

THE COLUMNIST VS. THE MADRASSA  
ALICIA COLON TAKES ON NEW YORK'S ARABIST SCHOOL

SUCCESSING BY THE COWBOY CODE  
LARRY BARNES SADDLES UP IN FRANCE

# THE NEW INDIVIDUALIST

JULY/AUGUST 2008

THE  
LARRY  
ELDER  
INTERVIEW

BY ROBERT L. JONES

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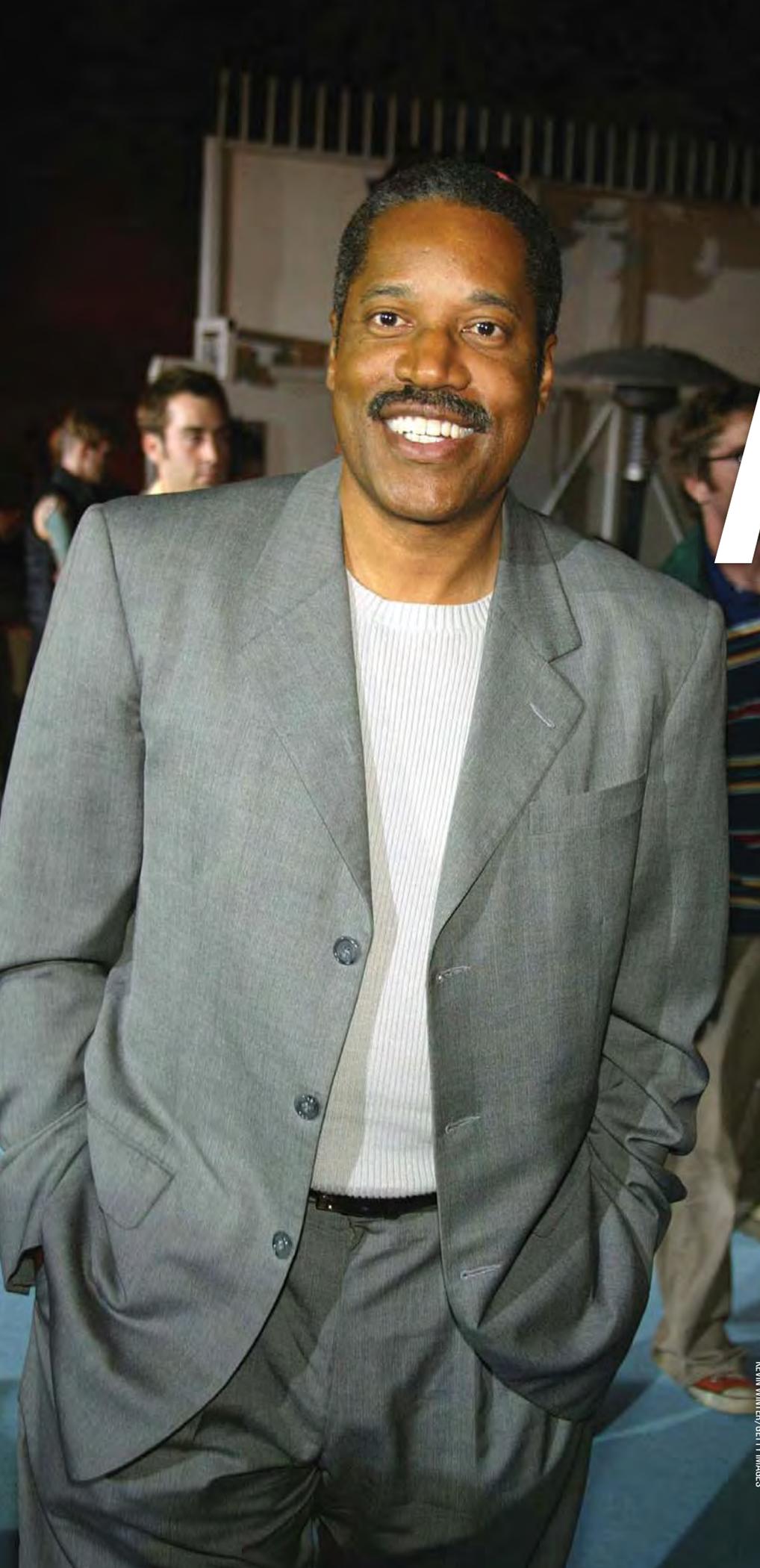
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# *TNI's* Interview with Larry Elder

BY ROBERT L. JONES



**A** According to his website, “best-selling author and radio talk-show host Larry Elder has a take-no-prisoners style, using such old-fashioned things as evidence and logic.”

The Larry Elder Show airs weekday afternoons on KABC in Los Angeles and was syndicated nationally on ABC Radio Networks from 2002 to 2007. The self-described “small-l libertarian” uses common sense and sparkling wit to champion private property, free trade, and school choice, while gleefully dissecting the income tax, racial preferences, and the war on drugs. Although he is not an Objectivist, he says that Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* is one of his favorite books.

Born April 27, 1952, in Los Angeles, Laurence Allen Elder, aka “the Sage from South Central,” attended Brown University, receiving a BA in political science in 1974. Elder attended University of Michigan Law School, graduating in 1977, then practiced with a large law firm in Cleveland, Ohio. He opened Laurence A. Elder and Associates, a business specializing in recruiting attorneys, while simultaneously hosting a topic-oriented television show in Cleveland on PBS and then on the local Fox affiliate. He later hosted the syndicated television show *Moral Court*, and he sat in as a guest host for *Geraldo* on CNBC’s *Rivera Live*. Elder also served as a reporter on the PBS’s National Desk, where his segment “Redefining Racism: Fresh Voices From Black America” won a 1998 AEGIS Award of Excellence, a 1998 Telly award, and a 1999 Emerald City Gold Award of Excellence.

