

BEN STEIN'S DIARY

SUNDAY
Beverly Hills

Success," said John F. Kennedy—or whoever wrote it for him, maybe Richard Goodwin—"has a hundred fathers. Failure is an orphan." I think he said it about the failed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. But it certainly applies to "How To" literature. In any bookstore there will be dozens of titles on how to succeed, many with the same advice only different typeface. In fact, I am at the Brentano's in the Beverly Center looking at shelves of them, by one famous and then sometimes obscure writer after another. Oddly enough, I have not heard of many of these authors. This is particularly strange, since their books are such a mine of good advice. Still, there are a lot of these books, so they must do some good for someone (maybe for the authors). They teach how to succeed, and that's a lot.

Yet, as any parent knows, you can learn just as much by studying the people who fail as those who succeed. It's been fascinating to me to observe that while successful folks have all different routes to triumph (some as simple as luck and inheritance), failures have a lot in common. And if you can avoid the ways and means that losers take to wreck their lives, you won't necessarily be a huge success, but you will avoid dismal failure—at least the self-inflicted sort.

So, offered to you with the sure knowledge that you will not see in these tidbits anything of yourself or anyone you know (yeah, right), herewith some guidance on "How To Ruin Your Life." All of it is gathered from observation of men and women (and children) who have done it in spades.

1. Don't learn any useful skills. Just coast by on your wits and good looks. Avoid getting any education. You'll get by somehow. Don't people in the movies?

2. Don't learn self-discipline. Get up whenever you feel like it. Stay up as long as you want. Eat anything you want. Don't make yourself work when you'd rather play. In fact, don't work at all if you don't feel like it. You're a big loveable baby, and everyone will always adore you for it, even when you're a middle-aged fella or gal.

3. Assume that you are the center of the

universe, the only one who matters in any situation. Why bother listening to anyone else's story? You're the dude who counts, right? Why hear anyone else's troubles? Your problems are the ones that make the difference. So what if after a while no one wants to talk to you? You just take your marbles and go home. Where you want to eat, where you want to go on vacation, what neighborhood you want—that's all that matters. Get it straight.

4. Never accept any responsibility for anything going wrong. It's always someone else's fault or else it's just bad luck. You didn't mean to do it wrong. And if it doesn't go right, that's someone else's problem. Your mom didn't raise you to get yelled at.

5. Always be the caustic critic. There is something wrong with everything if you look closely enough, and by God, you'll find it first and complain about it loudest. Don't spare the criticism either. You're the important one, and people have to pay attention to what you say. And the world is a crappy place anyway, right?

6. Never be grateful. Why should you? Sure, you live in the richest, most free, most beautiful country in the world. Sure, you have great cars and air conditioning and a comfortable place to live, but there's still lots to be angry about. What about today's music? What about the environment? What about other people who don't bow down to you? What if they don't bow low enough? There's plenty to moan about. Don't let gratitude even enter your mind. What is there to be grateful for? If you start feeling grateful, that means you're weak, so forget it.

7. Envy everyone. That neighbor has a better lawn. The other neighbor has a better car. That one's kids got into Harvard. That one's wife has a better figure. That one's husband has a better job than yours. Hey, come to think of it, there's almost everything to envy and almost nada to be happy about. Start down the road to envy and you won't come back. You'll just get more and more envious until you disappear right up your own exhaust.

8. Be a perfectionist. Don't be satisfied with yourself or anyone else unless what you do is perfect (if this conflicts with "no responsibility" above, blame the imperfections on someone else). Don't just do it well enough to get by: torture yourself until it's perfect, and torture everyone around you, too. This

is a surefire guarantee of misery and paralysis and ever more imperfection.

9. Have enormous, unattainable goals. Don't just be happy spending an afternoon with your kids. Seclude yourself and plan to be bigger than Microsoft. Or, instead of simply enjoying an afternoon breeze, read in the financial magazines about people who have made billions starting with selling T-shirts from the back of their car. Then make plans to be even bigger than they are and richer, and completely avoid enjoying the loveliness of the moment. You're a world beater, a conqueror. The small enjoyments of life are far too trivial for you.

10. Have a relationship with someone with a lot of problems and believe in your heart that you can change them. Yes, you will hear over and over that people can't be changed. But that doesn't apply to you! Yes, you, alone in history, will be the very first human being ever known to change anyone else. You can do it where everyone else fails. Human character may be totally immutable to most people—but not to you!!! And don't give up trying until you actually do make that change. It's just around the corner. That husband who drinks and lies and wastes your money? Yes. He'll change. Just keep nagging and nagging and you'll surely get it done. People really do change—but only for you. That wife who never gets out of bed until noon and then spends the whole day spending your money and never does anything for the kids? Sure, she's been this way for fifteen years, but you can fix it with a few choice words when they occur to you. The boss who's a nasty, unfeeling creep, year in and year out? Just wait. Tomorrow, he'll be a pussycat.

