were numerous previous examples of failed attempts to establish pure democracies in Africa, from Guinea and Ghana, to Nigeria and Uganda, **and there was good reason to expect that Rhodesia would follow a similarly tragic path if the universal franchise was extended. Facing a possible future of either a Marxist dictatorship or anarchy, the Rhodesian leadership declared independence and prevented Britain from imposing majority rule in the colony. The lives, liberty, and property of people of all races in Rhodesia were preserved.**

Smith was motivated by the desire to uphold the historical Anglo-Saxon tradition of limiting the vote to that segment of the population that would be able to use it responsibly. The Rhodesian UDI of 1965 was modeled on the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, and the Rhodesians had great respect and admiration for America. However, the Rhodesian admiration for America was not reciprocated, and the U.S. joined the rest of the world in denouncing and isolating a friendly country.

The Rhodesian government was unfairly compared to the segregationist state governments of the American South, and to South Africa under apartheid rule. However, Rhodesia did not have the rigid racial segregation that characterized those two other systems of government, and Blacks were allowed to vote in Rhodesian elections. Blacks were allowed to have 16 seats in the 66 member Rhodesian parliament, while whites held 50 seats. Voting was limited to those who could meet the literacy and property ownership qualifications, just like in Britain and the United States in the relatively recent past. Rhodesia was a limited democracy, not a pure democracy.

It was expected that, with time, as black Rhodesians became better educated and more prosperous, they would gradually gain greater representation in the Rhodesian Parliament. Eventually, white and black Rhodesians would share power in the Rhodesian Parliament, under a 50-50 arrangement. This position fell short of majority rule. But since the whites had created and built the country, and were expected to pay a disproportionate share of the taxes even in the future, this arrangement seemed to be fair. Many white and black Rhodesians felt that this

power sharing model would prevent Rhodesia from becoming a Marxist dictatorship like Nkrumah's Ghana, or deteriorating into the chaos of the democratic republics of Congo and Somalia. But the international community would not accept anything less than black majority rule.

By the mid 1970s, Rhodesia had, proportionally, the largest black middle-class in Africa, and it was growing rapidly. This was despite the fact that Rhodesia was under U.N. economic sanctions, and the government was spending vast sums of money waging a war against Marxist terrorists, who were based in neighboring Mozambique and Zambia. Despite those challenges, Rhodesia was a successful limited democracy, governed by the rule of law, having independent courts, and a multiparty system of government. The leader of the official opposition in parliament was black, and he and other black members of parliament were able to openly criticize Prime Minister Smith and his government for what they felt were their shortcomings. This was in stark contrast to the situation in the rest of Africa, where one-party dictatorial rule was the norm, and criticism of the president was equated with treason.

In 1979, a power-sharing agreement between white Rhodesians and their moderate black allies was arrived at. Free and fair elections were held under universal suffrage, which led to black majority rule, but there were strong guarantees put in place to protect white minority rights. The new government was headed by the moderate black clergyman, Abel Muzorewa, and he was committed to maintaining Rhodesia's capitalist system and its economic prosperity. However, Muzorewa's government was denied recognition by the West, and Rhodesia remained under U.N. economic sanctions. U.S. President Jimmy Carter and British Prime Minister James Callaghan, demanded new elections that would include the participation of terrorist leaders who did not believe in the democratic process.

New elections were held in 1980, and the Maoist terrorist Robert Mugabe won the vote through appeals to tribal sentiment and by intimidating rural voters in the Shona-dominated provinces. Mugabe was a devoted student of Kwame Nkrumah, having lived and worked in Nkrumah's Ghana in the late 1950s, where he closely observed how his mentor managed his government. Since 1980, Rhodesians (now called Zimbabweans), have had less freedom than they ever had under Smith.

The economy of Zimbabwe gradually declined from 1980 to 1999. In the year 2000, the Mugabe regime launched the infamous invasions of white-owned farms that completely destroyed the country's agriculturally-based economy. Ironically, the Zimbabwean government already owned millions of acres of land, which it could have re-distributed to poor blacks, without touching the white-owned farms. But Mugabe did not want a sensible solution to the land question. He was driven by the desire to punish white Zimbabweans for supporting the emerging opposition party, known as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). As anyone with knowledge of the situation in Zimbabwe knows, Mugabe never had any intention of helping Zimbabwe's poor, despite his rhetoric on the issue. The black middle-class, which had thrived under Smith, has now been almost completely wiped out. Just as the Bolsheviks of the former Soviet Union enslaved the Russian people by abolishing private property, Mugabe is now in the process of seizing privately-owned business enterprises, just as he seized the white-owned

commercial farms. Instead of condemning Mugabe, corrupt African politicians view Mugabe as some sort of hero, for his defiance of the West.

Out of concern for Africa's future, I founded the African Conservative Forum (ACF) in May, 2007. My organization seeks not just the downfall of the Mugabe regime, but the complete dismantling of the disastrous Marxist legacy that Nkrumah and Mugabe have bequeathed to Africa. One of the major tasks that I plan to undertake is the distribution of 10,000 copies of Ian Smith's autobiography, *The Great Betrayal*, to African legislators, civil servants, academics, journalists, university students, diplomats and others. Individuals or organizations that may be interested in assisting in this important task, can contact me.

Reading Smith's memoirs changed my life. His book helped to make me a conservative. If African intellectuals were to get an opportunity to read his autobiography, they would realize, as I did, that the true freedom fighter from Rhodesia is Ian Smith, not Robert Mugabe. Once they learn about the link between property and freedom, and how pure democracy and political independence do not necessarily translate into freedom, then they would get a true idea of what freedom is all about.