In 2000, Elder published his first book, *The Ten Things You Can’t Say in*

KEVIN WIMMER/GETTY IMAGES



Larry Elder at the Los Angeles Union Mission's Thanksgiving Meal for the Homeless in 2002, with actress Laurie Metcalf.

America, an assault on Political Correctness that dwelled for several weeks on the New York Times bestseller list. He followed up in 2002 with *Showdown: Confronting Bias, Lies, and the Special Interests That Divide America*, again challenging liberals, “victicrats,” and the purveyors of PC. His latest controversial bestseller, *Stupid Black Men: How to Play the Race Card—and Lose*, was released early in 2008. As if all this were not enough, Elder also writes a nationally syndicated newspaper column.

Because of his prominence, influence, and maverick views, Elder has been the subject of profiles on *60 Minutes* and *20/20*. The versatile media marvel has even portrayed himself on sitcoms ranging from *The Hughleys* to *Spin City*.

On March 25, 2008, Larry Elder sat down with *TNI's* entertainment editor, Robert L. Jones, at the Sheraton Universal in Los Angeles for a wide-ranging interview.

**TNI:** So, you are what's called a “small-l libertarian”?

**Elder:** A lot of my listeners will often call up and say, “I preferred you when you were a Libertarian.” I always tell them I never was a “capital-L Libertarian.” I am still “small-l.” It's a philosophy to me, not a party.

I did go to a number of Libertarian Party meetings. I remember one in Washington, D.C., and hearing how all of these people felt about foreign policy, and I thought it was just absurd. I remember giving a speech at the Libertarian Party convention, and someone in the Q-and-A session stood up and said, “Why aren't you a member of the party?” I babbled something along the lines of what I just said, and he had a registra-

tion card and said, “I want you to join right now.” I didn't do it.

**TNI:** I was a dues-paying Libertarian Party member up until a little past September 11, and then I left. I felt like Reagan did about the Democrats: that the party had left me. I was in the military for many years and felt that the Libertarian Party had this utopian way of looking at the world—that if we would just stop being involved in the world, everybody would love us and leave us alone.

**Elder:** Right. Well, the Libertarian Party didn't leave you; you just discovered what they were. They have always been like that. The Libertarian Party is pretty much isolationist. They believe virtually every war ought not to be fought. Some Libertarians even think World War II is a war that the United States should have somehow managed to avoid getting into.

After 9/11 happened, I read three or four articles by [past Libertarian Party presidential candidate] Harry Browne, and the first one blamed American interventionism: If we hadn't been sticking our nose in other people's faces, it never would have happened. I went ballistic about that. He wrote another one saying, “that's not

FREDERICK M. BROWN/BETTY IMAGES

what I meant,” but it *was* what he meant. I don’t want this to sound disrespectful. Harry [now deceased] and his wife and I knew each other for a number of years, and we were very good friends. But the series of columns he wrote after 9/11 was, to me, appalling.

And Ron Paul [former Libertarian Party presidential candidate, now a Republican] personified what I considered to be the contradiction. During one of the debates he said something like: “If we hadn’t been *over there*, they wouldn’t have come *over here*. It was because we were *over there* that made them so angry that they came *over here*. And I agree with Ronald Reagan: These people are completely irrational, we shouldn’t be over there.”

I said on the air that if their being “over here” is because we are “over there,” that is *not* irrational; that is a rational response. You can’t say they are responding rationally to what they perceive to be our excessive involvement, and then say they are irrational. That’s a contradiction.

A lot of people still call up and say, “Why aren’t you supporting Ron Paul?” Because from a domestic standpoint, I agree with virtually everything he says. But the number-one issue to me is national security, far and away. I consider FDR to be a great president, even though he was a socialist and the father of the modern welfare state. But for crying out loud, he absolutely was clear-eyed about the enemy we faced and knew it well before much of America did. Ron Paul personified these contradictions within the Libertarian Party.

Are you a fan of the show *24*, do you watch it?

**TNI:** I don’t watch it often. My editor loves it.

**Elder:** Well, in one of the earliest episodes there is an exchange between the Secretary of Defense and his idealistic son. The liberal son makes the argument that Ron Paul essentially made. The Secretary of Defense says, “Oh, spare me your sixth-grade Michael Moore logic.”

It was just beautiful. From time to time I would play that on my show. Because that is exactly what it is: The idea that the world is full of these rational actors, and if you act nicely, they will act nicely in return; there is no such thing as just out-and-out evil.

**TNI:** A lot of today’s conservatives have bent conservative principles out of recognition.

**Elder:** They have. I remember watching an interview with Fred Barnes on C-SPAN on the tenth anniversary of the *Weekly Standard*. He was asked, “What is the philosophy of your magazine?” And he said, “If there is something called ‘big government conservatism,’ that’s us.” I almost fell off my chair, but he was just being honest.

These are the people who were either okay with, or did not yell and scream about, a prescription-drug-benefits bill for seniors. These are people who were okay with, or did not scream about, the Department of Homeland Security. Who are okay with “No Child Left Behind.” We could go down the list of positions that are completely antithetical to what a limited-government, libertarian/Republican should support: raising the minimum wage, S-CHIP, extending unemployment compensation—which the Bush administration did two or three times. He now says that global warming is here, it’s a fact, and is proposing all sorts of federal legislation to deal with it.

