

COMMUNITY VIEW

He's a 'liberal,' and darn proud of that

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Letter-writer Siggy Latarski did not provide one bit of evidence to back up his charge that "liberal philosophy seeks group factionalism and separatism by ethnicity, race, culture, language, gender and lifestyle to maintain its power base." In fact, no group in American history has done more to bring together Americans of all ages, races, creeds and gender than we liberals.

Musician Leonard Bernstein put the contributions of America's liberals into historical context, powerfully and succinctly: "Who fought to free the slaves? Liberals. Who fought for women's rights, civil rights, free public education? Liberals. Who stood guard and still stands guard against sweatshops, child labor, racism, bigotry? Lovers of freedom and enemies of tyranny? Liberals."

Lately, however, opportunistic politicians and their parrots in the right-wing media have come up with a new sport: "liberal bashing." They balkanize us with wedge issues, put asunder what we liberals have tried to join together and seek to score cheap political points by deliberately debasing and misusing the term "liberal."

But what does "liberal" really mean? It is derived from the Latin word "liber," which has three meanings: child, book and free. What is wrong with children, books and freedom? "From this word liberal we derive the word 'liberty,'" Bernstein says, "which is what the civilized world has been struggling for throughout its history, wheth-

er through reform or revolution, including our own American Revolution.

"George Washington was a revolutionary, as were Jefferson and Franklin. They and other Founders strove for liberty above all. All these forefathers were therefore liberals."

Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt were the great Republican presidents. Andrew Jackson, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman were the great Democrat presidents. Abraham Lincoln was known as "The Great Emancipator," but all of these great presidents could have been known as "The Great Unifiers." What did all these leaders have in common? They were all liberals.

Liberals do not hoard; we share. Liberals do not destroy; we create. Liberals do not subjugate; we liberate. Liberals are not pessimists; we are optimists. Like Leonard Bernstein, we liberals "look forward to a better day, a more tranquil night and a bright, infinite future."

Like Thomas Jefferson, we liberals "have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."

Liberals do not divide; we unite. America needs more liberal philosophy, not less of it.

I'm liberal, too, proud of it, and proud to be in such distinguished company.

The writer is a Nyack resident and is village Democratic chairman.