If there is any African leader who deserves a presidential library, it is Ian Smith. His memoirs spell out how Africa can move forward to a future of liberty and prosperity. It is often said that prophets are not honored in their home countries. Smith can accurately be described as a prophet, because he predicted disaster for Rhodesia once it came under the control of the communist terrorist, Robert Mugabe. Many people who opposed Smith in the past are finally coming to realize how right he was. In the British Sunday Times newspaper of September 23, 2007, Judith Todd, a left-liberal human rights activist who was one of Smith's most outspoken opponents in the 1970s, now admits that "Mugabe was rotten from the start".

Not surprisingly, the Marxist government of Zimbabwe viciously attacks Smith's legacy in the history books and in the state-controlled media. But what is more difficult to understand is the reaction of the brave men and women who make up the opposition to the Mugabe regime, whenever the UDI era is mentioned. **Zimbabwean opposition activists, both white and black, make strenuous efforts to distance themselves from Smith, out of fear of being labeled lackeys of the colonialists by the Mugabe regime.**

The minds of the Zimbabwean people have been so poisoned against Smith, that it seems highly unlikely that he will receive the honor he truly deserves, even if the opposition comes to power in the next general elections scheduled for 2008. **I often dream about building an Ian Smith Library here in Nairobi, where I would be able to educate future generations of African leaders about Smith's admirable legacy. But I guess, given the high cost of such a project, it will remain an impossible dream.**

In 1980, when Mugabe came to power, Rhodesia had a GDP per capita that was comparable to that of Malaysia. Today, Malaysia is hailed around the world as one of East Asia's great economic success stories, and is a newly industrialized country that manufactures goods of all

sorts. Yet, in 1980, Rhodesia had economic policies that were more business-friendly than those of Malaysia, and a civil service that was far more honest and efficient than Malaysia's. Both nations are former British colonies, and have a public service modeled on that of Britain.

Where would Rhodesia be today, if Ian Smith's vision of power-sharing rather than majority rule, had come to pass? I will try to hazard a guess. Rhodesia would have experienced an economic boom without precedent in Africa's history, with impressive double-digit growth in the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond. The white population would probably be double what it was in 1980, growing from 250,000 to 500,000. This would have been partly as a result of natural increase, because of the lower costs of raising children in Rhodesia. Many of the hundreds of thousands of Portuguese settlers who fled from the Communist revolutions in Angola and Mozambique would have moved to Rhodesia. There would also have been some immigration from South Africa, as well as from many Western nations, attracted by Rhodesia's pleasant climate and promising economic future. All those whites would have brought useful skills that would have benefited the country immensely.

Interestingly, the dynamism of the free market would have reduced the racial disparities in land ownership in a fair and transparent manner. This is because the rapid growth in manufacturing, tourism, and other industries, would have led to many black workers abandoning their jobs in the white farms for better economic opportunities in the cities. The resulting rise in average black agricultural wages would have put many white farms out of business, and some of the farmers would have been forced to sub-divide and sell their farms. The newly economically empowered blacks would have purchased plots of land for residential use, or for small-scale horticulture.

If Smith's vision had prevailed, Zimbabwe would have had a GDP per capita equal to, or higher than, that of Malaysia. But the sad reality is that Zimbabwe's GDP per capita today is lower than that of Haiti. The Caribbean nations of Barbados and the Bahamas are majority black former British colonies, **and they can provide us with a model of what the future could have been in Rhodesia, if the Communists had not taken over.** Both nations have maintained the colonial tradition of providing strong protections for property rights, and, today, both nations have a GDP per capita higher than that of Malaysia.

My British and American friends often ask me to predict the future of South Africa, and whether that nation will go the way of Zimbabwe. I am often tempted to tell them what they want to hear – the politically-correct answer that the situations in Zimbabwe and South Africa are different, and that all is well in South Africa. But the past record of the ANC does not give me much cause for optimism. During the days of white rule, the ANC worked to mobilize black support by stirring up anti-white hatred. The late ANC activist, Peter Mokaba, is credited with creating the infamous chant, "Kill the Boer, kill the farmer". Not to be outdone, the main rival of the ANC among the black radicals, the PAC party, had its own rallying cry, "One settler, one bullet".

As one can expect, the anti-white hatred that the ANC and PAC stirred up during the era of white rule, did not dissipate with the coming of majority rule. The ANC leadership blames all its failures on whites and the supposed 'legacy of apartheid'. There has also

been an explosion in the rate of violent crime, in which whites have been disproportionately targeted, and which the ANC has shown an unwillingness to deal with. Some 210,000 blacks and 40,000 whites have been murdered since 1994. When he was challenged on his failure to tackle violent crime, the South African Security Minister, Charles Nqakula, told his critics that if they were unhappy with the conditions in South Africa they should leave the country. His statement was widely understood as being targeted at South African whites.

Blacks in South Africa enjoy one of the highest standards of living in Africa. Yet the ANC blames whites for the poverty and landlessness of much of the black population. The government of South Africa owns millions of hectares, and is the largest land owner in South Africa. Instead of offering this land to South Africa's poor people of all races, the ANC focuses on making the blacks envious of the white land owners who produce most of South Africa's food. The ANC plans to maintain its hold on power for decades to come, by inciting racial resentment against the white minority. There is a real danger that the country may join the long list of failed democracies in Africa. Unless a new generation of enlightened black leaders emerges in South Africa, committed to promoting Christian values, property rights, and free market economic policies, South Africa's future looks bleak.

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See also:

[*A Tribute To Ian Douglas Smith*](#)

[*Hope for Africa*](#)

[*Zimbabwe : A Lesson in How to Destroy Civilization*](#)

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