

GIVE ME A BREAK

How I exposed hucksters, cheats, and scam artists, and became the scourge of the liberal media, by John Stossel

2004, Harper Collins, 286 pages

You may recall I mentioned that John Stossel addressed our NH Liberty Forum in February (2007) as the banquet keynote speaker. I lamented then that I had not been properly appreciative of the courageous work of this noble contrarian knight of the mainstream media (M2).

He is after all an explicit libertarian (possibly even a Randian). In *Give Me a Break*, Stossel writes that his liberal peers and audience regard him as “that [damnable] conservative on ABC.” To which he counters:

“I’m hardly what I would call a conservative. I happen to think consenting adults should be able to do just about anything they want. I think prostitution should be permitted. I believe homosexuality is perfectly natural, that the drug war should be ended, that flag burning and foul language should be tolerated, and most abortion should be legal.”

He continues, asserting that M2 is tilted so far to the left, they still call him a conservative:

“Libertarian is a better term for my beliefs. But the term [is misinterpreted.] Maybe ‘classical liberal’ is a better term for what I am. Liberals were originally the ones who advocated freedom and tolerance. Not lately.”

He also opposes pseudo-conservatism, skillfully dissecting our current Republican/Neocon brand of crony capitalism and its imperial-fascist excesses with his intellectual scalpel.

Stossel is the real deal, a popular media personality—the weekly viewership of 20/20 is somewhere around 20 million—who lays it on the line for rational liberty. And he gets his facts straight. He *has to* because when he doesn’t all the poseurs he has pissed off form a lynch mob calling for his head.

Some of the sacred cows he slays:

- Business regulation by government—e.g. OSHA, the FDA, the FTC, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), child labor laws, and so on, all radically harmful.
- Scaring ourselves with false threats—Brain cancer from cellphones, exploding Bic pens, toxic waste cause minimal damage compared to smoking, obesity, and poverty.
- Expensive government bureaucracies—e.g. the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) that wastes billions. TSA stands for “thousands standing around.”
- The organic food hoax—Food from regular farms treated with artificial pesticides is generally as good or better for you than 100% organic food.
- Welfare for the rich—Millionaire sports franchise owners receive \$700 million stadiums. Federal flood insurance bails out rich people, including Stossel, who build on the ocean.

“Law grinds the poor, and rich men rule the law.”—Oliver Goldsmith

- Agricultural subsidies—Taxpayers give Arthur Daniels Midland millions in subsidies through corn-ethanol tax breaks of 52 cents a gallon.
- Tort lawyers crush entrepreneurs and kill jobs—Only a fraction of the money goes to plaintiffs. The US needs a “loser pays” system.

I’m just scratching the surface of what Stossel covers in this entertaining, fact-packed book. So much growth of government stems from “concentrated benefits with diffuse costs.” When, on principle, we let the state into our lives, the people with the most to gain are there with a hand out while the people with so little to lose don’t have the time.

Give Me a Break is a deeply rewarding read and a lesson in social morality. As Stossel says, we learned all of this in kindergarten: Don’t hit people, don’t steal people’s stuff, and keep your promises. His book is a potent reminder of our ethical responsibilities along these lines.