Van Jones Blasts the Conservative Faux Patriots
Who Are Wrecking America

Conservatives: Put Down the Red, White & Blue Wrecking Ball
What should Democrats compromise on this year? Absolutely nothing, says Van Jones.

VAN JONES

Founder & President, Rebuild the Dream; Former Special Advisor, White House Council on Environmental Quality

I can't think of a single issue that Democrats should drop. Which American value should Democrats betray, “America the Beautiful?” Should we say, “Listen, we don’t care about ‘America the Beautiful’ anymore. We’re going to get in bed with the oil spillers and the clear-cutters and the mountaintop removers and the people who want to destroy America’s beauty for profit?” I don’t want to betray that value. I’ve taught my kid to sing that song. I should probably stick up for it.

Which American values should we betray? You’ve got the Statue of Liberty. Maybe we should just knock that over and build a little mall there, a little strip mall where the statue used to be, so we can join the anti-immigrant crowd. No. The statute says, “Give me your tired, give me your poor, give your huddled masses who yearn to breathe free.” If that sentiment was good enough for our grandparents, it should be good enough for our grandchildren. The color of the immigrants might change. Our national values should not change. We are a nation of immigrants. We should be respectful of the contribution of immigrants. And you cannot be an anti-immigrant bigot and a patriot at the same time. Those are things that don’t go together.

We’re supposed to give that up? We’re supposed to give up the idea of liberty and justice for all? Oh, okay, we believe in liberty and justice for all, just not for the gay people. You know, just leave them out. Or not for those poor urban black kids. We’ll leave them out. We’ll give them
justice based on their hoodies they're wearing rather than based on what they're actually doing. I mean, which American value are we supposed to betray?

I'm not going to betray any of them. I think we should have liberty and justice for all. I think we should honor not just the Statue of Liberty as symbol but as also the substance that that statue stands for. I think we should believe in “America the Beautiful” and defend America's beauty. I'm not willing to give up any American values to appease people who, if you gave up those values, they would move ten more feet to the right anyway.

Anybody who is in public life needs to find out what they believe in. And public life will test you. You may think you know what you believe until you get put over those hot coals of public life. Some people believe that America is just this land of individuals who have a lot of liberty and should be left alone because that's how we got so great. I can't find any evidence that that's a true story. As best I can tell, the American century, the last century, the one everybody looks at with such awe, wasn’t built by a bunch of random individuals who didn't care about each other and wouldn’t do anything for each other and a government that was missing in action. That was built by us pooling our resources, mainly through government, massively investing in infrastructure, public schools and dams and roads and bridges and education, educating a whole generation of young people at a level and scale that had never been done before, building a middle class that had labor rights and civil rights and women’s rights to make sure that middle class could include more and more people, to making sure that we were no longer poisoning the air and the water, taking care of our children, making sure that industry wasn’t poisoning and killing our kids. That is what made this great American century that everybody's so in awe of.

It wasn’t just individual liberty or just market economic performance. Lots of countries care about economic growth, but they have no environmental protections, no labor standards. That’s not America. America is a great country because we perform well economically and meet those standards, but also we meet high environmental standards and high consumer protection standards and high civil rights. We are world-class across the board. That's why people want to come here, not just because we’ve got a big GNP. You can have a great GNP and have people working in sweatshops and have the water and the air poisoned. That's not America.

So, when you look at that as the kind of country that we are, then you say I’m going to defend that. I’m going to defend my parents’ achievements. I’m going to defend my grandparents’ achievements. I’m
not going to let people take a wrecking ball, paint it red, white and blue and smash down every American achievement for the last century and call that patriotism. In my view, it’s not patriotism. In my view, patriotism, and frankly being a conservative, would mean you would conserve the achievements of our parents and our grandparents. They achieved the American century, the American middle class, the American way of life. It includes an appropriately active government. It also includes a dynamic private sector. It also includes community responsibility and individual responsibility. But all of those together, not just free markets and starve America’s government so it can’t do its job.

And so we have a responsibility, I think, to go forward and stand up for what we believe in. Whether we’re running for office, like some are, or whether we’re not, like myself, we have a responsibility to defend the America that we inherited and to make sure that people calling themselves patriots don’t smash it down.

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