11. Treat the people who are good to you badly. They're your doormats. They have nothing to say to you that's worth hearing. They're your servants. They exist for you to trample upon. And they'll always be good to you because they sense you are permanently superior to them...and they're right. They have no feelings. Just use them and abuse them and toss them away when you feel like it. They'll always be more of them. People like to be treated meanly, and it'll help you in the long run.

12. Treat the people who are bad to you well. They'll soon change and start being really, really good to you. Plus, some weird urge in you tells you to knuckle under and treat the people who are bad to you really well. Just stick with truckling to them, and all will be well.

13. Hang around unlucky, failed people

with terrible habits. Yes, no matter how bad your life seems, there will always be people who are drunker, have less money, more debts, more trouble with the law, are lonelier. Make these people your pals. It will make you feel better to be around such sad sacks. You can feel superior all of the time. And, their bad habits will never rub off on you, because you're perfect even if the world at large, those creeps, don't know it yet.

14. Try to make the people around you feel small. Brag as much as you can about your family or your job or your car or your investments. Brag as much as you can about everything in your life. That will make the people around you really look up to you and even worship you. They won't resent you: they'll like you all the more for it. Come to think of it, make stuff up to make other people feel even worse.

15. Keep score of every one of life's injustices. The world is not meant to be fair—except where you're concerned. No matter that there are small children in cancer wards. What counts is that the waiter at your juice bar was rude to you. No matter that people are being sold into slavery right now

your salad's lettuce isn't crisp. And what about that guy who did so much better than you in school? He must have cheated. And how come your house didn't go up in value as much as your brother's? You have been robbed, my friend, and we both know it well. Hold onto that anger and the feeling of being cheated. They will really help you get through your day.

16.) Use drugs and alcohol freely. True, usually there is no human so powerful or high that drugs and alcohol cannot bring that creature to the gutter. Yes, drug and alcohol abuse can wreck the lives of superstars and billionaires. But you're different. You can drink day after day and get to be dependent on it. Truth to tell, you're funnier, sharper, better looking, and more confident with it in you. And drugs that get you high? Well, what the heck were they invented for? Besides, life stinks and it's really only bearable when you're high on a little something. You'll never get to be an addict and all of those warnings are just scare tactics for weaklings. When you want to be feeling a little better, don't hesitate to take

out the bottle or the pills. You deserve a break today—and every day. It's your right, your native born right, to avoid ever feeling anything you don't want to feel. If drugs and alcohol do it for you, hey, go for it.

17. Don't save any money. That's for fraidy cats and nerds. You're always going to have a great job or score big on the stock market or have "friends" you can take advantage of. There won't be any rainy days in your life. Savings? That's for people who don't know how to enjoy life right here and now. Losers.

18. Ignore your family. They are just a ball and chain on you anyway. Who needs 'em? Your parents? Screw 'em. They're boring and what the heck did they ever do for you besides nag you? Your kids? They're always talking about themselves when they should be talking about you. Plus, they expect some time and energy from you and you need it to plan for your big future and also to feel cheated and



to keep score of the injustices against you. Your spouse? Just expects attention when you should be getting all of the attention. And he/she expects you to actually do things around the house. Who the heck needs it?

19. The rules of reasonable decent conduct don't apply to you. Only idiots pay their full income taxes. The IRS will never catch you. Only geeks and wimps drive the speed limit. You're in a hurry. Buckle up your safety belts? Don't smoke? Hey, you're not a baby. You can do what you want. The rules are made for somebody else. Just do what you feel like. Plan for the future? Forget it. That's too much hassle. The future will take care of itself. Don't bother to be anybody but yourself.

20. Don't tell the truth if you don't feel like it. The "truth" is just a way to hem you in, keep track of you, control you. The real truth, the one that matters, is whatever is good for you and saves your behind. There is no objective truth except what's good for you, brother. And who cares if you get caught lying? That's someone else's problem. No one else can judge you. Only you can judge you. I think

Charlie Manson said that and he was right.

21. You don't owe anyone a thing. The universe was made for your enjoyment, not for you to do anything for anyone else. Your boss wants something from you? Too bad. You've got to talk to your girlfriend on the phone. Your spouse expects you to be somewhere to help with a project? The heck with it. You have your own plans. You are not anyone's slave. You have a right to do whatever you feel like doing any time you want.

22. Dress any old way you want. Yes, you judge people by the way they dress, and yes, you think people look better if they're dressed nicely, but for you, it's just too much trouble. Plus, since you're the center of the universe, the Amun-Ra of all creation, the sun god, you may expect that your serfs will see the real glorious you within, even if your clothes are rumpled and old and don't fit. By the way, don't bother with personal hygiene

either. Don't bother washing or using deodorant or keeping your hair clean or your breath sweet. You're the Czar. Everyone else has to adjust to what's easy for you. Anyway, they'll like you even if your breath is bad because, well, just because you're

you, you big omnipotent lug.