**TNI:** You are often credited with creating the term “Republi-tarian.” How did that come about?

**Elder:** I think a caller suggested that. I can’t say that was something that Larry Elder invented. But I know that I was the first one to begin saying it. I remember a caller said, “You’re a combination of a Republican and a Liber-

**I NEVER BELIEVED THAT  
BECAUSE I WAS BLACK,  
FORCES WOULD PREVENT ME  
FROM SUCCEEDING.**

Despite his personal friendship with Harry Browne, the Libertarian presidential candidate in 2000, Elder was appalled by Browne’s analyses of 9/11.



ALEX WONG/NEWSMAKER/GETTY IMAGES



Economist Milton Friedman advocated school vouchers for forty years, an example for Elder of the glacial nature of progress.

tarian, you're a 'Republitarian.'" I think I said, "Did you come up with that?" And he said, "Yes," and I said, "Not anymore." So I began using it.

I will take credit for the term "victicrat"—that is completely my term. "Victi," the prefix meaning "victim," and "crat," the suffix, "of the people."

**TNI:** You are a registered Republican?

**Elder:** Yes. After 9/11, I thought it was important for me to get involved. It is really easy to puff your chest out and then say "a pox on both your houses," and that's what I did for a very long period of time. After 9/11, I began to really appreciate that the differences between the parties are graver than I thought. I was also thinking about running for office as a Republican and had to register in time to declare for office. So I decided to become a Republican.

I still have lots of issues with the Republican Party, of course—and not just since George W. Bush, but the things Nixon did, the things that even Reagan did, raising taxes. There is no *pure* party. I wish there were. The parties are imperfect, and I feel that one of the things I can do is to try to push the party in a more perfect direction.

**TNI:** But to push the party in a more perfect direction, you have to make trade-offs.

**Elder:** Absolutely, though I would state it somewhat differently. I would say there are going to be trade-offs, but the changes are going to be incremental. When I first got on the air, I used to say about the welfare state, "The Republicans want to take a pocketknife to a problem that requires a machete. The Democrats don't even see the problem." Well, cute line, but in the real world things don't work that way. Change is incremental, and you can push them in a certain direction.

Take school vouchers. That was a glint in Milton Friedman's eye forty years ago, and now we are beginning to see pockets where cities are trying it, generally pretty successfully. But this was a forty-year deal. If he had given up and walked away, there wouldn't have been the change that we're now seeing.

**TNI:** Positive change is incremental because it requires persuading individuals one at a time, after sober reflection. But backsliding is always quick and swift, because it's collective. People get swept up by the latest buzzwords—"diversity" or "global warming," for example—just because it's an emotional issue.

**Elder:** Well, Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* talks about why collectivism has such an appeal. And it's because it is emotional. When you talk about freedom, individual liberty, and responsibility, these are *intellectual* arguments. They have to be made carefully; they have to be understood. It is easier for human beings to latch onto something emotional rather than something that requires a lot of thinking.

**TNI:** In the run-up to the primaries, every Republican candidate dropped Ronald Reagan's name in every speech. He wasn't just a politician, he also was a man of ideas. But I believe they were invoking his name for *emotional* reasons, not intellectual ones.

**Elder:** He read *National Review*, he read Friedman. And Ronald Reagan also majored in economics. A lot of people don't know that. It's one reason he was able to be so competent about supply-side economics. He was an economist.

**TNI:** But it was his demeanor that swung so many people over, his optimism. That seems reasonable to me—not to invest my hopes and my votes in somebody who is warning us that doom lies ahead. That's not an American way of looking at the future.

**Elder:** I agree, it isn't. He was a remarkable man. I was one of a handful of people invited to his funeral. One thing that always struck me about him is how un-intimidated he was by all these eggheads around him who had gone to, quote, "better schools." He went to a small school. He had all of these guys from Harvard around him, and he wasn't the least bit intimidated. He had a confidence, and an ease, and a sunniness.

When Reagan was in office, a lot of people said, "The country is now conservative." I found some survey article about Reagan when he was in office and, issue-by-issue, how he felt about the Soviet Union, taxes, spending, and so on. In the poll, the majority of American people disagreed with his positions in almost every category—but they loved *him*.

People didn't buy supply-side economics, they didn't buy "the government that governs least governs best." What they bought was that Reagan was kind of a cowboy with a smile. He stood down the Soviet Union. They trusted him. He made them feel good about themselves. But when you isolate view by view, they weren't with him.

I find it scary that the reason Reagan pulled it off is not necessarily the power of his ideas, but of his personality. What happens when the guy goes, when he leaves the field? He takes his ideas with him because he took his personality with him.

**TNI:** It appears that Senator Barack Obama is—superficially—running a campaign similar to Reagan's. Yet, the more that comes out about Obama's views, the more people are becoming skeptical of his candidacy. Isn't this a good sign? That Americans are willing to "live with" conservative, free-market positions, but *not* willing to "live with" Obama's far-left positions, which he's gone to great lengths to keep under wraps? Isn't it a good sign that Republicans *still* don't have to hide their conservatism, while Democrats have to hide their more liberal and radical views?

**Elder:** I was talking on the air about all of these people who claim that they are going to vote for Barack Obama but who are otherwise limited-government, low-tax, low-regulation people. Like Reagan, because of the force of his personality and his eloquence, he has at least initially attracted people holding otherwise-differing views. But unlike Reagan, Obama is far, far left of center. Once people pay closer attention to his views, I believe they will peel away.

For example, he supports driver's licenses for illegals. That position is so unpopular that Senator Clinton did a 180 and now opposes it. When Obama ran for the Illinois state legislature, he filled out a questionnaire in which he supported abortion without restriction—not even parental notification for minors. He also supports the Washington, D.C., ban on handguns, a law currently under review by the Supreme Court.

