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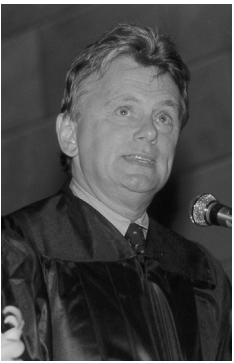
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Because Ideas Have Consequences

The Disconnect Between Hollywood and America

Pat Sajak

Host, Wheel of Fortune



PAT SAJAK was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1946 and attended Columbia College. Hired at his first job in broadcasting in 1967, he left college in 1968 to volunteer for the Army and was posted to Vietnam, where he served as a morning disc jockey on Armed Forces Radio. Following his discharge, Mr. Sajak's broadcasting career brought him to television station KNBC in Los Angeles, where he performed weather duties and hosted a weekend talk show. *Wheel of Fortune* creator Merv Griffin hired him to host the then-daytime game show in 1981, adding the syndicated evening version in 1983. Since then, the program has been the most watched show of any kind in syndication. Mr. Sajak's honors and awards include three Emmys, a People's Choice Award, and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. In addition to his broadcasting career, he owns a radio station in

Annapolis, Maryland, a television production company (in association with Sony Pictures), a music publishing company and a record label. He has performed readings with, and guest-conducted for, the Dallas, Pacific and Florida Symphony Orchestras, and serves on the boards of the Claremont Institute and the American Cinema Foundation.

The following is abridged from a speech delivered at Hillsdale's All-College Spring Convocation, held at the College Baptist Church, on April 4, 2002.

Here in this quiet, peaceful corner of Michigan, you might not have a sense of your importance in the world. I come from a community that has the opposite problem. Because it is so big and so powerful, so great and so well-known, it has an exaggerated view of its significance. That community is Hollywood. Not Hollywood, the town. Not much Show Business actually goes on there. Most of the studios are spread around other Southern California communities, like Culver City or Burbank. But I mean Hollywood, the Entertainment Mecca – which includes parts of Southern California and New York City, and, because news has become entertainment, some of Washington, D.C., as well.

While I work in Hollywood, I live elsewhere. My family and I live in a quiet suburb of Annapolis, Maryland. The kids go to school there. They live near their grandparents – my in-laws – and most of my neighbors care very little about overnight ratings, box office grosses and sweeps weeks. We don't hate L.A. In fact, we like it, and we spend a great deal of time there. But I happen to have a job that allows me a great deal of flexibility, and that gives me the luxury of living a *real* life in addition to my fake one.

You see, one of the dangers of my business is that it has the potential to fill you with a distorted view of life and of your importance in it. And it's understandable in a way. If you are part of a successful enterprise, people treat you very well. They send limos for you. They tiptoe around you. They pretend that the most outlandish or inane things

you might say are important and quotable. Drugs? Adultery? Alcoholism? Deviant behavior? Don't worry. You go on Oprah...you cry...people call you heroic for being so open...and your career soars to new heights.

You're treated importantly, so you must be important. Suddenly your views are not just your own private opinions; they become part of the public record. They quote you on *Entertainment Tonight* and in *People* magazine. You can endorse a candidate, fight for a cause, call people names – it's pretty heady stuff. The world waits breathlessly for your next pronouncement.

Rosie O'Donnell – a daytime talk show host – goes public with her sexual preference, and she is lauded as brave. What exactly is brave about that? First of all, who cares? And what's brave about getting the chance to be interviewed by ABC and landing on magazine covers? I characterize it as bravery-as-a-career-move.

I don't mean to pick on Ms. O'Donnell, but it's just another example of the self-importance that Show Business can bestow on you – the idea that your sexual preference matters to anyone other than your immediate family and your partner, or partners, seems rather silly to me.

Speaking of silly, Alec Baldwin, an actor, recently compared the election of George Bush to the terrorist attacks of last September. This is the same Baldwin brother who promised to leave the country if Bush were elected. Sadly, he reneged on that one. Baldwin also went on Conan O'Brien's late-night show during the Clinton impeachment to say that Illinois Republican Congressman Henry Hyde should be shot – along with his family.

Do remarks like that get you chastised in Hollywood? Ostracized? Marginalized? No, it's Alec Baldwin. He's an actor. He's in Show Business. He's important.