**THE WELFARE STATE  
SHIELDS PEOPLE FROM THE  
NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES  
OF THEIR BEHAVIOR.**

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S  
CORE VIEWS REFLECT  
MORE ACCURATELY THE  
CENTER OF AMERICA THAN DO  
DEMOCRATIC VIEWS.

The Republican Party's core views—strong national security, limited government, pro-life—still reflect more accurately the center of America than the Democratic views: strength through peace, virtually no restrictions on abortion, and an inability—all too common among secularists—to call evil *evil*.

**TNI:** You'd be comforted to know that the secularists at my publication are quick to call out evil, particularly when they run airplanes into our buildings.

You talked about conservatives who are for Obama. After their experience with the Republicans, I think many people just throw up their hands and assume conservative *principles* have failed. That is ironic, because all those so-called conservative congressmen and senators have basically betrayed their bedrock conservative economic principles, and Bush leaned to the left to get reelected. So the average voter thinks, "Let's give the Democrats a chance."

**Elder:** Bush didn't move to the left; he did what he said he was going to do. I did not vote for him in 2000. I voted for the Libertarian candidate, Harry Browne. Bush said he was going to do the prescription bill for seniors, that he was going to be the "Education President."

**TNI:** A "compassionate conservative."

**Elder:** He said *all* of that stuff. On the air, I would go over his speeches and say that this is an abandonment of Republican principles, that this is not Ronald Reagan. But I was just amazed at all the conservatives who were behind him. They apparently wanted to win *so badly*.

Many people have said to me what you've said—that what's happened is we've gotten away from our Republican principles. And I said, "No, this guy was 'truth in advertising.' He said *exactly* what he was going to do, and he did it, and now you're upset. Look in the mirror."

**TNI:** I don't know how much John McCain will extricate himself from the mushy middle, except on being a spending and deficit hawk.

**Elder:** Well, he has always been a deficit and budget hawk. He has given two different reasons as to why he voted against the Bush tax cuts. The first is that they weren't accompanied by spending cuts, which is an acceptable reason. The other was that they go primarily to the rich—which is just class-warfare nonsense. Along with his class-warfare rhetoric, he also buys into the "global warming" hysteria and supports government mandates to deal with it.

On the other hand, his advisors include Stephen Moore, head of the fiscally conservative Club for Growth. McCain opposes a government health-care takeover in favor of medical savings accounts. He did not pander to Michigan voters by promising to rescue jobs lost primarily through competition and automation. He still supports NAFTA. He also supported strict-constructionist or "originalist" justices like Roberts and Alito and vows to nominate future justices in that mold. Remember, one to three Supreme Court vacancies are expected in the next few years. So, time will tell.

**TNI:** I'd like to ask you about *Moral Court*—that TV show you used to host. I have been in hotels in the last three months, and at 2:00 a.m. or on daytime television, I see *Moral Court*, even though it was canceled a few years ago.

**Elder:** It was canceled *seven* years ago. It only ran one season—630 cases.

**TNI:** It was a great show. It shows you do not need to use *legal* means to resolve social or family or friendship or home-economic issues. You can resolve them not by forcing people, but by introducing people to manners, civility. It reminded me what Robert Heinlein said about manners being "the glue that holds civilization together."

**Elder:** I had turned it down for two or three years. I didn't think I wanted to do a judge show; I didn't particularly like them. But I was told that it's not a "moral claims court"—not about somebody who ran over your rose bushes, and you are suing them for \$79. It's about moral issues.

**TNI:** What is morality to you? What do you think is the basis for human morality?

**Elder:** This may sound trivial, but it's the Golden Rule—treating people the way you would want to be treated. I think every major religion is based upon something like that.



JOSHUA LOTTY/GETTY IMAGES

**TNI:** Do you think that's practical? Because, I have learned throughout my life, the hard way, that it's not easy advocating the Golden Rule.

**Elder:** You know Robert, I was listening to back-to-back interviews on NPR a few weeks ago, and one of them was with an atheist who was a physicist. The other one believed in God and was a scientist as well. But it was fascinating hearing these two very educated people have diametrically opposed views about the existence of a higher being. And they both gave the same reason for why they believed what they believed.

The guy who believed in God said, "How do you explain morality? How do you explain right and wrong? How do you explain this quality in human beings that isn't in any other species, *but* for God? Because there is nothing about treating people fairly or nicely that is found in nature—what do you get out of it? Under a pure Darwinian theory, evolution, survival of the fittest, why should you be nice to somebody who is feeble *unless* there is God? Unless there is something that says we should treat people well?"

The atheist said that it was part of evolution, because we have learned that when you treat people well, there is a selfish benefit to that—that people will treat you well in return. And so it is something that is hard-wired in us, and it's *not* something that comes from on high, from somewhere else. We are doing it because it is in our best interest to treat people well—because if you do that, for the most part they will treat you well, and therefore it will advance your interests.

I believe the scientist who is religious. Why *is* there a sense of right and wrong? Why is there a sense of guilt? Why do we have that? How does that advance our interests if there is no God and it's just evolution? I don't know. All I know is that I'm much more comfortable knowing that there's a consequence behind not treating people well.

John McCain, appearing at a Reagan Day Dinner in Milwaukee, numbers the Club for Growth's Stephen Moore among his advisors but speaks little about ideas and personal responsibility.



AP IMAGES

Thomas Sowell was recently called by playwright David Mamet “our greatest contemporary philosopher.”

**TNI:** You talk a lot on your radio program about the power of the individual. Who were your influences, intellectually? I mean, you didn’t just wake up a libertarian one morning. Were you a conservative, initially?

**Elder:** Well, I think I started out being whatever my mom said I should be. My mom was a Democrat. My dad was, and is, a Republican. I would sit and watch them argue over the kitchen table. Because of my affection for my mom, I just sort of tuned him out and thought she was right. If my mom said something, that was the way it was.

The older I got, the more I began to rethink that. There were lots of turning points. When I was about fourteen or fifteen years old, I began watching *Firing Line*. I certainly wasn’t a conservative or Republican. Nobody was. An all-black neighborhood—

**TNI:** —You grew up in Los Angeles?

**Elder:** Yes. We moved to South Central Los Angeles when I was seven years old, and nobody was a Republican except my dad. He was the only one I ever knew. We would have primaries where you would have polling stands at somebody’s house, and there would be fifteen for Democrats and one for Republicans. My dad would walk in—there would be no lines for him—and he would pull the curtain and do his thing and come out. And everybody would look at him like he was some strange beast.

But I began watching *Firing Line*, and William F. Buckley would have these liberals on. I remember one in particular, Ron Dellums, the radical congressman from Berkeley. And Buckley just destroyed him. He wasn’t a name-caller—you know how courtly Buckley was. He would just ask questions, and his guests would just stumble and fumble. It was remarkable to me: If being a Democrat is such a good thing, why can’t they defend it better?

So it let me know that there was another argument, there was another side. I

was never a person who believed that because I was black, there were forces that would pull me back and prevent me from proceeding.

**TNI:** You also got that from your father.

**Elder:** My father and my mother. My parents would often talk about working hard and not making moral mistakes. They told me stories much later in my life about the racism that they encountered, about things that happened to them. I asked them why they had never told me these stories before. They told me they didn't want me to grow up bitter, because things are very different now than they were before. Why should you have these stories in your head and make yourself angry and less self-reliant? I don't know what kind of label you put on that, but it was a "personal responsibility" kind of branding that my brothers and I grew up with.

When you ask about my intellectual influences, two were my mom and my dad, although neither was an intellectual. My mom had one year of college, which for a black woman of her generation was like having a Ph.D. My father left school when he was thirteen.

I later took an economics course in college. I remember discussions about the minimum wage, price controls, about regulations. I read a book on libertarian economics by a guy named Angus Black, which was a pseudonym for some economist. I began to rethink all sorts of things, including socialized medicine, Medicare, Social Security.

I can't say that I was a conservative then, either. I had mixed feelings about race-based preferences. Those of us who got in under race-based preferences might not have gotten into the school that I got into. I would have gone to *a* school; I graduated the top of my class in high school, so I don't credit my success in life by any means to race-based preferences. But I had a feeling that because of racism and discrimination, there was something owed to blacks. I can't say I felt bad or whether this was a good thing or a bad thing. I most certainly don't think that way now.

**TNI:** You saw the opportunity and took it.

**Elder:** Yeah, but not only that. I thought, "Okay, we have shut people out and discriminated against them. We realize we were wrong and we shouldn't do that anymore, and so we're going to reach out." I honestly can't tell you I thought a whole lot about it. Had there been no such thing as race-based preferences, I was going to school. I was going to *do* something. I was going to be a writer. I was going to do something with my life that required college, if not more. I took a National Merit test and did well on that, and I got letters from all of these colleges that invited me to go. If that had not happened, I would have gone another route.

I later had a television show in Cleveland called *Fabric* on the PBS affiliate there.

**TNI:** I didn't know Larry Elder had a PBS show.

**Elder:** If William Buckley can have one, *I* can have one. They offered it, I took it. And I got a phone call from this guy named Bernie Baltic. He told me that Walter Williams, the economist, was coming to town, and asked me if I wanted to interview him. This was in 1987, '88. So I interviewed him, and I thought he was just amazing.

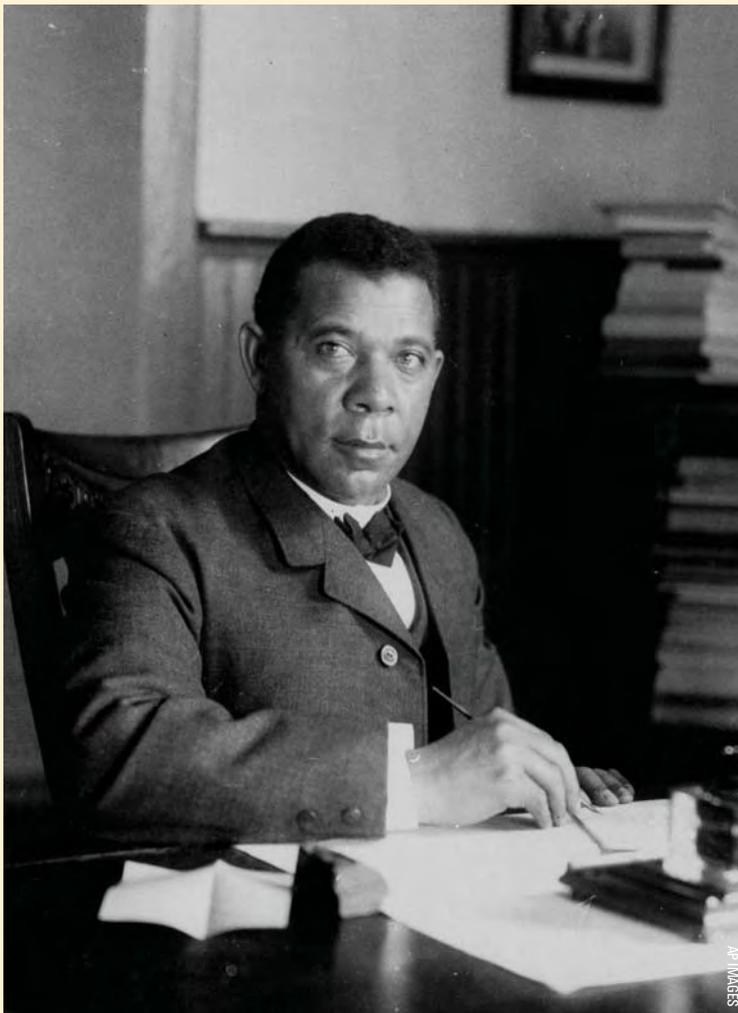
I had never heard anybody so skillfully talk about liberty, government, personal responsibility, why race-based privileges were wrong, were unconstitutional. Price controls. We just talked and talked. I can't remember whether he called himself a libertarian. But I began reading lots of his works. Because of his work, I also began reading virtually everything Thomas Sowell had written.