The silliness and outrageousness that emanates from Hollywood comes from non-performers as well. Ted Turner once mocked his employees who had ashes on their foreheads for Ash Wednesday as "Jesus Freaks." Mr. Turner, a self-proclaimed protector of human rights, apparently has his limits.

Filmmaker Rob Reiner – a co-founder of Castle Rock entertainment – is reportedly upset by what he sees in many films these days, and he plans to do something about it. In fact, he's so upset about this thing, anyone who wants to depict it in a Castle Rock film must meet with Reiner first in order to justify its inclusion.

So what's got Rob so upset? Gratuitous violence? Casual sex? Disrespect toward Christianity? Bias against Big Business? Is that what he wants to

cut down or eliminate? No, of course not. That would be censorship. He wants to get rid of smoking. There's too much smoking in movies.

To quote Mr. Reiner, "Movies are basically advertising cigarettes to kids." No knock on Rob. In fact, I agree with him. But why is smoking open to censorship and not these other issues? And what happened to Hollywood's argument that movies and TV shows don't *cause* bad behavior, they just reflect it. Or is it merely a health issue? But surely, health is involved when it comes to violence and casual sex. The answer is, there is no answer. It's just Hollywood being Hollywood. It's monumental hypocrisy. Kids can't pick up bad habits from what they watch...oh, except for smoking.

You see, if *you* complain about what you see as excesses on the screen, you are a book-burning prude who wants to tell everyone else how to live. You are a censor. You have no right. That is a right saved for the wise. They know better. They are important.

It's the same kind of nonsense that brings celebrities to "Save the Earth" benefits in eight-mile-per-gallon limos. Or that allows them to make a public service announcement urging recycling – filmed at their 20,000 square foot homes. They can lecture to you and you should listen, even if *they* don't, because...well, because they're celebrities. They're from Hollywood, for goodness sake...and you live in Michigan!

I could go on with a laundry list of silly and hypocritical things said and done by some of my fellow Show Business luminaries, but the point here is not to make them look silly. They're perfectly capable of doing that without my help. The larger point is the disconnect between the realities of this nation and its people, and the perceived realities of many in the entertainment community.

I don't mean to sound too harsh – or hypocritical. After all, I seem perfectly happy to have cashed my checks for the more-than-30-years I've been in television. And I'm not exactly working on the Dead Sea Scrolls. I *do* make a living by selling vowels and spinning a giant multi-colored wheel! So who am I to be pointing fingers? Well, I'm just someone who wants to feel prouder than he does – as proud as he once was – about what goes on in his industry. And that's why I spend only part of my time around it. I need to step back occasionally. I think it does help me see the world more clearly.

And that's the irony of it all. Whether it is from my home in Maryland or from your classroom here in Hillsdale, you – in a very real way – are more aware of what this nation

and this world are about than the supposedly well-connected and in-tune people who inhabit our media culture.

Former CBS Newsman Bernard Goldberg has written a best-selling book called *Bias*, in which he maintains that the real problem with the media is not a bias based on liberal vs. conservative or Republican vs. Democrat. It is a bias based on the sameness of worldview caused by social, intellectual, educational and professional inbreeding. These are folks who travel in the same circles, go to the same parties, talk to the same people, compare their ideas to people with the same ideas, and develop a standard view on issues that makes any deviation from them seem somehow marginal, or even weird.

They think they have diversity in their midst because they take pains to hire a representative mix of gender and race. But there is no diversity of *thought*. On the great social issues of our time, there is an alarmingly monolithic view held by what has become known as the “media elite.” You can bet that the *New York Times* is careful about how many women it hires, but you can also bet that it is *not* very careful that these women hold diverse views on issues they’ll be writing about, such as the environment, gun control or abortion. My guess is that a pro-life view within the walls of the *Times* is a pretty rare one. And the same holds true on the entertainment side. It is just assumed that “right thinking people” hold certain views. If you *don’t*...well there’s the problem. How can you portray people fairly in film or on TV if you think their attitudes are so foreign?

How can you write about people fairly if they seem so out of touch with what you are used to in your everyday life? That might help explain why religion is rarely depicted as a natural part of life in the average sitcom or

drama series, despite the fact that tens of millions of Americans say that it is important to them.

How can you write about people fairly if they seem so out of touch with what you are used to in your everyday life? That might help explain why religion is rarely depicted as a natural part of life in the average sitcom or drama series, despite the fact that tens of millions of Americans say that it is important to them.

At a dinner party in Los Angeles recently, our hostess was about to say some grudgingly kind words about President Bush and the way he was handling the War on Terror. She prefaced her remarks by saying, “Now I know everyone at this table voted for Al Gore, but...” Well, she knew no such thing. She just presumed it. It’s what “right-thinking” people did. This “false reality” is a phenomenon that permeates media circles.

It’s the phenomenon that caused Pauline Kael, former film critic for *The New Yorker*, to remark after Richard Nixon’s election sweep in 1972, “I can’t believe it! I don’t know a single person who voted for him.” This was a man who won in 49 out of 50 states, and she didn’t know *one* person who voted for

him. And I don’t think she was dealing in hyperbole. She simply had never met those people. She couldn’t believe they really existed.

It’s the phenomenon that allows the media to “rediscover” patriotism and heroism in the wake of September 11, when those of you in Hillsdale, and millions of others in St. Louis, Cleveland, Salem, Phoenix, Cheyenne, and a thousand other cities and small towns know that those traits never went away.

It’s the phenomenon that explains Hollywood’s disdain for big business. You read about it in the newsmagazines and see it in the movies. Big business is bad. The people who run these businesses are heartless, often criminal, brutes. There is no regard for the little guy. Thousands are laid off while the greedy business executives reap windfall profits. Never mind that some of the biggest and least-competitive businesses are in entertainment. They

merge, they lay off thousands, while stock options accrue to the top executives. Top talent at networks and in movies get tens – even hundreds – of millions while so many of their co-workers, the little people they care so much about, lose their jobs. They simply don't see the contradiction. They are above it.

And, perhaps worst of all, it's the phenomenon that allows movie studios and television networks to program with an utter disregard for your kids and your communities. It's not that they're evil people. *They* have kids and they care about them. But they see no connection between what they do and the results of what they do. And, besides, you're not really families and communities. You're ratings, demographics and sales.

You see, they are – for the most part – clueless. Clueless about this country and its people. Clueless about you. And they are afraid. They are afraid of the new technologies...afraid of the dwindling numbers of viewers or readers or listeners...afraid for their very existence. So, don't you see, they have to do what it takes to survive. They must survive. They are important. Who do you people out here – the ones they fly over on their way to the other Coast for meetings – who do you think you are?

Well, you are this country. You are its future. And I think that's a very good thing to be. The world can look mighty dark and forbidding at times. But how exciting to be in a position to help change all that. And you're at the center of it. The center is not Los Angeles or New York. The power is not in Hollywood or Washington. The power is here.

Oh, you may end up in one of those other locations, but look what you will bring with you. This place. Its ideals. Its strengths. Its traditions. You will have spent these formative years in a setting where ideas can be discussed and treated with respect. Where the great traditions of this nation and its cultural heritage have been passed on to you...and, through you, will be passed on to countless others.

No matter how you eventually make your living or where you live your life, your time here at Hillsdale helps assure that you will have a positive impact on your generation. That strikes me as an excellent start on your legacy.

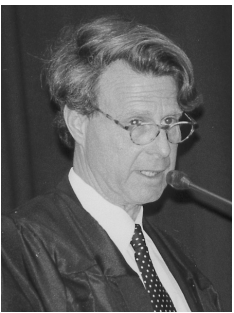
I will take a small part of Hillsdale with me when I leave. I envy the *big* part that each of you will carry throughout your lives. This resource – this power – *is* reality. Not the media's version of it. And you possess it. Use it wisely. Thank you. 🇺🇸

“Defend civilization itself”

Address at Hillsdale Academy

Mark Helprin

Novelist and Contributing Editor, The Wall Street Journal



MARK HELPRIN, a novelist and a contributing editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, was raised on the Hudson and in the British West Indies. After receiving degrees from Harvard College and Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, he did postgraduate work at the University of Oxford, and he has served in the British Merchant Navy, the Israeli infantry, and the Israeli Air Force. He was published in *The New Yorker* for almost a quarter of a century, and his stories and essays appear in the *New York Times*, *Commentary*, *American Heritage*, *Forbes ASAP*, and many other publications here and abroad. Translated into more than a dozen languages, his books include *Refiner's Fire*, *Winter's Tale*, *A Soldier of the Great War* and *Memoir from Antproof Case*.