**TNI:** Playwright David Mamet, who came out of the conservative closet recently, called Sowell "our greatest living philosopher." Not economist, but philosopher.

**Elder:** Right. I think he is probably, next to Milton Friedman, one of America's greatest thinkers.

**TNI:** He makes the theoretical practical. He writes in real-world terms. He's very intellectual, but he is not on such a high plane that the average reader can't relate.

IT IS EASIER FOR  
HUMAN BEINGS TO  
LATCH ONTO SOMETHING  
EMOTIONAL THAN ONTO  
SOMETHING THAT  
REQUIRES THINKING.



Booker T. Washington, now an unknown giant, authored *Up From Slavery* and expounded an individualist program of personal and social advancement for blacks.

**BOOKER T. WASHINGTON  
WAS MORE OPTIMISTIC IN 1901  
ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU  
WORK HARD THAN MANY  
BLACK LEADERS ARE TODAY.**

**Elder:** Absolutely. That was Buckley's charm and one of his problems. He was *so* bright, and he expressed things in such a complicated way that I think he had difficulty reducing it down to the way the average person could understand it. I felt that he often went over the heads of people.

Tom Sowell doesn't have that problem. Thomas Jefferson had a statement about people like Sowell; he said the more a thing is understood, the more readily it can be explained. Sowell thoroughly understands what he's talking about, and he can explain it in a way that the average person can understand. That is his charm, and that is his value.

You know, I spent the weekend with him and his wife about six months ago. He's a wonderful photographer. We went out and took pictures, and he showed me how to work his camera. He said to me that if he could do it all over again, if he could have the career he wanted, he'd be a photographer. I said, "You've got to be kidding me! Tom, there are lots of great photographers, but there's only one you."

I don't know how serious he was, but I thought it interesting that somebody who's that accomplished, who's had such a profound impact on the lives of so many people—known and unknown—would feel that way.

**TNI:** But that's what makes him who he is. That's his passion. He *is* an individualist, first and foremost. I can really sympathize with him. After being in the Army many years, and then teaching, I was bitten by the photography bug, after having put my cameras away for almost a decade. There's something very *visceral* watching a photograph spring to life in the developer tray.

**Elder:** That's exactly what he said to me. I don't know how many great photographers there are. But there are a

lot more than there are great thinkers, philosophers, scholars, economists. And for him to have taken all that energy and put it in that field would have been, to me, a huge loss for all of us.

I once asked him if he ever thought that he might get a Nobel Prize in economics, and he laughed and said, "No. Because my kind of economics is application, and you don't get Nobel Prizes for that kind of work." It wasn't something that he aspired to. He also said he had so many different interests that he applied economics to, that the idea of getting that kind of prize would be just beyond anything. But what a guy, what a human being.

**TNI:** From reading your books, I've seen you're also heavily influenced by Booker T. Washington's book, *Up From Slavery*. I first read that when I was stationed in Germany. I just became enamored with how Washington takes his life story—

**Elder:** —a slave—

**TNI:** —yes, a slave in rural West Virginia, and how he transformed his life after becoming free. He wasn't writing about his "self-esteem"; he was writing about all of the qualities that *produced* self-esteem. It could have been titled "How to Become a Man." He described how, at the Tuskegee Institute, he had a program for the students—not only for their intellectual development, but for their vocational development. A very practical man. That's the kind of ethic that used to be an American ethic but is disappearing. Booker T. Washington is an unknown giant today.

**Elder:** He is. One thing I would add, though, is *Up From Slavery* was written in 1901. Think about that. Slavery ended in 1865. You're talking about a book written thirty-six years after slavery ended, and he was more optimistic about the country, about what happens if you work hard and you apply yourself, than many of the so-called black leaders are today in 2008.

Barack Obama, in his big race speech, talked about the “dialogue” that America needs and can’t avoid regarding race. It was all nonsense. Washington was born a slave; he writes a book about “thank God, now I can read and I can write and I can expand my mind and apply myself, and I can be somebody”; and the book is far more optimistic and hopeful than the speeches and columns written by many so-called black leaders today. It is just stunning.

**TNI:** It also has the universal message. I didn’t see anything that was particularly inapplicable to myself, just because I’m a white guy reading that book.

It seems that, after Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, the ideal that the civil rights movement was to achieve—not just equality but a basically color-blind society—to a large extent died with him. Malcolm X’s view took over because of the hopelessness that settled in with the rioting, his pre-Mecca ideals of black nationalism and racial separation.

**Elder:** Right, a whole different guy after Mecca—which was why he was killed, by the way.

**TNI:** It is just such a tragedy that we’ve been stuck in that rut for forty years. Equality of people before the law was a threat to a lot of people, this idea of judging men solely as individuals—as he said during the 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech—“by the content of our character.” That was the ultimate statement of freeing someone from slavery, because you free them from the mental block that they will be held back because of this or that.

I had a racist roommate in college who put a Rebel flag on everything, and everything to him was a matter of race. I saw this guy become enslaved by the idea that he couldn’t make it as a white man in America because of affirmative action for blacks. He really obsessed over it and eventually lost all of his friends because nobody wanted to be around him.

**Elder:** I know exactly what you mean. I was smiling because I was thinking about the speech that Barack Obama gave where he talked about why his pastor felt so angry. Being the politician that he is, Obama also put in something there for whites who are angry. He spoke about guys like your roommate, and he said that we must also acknowledge that there is a legitimacy to the anger that some whites feel—lower-class whites, who don’t like the idea that somebody has been getting some sort of benefit because of their skin color. I said on the air, “This is fascinating. What Barack Obama is saying is that there is legitimacy to the anger that people feel about race-based preferences.”

I don’t know when it happened, but blacks went from demanding and whites from supporting equal rights, to supporting and demanding equal *results*. Those are two very different things. When people like Barack Obama talk about the differences in net worth between blacks and whites, what they are saying is that until we have equal results, we as a society are not there yet. It’s a horrible way of looking at things. If you argue that because there are disparities, there aren’t opportunities, and that disparities are the result of continued racism, you are paralyzing yourself and others. The question is, “Are there opportunities today?” and the answer is: “Hell, yes!”

**TNI:** The contradiction I see in Obama is that he apparently believes that he has that power to transform *his* life, but to some degree others don’t. The media call him “post-racial.” Many of Obama’s defenders have used a particular phrase—that “Obama does not have an ‘I have mine, screw you’ attitude.” This is to suggest that he’s “authentic.” But how about: “I have mine. Look, you can do it, too.”

**Elder:** He doesn’t preach what he practices; he practices everything that you just said: hard work, going to school. I mean, for crying out loud, becoming a *Harvard Law Review* editor and then its president—it was an elected position. That is incredible. And then he makes the argument, essentially, that “I did it, but you really *can’t*, and I don’t really expect the rest of you to.”

**TNI:** Your latest book is titled *Stupid Black Men*.

**Elder:** And subtitled, “*How to Play the Race Card—and Lose.*” Don’t forget the subtitle; it’s very important.

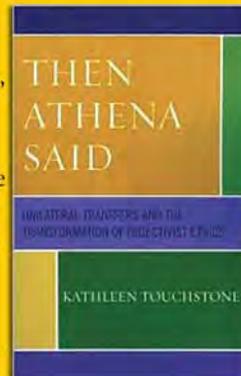
**TNI:** Why the title? Because when I read it—and this is a play on words—it

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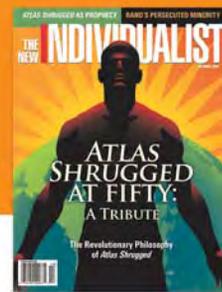
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## THE NEW INDIVIDUALIST



Although Barack Obama has attracted some support from limited-government advocates, Elder finds his views to be far, far left.

PAUL J. RICHARDS/AP/GETTY IMAGES

should be called, *Mind Your Elders*. Because you're talking about the kind of *real* racism that people of your mother's and father's generation went through, and how you view it as an insult that people of today's generation take every little slight as Bull Connor turning the fire hose on them.

**Elder:** The idea behind the title is, first, I wanted to be provocative and catchy. This is a marketing world, and if your title isn't provocative and catchy, you're going to have difficulty in the marketplace. But more than that, the book says: *Don't allow people to think you're stupid. Don't allow people to manipulate you, to make you angry for their own purposes, and get you to act in ways that are inconsistent with your own best interests.*

I talk a lot about how the Democratic Party gets ninety to ninety-five percent of the black vote. But think about things that black people stand for. Blacks are more anti-abortion than

whites are. Inner-city blacks want school vouchers. I talked about how Bush wanted to partially privatize Social Security. Had he succeeded, that would have disproportionately helped blacks because they die sooner and leave the job market earlier.

Because the Democratic Party has successfully branded itself the "civil rights" party, they have gotten many blacks to believe that the Republican Party is the "racist" party. If blacks were to stop thinking of race and racism as a major issue and begin to look at what the Republican Party has to offer, the Republican Party would become far more appealing, and the Democratic Party at the presidential level would be in very, very serious trouble.

**TNI:** There's a counterpoint to this. If I were a young black man, and I didn't know anything about Larry Elder except that I've been told by some people that he's an "Uncle Tom," and I see his book called *Stupid Black Men*, would I

judge it by its cover? I had to think that, because I once saw a book by Michael Moore called *Stupid White Men*. Knowing about Michael Moore's politics, why would I, a white guy, let myself be insulted and buy that book and make him richer?

**Elder:** The difference is that Michael Moore's book was a condemnation of all things white. The white race is responsible for slavery, for racism, for everything. My book affirms how great this country is, encourages people to embrace what this country has to offer and not to allow the Jesse Jacksons, the Hillary Clintons, and the Howard Deans to manipulate you. But if you look at the cover, would this not be a turn-off? And the answer is yes and no.

When this book first came out, the first few days I was trying to set up interviews, and there was tremendous resistance. After I saw the resistance, I began to try to figure out different ways of explaining to people what the book was all about. I met this woman on an airplane. She is Jewish, an actress, and is doing a play in Santa Monica, which is a very liberal area here. Now that's a trifecta; this is *not* a Reagan Republican. So I let her do most of the talking, and then she finally asked me what I was doing, why was I going to New York? I said I was on a book tour. And she said, "Really? What is your book called?"

And I said, "Let me tell you what the book is about first, and then I'll tell you what it is called." I told her what I told you. The book is about the fact that seventy percent of black children are born outside of wedlock, that twenty-five percent of young black men have criminal records, that half the prison population is black, and the inner-city dropout rate is almost fifty percent. Yet many people are blaming all these things on racism, when in fact—though racism may have had a role in their creation—you could eliminate racism from the hearts of all whites in America, and you wouldn't solve these problems.