The following speech was delivered to the graduating class of Hillsdale Academy, Hillsdale College's K-12 model school, on May 24, 2002.

I had wanted to speak to you tonight about defense, about the campaign in Afghanistan, and the war against terrorism – to shower you with facts and figures, which would support my

contention that, in regard to the defense of this country, three administrations in a row have not done, and are not doing, enough. Three administrations in a row have not appreciated, and still do not appreciate, the gathering storm. I had wanted to do that, but the president of a surrounding college said, wisely, “Remember the occasion.” And I shall, for it is a most worthy occasion, and he is right, it must take precedence over policy, which

not only blows with the wind, but disappears with it.

The graduates tonight cannot know what is in their parents' hearts. You have been spared that, until you have children of your own, who are about to take the first step in leaving you . . . forever. Among those of false and mechanistic emotion, the expectation is that your parents will be overjoyed. But in a world where things matter, where love is understood in its relation to mortality, and where there is the courage of commitment — which is to say, in this world — they cannot be overjoyed. And this I know not only because I once left my own parents, and then they left, me, forever, but because I have two daughters of your age, and although they must, it breaks my heart to see them go.

My heart will have to wait, however, because by tradition in this the very last act of your extraordinary secondary education I am obliged to impart to you some sort of resolution for which, given the nature of that education, you are particularly suited. It is also my hope that, in regard to resolution, I can outdo the deservedly most famous high school commencement address in all of history, Clarence Darrow's command to a 1918 graduating class: Get out of here and go swimming. That's admirable, but I would like to add just a little more, and to lengthen it by only a third. My charge to you, then, taking into account who you are and the nature of this institution, is: Get out of here, go swimming, and defend Western Civilization. Admittedly that is a bit more than Darrow asked, but then again he was a Progressive, and Progressives are notoriously permissive with their young. I know that such a charge is most ambitious, but it comes at the right time, both in history and in your lives.

There is a time to lay down arms, and there is a time to take them up, and that we are now in a time to take them up is self-evident. Those for whom it is not self-evident, who would challenge the right to defend against and preempt barbarous attacks upon our persons and our country, and who would instead substitute a distorted inquiry that would end in the condemnation not of the terrorists but of the terrorized, do not find the need to defend their civilization — Western Civilization — self-evident. Nor do they find the action of doing so congenial, in that it is something from which they habitually abstain. This is a serious charge, and I have drawn a clear line, but I mean to, so let me give you an example.

Several years ago, I was speaking in a university town in Massachusetts. By some quirk which I hope never to see reproduced, and before I knew what was happening, I found myself debating my entire audience on the subjects of human sacrifice and cannibalism. These well educated and polite people — only a few of whom would actually have

murdered or eaten one another — who had sons and daughters, Ph.D.s, and BMWs, were defending the Mayan and Aztec practice of human sacrifice — that is, in the main, of children — and the South Sea custom of cannibalism. It wasn't that they were for such things: they weren't. It wasn't that they were not against them: they were. It was that to take the position that human sacrifice and cannibalism are wrong is not only to reject relativism but to place oneself decisively in the ranks of Western Civilization, such a position being one of its characteristic distinctions, and this they would not do. They were ashamed to do so, and they were afraid to do so. My charge to you is that in this, you never be either ashamed or afraid.

Civilization is vulnerable not only to munitions, it is vulnerable to cowardice and betrayal. It is a great and massive thing of many dimensions that can be attacked from many angles. When professors of ethics at leading universities advocate infanticide, you know that civilization is under attack. When governments and churches advocate racial discrimination, you know that civilization is under attack. When a popular “art” exhibit consists of human cadavers in various states of mutilation, including a bisected pregnant woman and her unborn child, you know that civilization is under attack. The list is endless. The daily assault could fill an encyclopedia of decadence and degradation.

You must never fail to stand against such things, to use your education to break the sophistry that surrounds them, and to draw upon it to summon the memory of a thousand struggles, of ten thousand battles, and of the countless millions who fell to establish and defend those principles that not long ago were called self-evident, and that, now and forever, absent moral cowardice, are self-evident.