I said, "You're Jewish. Suppose all of these things were true of Jews, and so-called Jewish leaders were blaming this on the Holocaust. How would you feel?" I told her she would feel the same. I said, "Now, the name of the book is *Stupid Black Men: How to Play*

*the Race Card—and Lose,*” and she said, “Great title.” I don’t think she would have said that if I had done it the other way around.

**TNI:** It seems you relish being a contrarian to get your point across.

**Elder:** *Moi?* [Laughs.] Do you know Linda Chavez? She was up for Secretary of Labor in Bush’s administration. I interviewed her years ago—a very pleasant person, very bright, big smile. We were talking off the air, and she said, “I have been named by *Hispanic* magazine as ‘the most-hated Hispanic in America.’” Big smile.

I was just struck by how it wasn’t a smile in that “I’ve achieved my objective” sense. It just amused her that people felt this way about her. She wasn’t angry about it. I remember learning from that—that when I provoke this kind of reaction, not to be bitter about it. You must be having an effect, you are probably causing people to rethink their assumptions, and you matter.

But there is a learning curve. When I first started in L.A., in 1994, when I would talk about race—and it would be about ten or fifteen percent of the show—many people were writing angry letters and calling the office and me. And they went away. On my show, callers who disagree with me about affirmative action, about Obama, about whatever, are generally respectful and almost never call me a name the way they did in the first couple years I was on radio.

But doing this particular book tour, spending a lot of time on CNN, I am getting exactly the same kind of vitriolic letters that I got in 1994 and ’95, when I came on the air. I mentioned this to my brother the other day, and I showed him some of the letters. And he said, “Well, they’ve not yet been educated. Same thing when you first came out here.” I said, “You’re right,” and then he said, “Give them time.”

**TNI:** You write in *Stupid Black Men*, as well as your second book, *Showdown*, that one of the most destructive things to come out of the Great Society is that fathers have been replaced by welfare checks in the home. You also have the modern phenomenon of fathers who are in the home *physically*, but that’s about all. They’re totally uninvolved with their children’s lives;

they are very self-centered, self-indulgent. Boys are growing up without real dads because their fathers are still boys themselves.

**Elder:** I agree. It’s just the entitlement mentality and that comes from their peers. A colleague, Walter Williams, mentioned to me once that “most people are not that brave”—meaning they are unwilling to really accept the consequences, both good and bad, for their behavior. What the welfare state has done is to allow people to be shielded from the negative consequences of their behavior. If you have a child outside of wedlock, we are going to give you food stamps, we are going to give you AFDC, public housing, transportation vouchers, daycare vouchers. It allows the woman not to marry the father. It allows the man to abandon his moral and financial responsibility.

**TNI:** So, government is subsidizing cowardice and lack of character?

**Elder:** Exactly. In the white community, it’s about twenty-five percent of white kids now born outside of wedlock. When I was in college, there was a book called *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. It came out in 1965. At the time, the illegitimacy rate within the, quote, “black community,” was twenty-five percent. Moynihan said this was horrible, and unless we do something about it, it’s going to get higher, and it’s going to have all these negative social implications. Well, now it’s *seventy* percent, and the rate that triggered this alarmist book has now been reached by the white community.

We were talking earlier about the power of ideas and the power of individuals. I have not heard McCain express anything remotely close to what you and I are talking about. So, I worry a great deal about our society.

**TNI:** You write extensively about your own father in your latest book—how he started his restaurant after his discharge at the end of World War II, and after working as a janitor; and he saved up money to start a café that he ran for, what, almost fifty years?

**Elder:** Forty years.

**TNI:** You write that racism was not for your father some kind of handicap. My grandfather had that same “stiff upper-lip” approach to life. He had

polio and could not walk since early childhood. But, he never let that stop him, never called himself “handicapped,” never had a “handicapped” plate on his car, parked in the furthest spot away from the store, just to prove his point. That was his way of saying, “Don’t feel sorry for me.” I cannot tell you how many times in life, when I’d feel sorry for myself, how his perseverance and utter refusal to complain made me straighten up and fly right.

**Elder:** That is what I do. I’ve got on my desk in my house a black-and-white photo of my dad’s café, Elder’s Snack Bar. It’s about yea-big [gestures with hands about five-by-seven inches]. *Whenever* I have an inkling about how tired I am, or I don’t feel like doing this, I just take a look at it, and it’s like a shot of adrenaline.

**TNI:** And he’s how old, about ninety?

**Elder:** He’ll be ninety-three this May.

**TNI:** I heard you call him one night on the air shortly after your mother had passed away. He sounded like he was getting along, but—

**Elder:** They had been married for fifty-six years, and he loves and appreciates her more now, I think, than ever.

**TNI:** I listened to your mother when you had her on your program.

**Elder:** She gave movie reviews. She was a pit bull, wasn’t she?

**TNI:** She had this innate sense of humor about everything. She was a natural because she wasn’t a film critic. She just said whatever was on her mind. It made my Friday afternoons.

**Elder:** I really miss her, and I tell you, she was by far the most popular feature of my show. She’s been dead now almost two years, and people still call up and tell me how much they miss her.

**TNI:** I miss hearing her too, very much. Most of the articles I write for *The New Individualist* are movie reviews, and I must admit she’s a tough act to follow.

**Elder:** At the end of the day, isn’t it always about family and friends and faith and love and passion and kindness?

**TNI:** Thanks for a thought-provoking interview.

**Elder:** Thank you, Robert. **TNI**