If civilization can be attacked on many fronts, it can also be defended on many fronts, and to do so you need not necessarily drop into Afghanistan by parachute or found a political party. Last summer in Venice, I was walking from room to room in the *Accademia*, which, unlike timid American museums, throws its windows wide open to the light and air of day. As if to bring even further alive the greatness and truth of the Bellinis and the Giorgiones on the walls, the galleries were flooded with music. As is most everything in Italy, it was unofficial. It came from a guitarist and a soprano on a side street. He played while she sang — gloriously — Bach, Handel, Mozart, and anonymous folk songs of the 18th Century. Because it was music, I cannot properly convey to you how beautiful it was, but it was



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accomplished, precise, and infused with the ineffable quality that lifts great art above that which merely aspires to or pretends to be great art. I could not see them from the windows, but when, several hours later, I went outside, they had neither ceased, nor skipped a beat, nor produced a single false note.

They were impoverished Poles, who appeared to be in their late twenties. She was thin, sharp-featured, and hauntingly beautiful. Most people simply passed them by, some dropped a few coins in a basket at her feet, and the visitors to the *Accademia* had no idea who they were, but she sang as if she were bathed in the footlights of La Scala, where she should have been, and where someday she may be. It did not matter that they were unrecognized, that they sang on the street, or that they were desperately poor, because that day in Venice they rose above everyone else except perhaps the saints. In this they shared a brotherhood with the American soldier who made the first parachute jump, in the dark, into Afghanistan. For they and he were defending the civilization of the West, and they and he are inextricably linked. Without the soldier, they could

not exist except in subjugation, and without them, he would not have enough to fight for.

I ask you to join this brotherhood, and, in your own way, whatever that may be, to defend and champion the sanctity of the individual, free and objective inquiry, government by consent of the governed, freedom of conscience, and the pursuit – rather than the degradation and denial – of truth and of beauty. I ask you to defend a civilization so buoyant with the presence of God that it need never compel others in His name. I ask you to defend a civilization that rather than deliberately obscuring the difference between combatants and non-combatants, struggles to maintain and respect it. I ask you to defend a civilization of immeasurable achievement, brilliance, and freedom. I ask you to defend civilization itself.

It is not without risk, and to request this of you in the presence of your parents is something I can do only because I ask the same of my own children. Because of the temper of the times (and, some would say, the temper of all times), what may be exacted from you is sacrifice – of income, position,

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continued from page 6

title, acceptance, respect, perhaps even of life. But what may be provided, or, rather, earned, is a kind of battlefield commission that will give you neither rank nor insignia nor anything but honor. And therein lies the justifying balance, for honor is usually worth at least what you must give up to obtain it. We have heard of late how we are at a disadvantage in the war that has just begun, because in the West we cling to life and comfort at the expense of honor. Our enemies tell us that, and in the telling they barely conceal their enjoyment. Do they really believe this? Because if they do, I have a message for them: The sense of honor in the West may be slow to awaken, but it exists in measures and quantities, when it does awaken, enough to fill the world, as it shall, as it must. How do they think we have come to where we are? How do they think we survived the battles that led to the great revisions in this civilization, its unprecedented turnings, redirections, and rededications – of which, being entirely unself-critical and subjective, they have not yet had the courage to make even one? They say we have no history. Did we spring from a leaf? How do they think we have come through our five

thousand years? Honor. From long familiarity, we know what honor is.

It is what enables the individuals to do right in the face of complacency and cowardice. It is what enables the soldier to die alone, the political prisoner to resist, the singer to sing her song, hardly appreciated, on a side street. It is God's valuation and resplendent touch, His gift of strength to those who need it most, when they need it most.

I ask you to defend and protect what is great and good, to choose your battles, but to stand your ground. For little things cascade into big things, and even should the larger battle not go well, hold your position. Even if, in the end, you do not prevail – though you must – you will have done right, and the ghosts of those who came before you over many thousands of years, of those who fell unknown and unremembered while doing right, of those who upheld against all pressures and in the face of wounding opposition, will be justly honored, as you will be justly honored, by those who come after you.

Congratulations, and God bless. 

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