24. Don't bother keeping your word. Promises were made to be broken. So what if people depended on you. That's their misfortune. You have your own life to think about and your own convenience. Promises are just words—unless they're made to you, and then capital punishment is inevitable and richly deserved for anyone who breaks his promise. But, hey, you make the rules, remember?

25. Remember above all: the world owes you a living and a good one at that. No matter if you're shiftless and lazy and constantly complaining and never produce anything useful and can't be trusted—the world owes you a living. It's your promise from on high (oh, wait, you are the one who's on high!). Never mind what happens or what anyone tells you about work and discipline: because of past injustices against you or your family or for any reason at all, the world owes you a big fat living at any level you think is best for you. If you want it—car, house, vacation—it is owed to you just because you want it. And don't stop whining about it until

you get it. People have got to know the terrible crimes sacrilegiously being waged upon you. You deserve it, whatever it is.

I am sure there are other ways to ruin your life—and those around you!!!—but these are a good start—and damned good ways to stay a long way away from. Take them to heart and if you see yourself doing them, pause, laugh and do something else.

Hey, I'm going to write a book of these!

SATURDAY

I am endlessly fascinated by my fellow Jews. I guess it's because I am Jewish, but I just find Jews amazing. Now, tonight, for example, on my local PBS station, KCET, they are showing a special about the making of the sound track for *The Producers*, a gigantic hit Broadway musical comedy. It's based on the throwaway Mel Brooks movie that I never could stand. (One thing I agree with my sister about.) And it is a longer version of a story about two Jewish producers who scheme to defraud women of their money by producing a bogus Broadway musical about the most horrific subject they can think of: an encomium to Hitler and Nazism. The story has a strutting, cheerful, loveable Fuhrer, goose-stepping cuties in a chorus line, and, again, two Jewish swindlers as the main characters.

As I am watching, there are men and women in the cast, some I know, mostly Jewish, singing with great gusto, "Heil Hitler!" and "Springtime for Hitler and Germany." Generally, the show makes light of Hitler and Nazism and implies they were somehow cute.

A couple of miles from the house we used to rent in Sandpoint, Idaho, was a white supremacist church. I think it was called something like Church of the White American or something vaguely like that. It had armed guards and swastikas and portraits of Hitler.

Suppose, I thought to my silly stupid self, that said church had, about ten years ago, put on a play at a local auditorium that featured as its main themes, two scheming, soulless, self-promoting Jews who think that taking money from innocent elderly ladies is a good thing. Suppose the play also had a loveable, even adorable Hitler character, and made Nazism seem like a good thing. And then suppose that a network TV news person got hold of that story. Of course, people in New York would be screaming and rightly so at the thoughtless racism and contempt of the people who could make such an evil message come alive on the stage.

But here it is on PBS, and there it is at the Tony's and there it is on Broadway. Jews singing, "Heil Hitler" and making Jews thieves, and Hitler a nice guy.

Now, I know very well that the standard answer to this is that "only" by making him funny can Hitler be attacked and defeated. This, I am told, is what Mel Brooks says.

To this, an answer comes to mind. My father-in-law, the brave Col. Dale Denman, fought against the SS hand-to-hand in France and Germany and Czechoslovakia. He saw men blown to bits by Nazi shell fire. When an SS unit overran a forward position of his regiment, he could see with binoculars the SS shooting the Americans after they had already surrendered. His regiment was so enraged that they charged fortified positions and routed the SS. (And when an SS officer was wounded and taken before a Jewish army doctor, the SS man spat in the doctor's face.)

I think this is how the Nazis and Hitler were beaten and not by a play or a movie, and I think this is the essence of what Hitler and the Nazis were and it doesn't strike me as funny.

I wonder what men and women who were in death camps or slave labor factories think about "Springtime for Hitler." I wonder what they think about prancing cuties shouting "Heil Hitler!" I wonder if it could be any more distressing that Jews are doing this cosmetic work on the worst enemy the Jewish people have ever had. Maybe at our synagogue's next (pitifully poorly attended) Yom Hashoah service, memorializing the victims of the Holocaust, we would have our fine cantor and choir sing, "Springtime for Hitler and Germany." Maybe the sad old people with tattoos on their arms in the congregation would think it was funny.

Somehow I doubt it.

But then how explain the phenomenon of *The Producers*? How explain its worship in New York and nationwide? Maybe it's relief that Hitler is slain and we can laugh about it now, but is it ever going to be funny? Ever? Well, I am probably being too harsh. Maybe if you look at it through the right lens, Hitlerism really is funny. On a moment's thought, no. I don't think so.

SUNDAY Malibu

I had a great breakthrough today. I awakened out at my house in Malibu, slightly dazed from a stomachache. I felt awful.

I called my wife, who was in town, still sleeping off a party she had been to the night before. I called my son. He was too busy playing his online games to talk to me. My best pal, Al Burton, called and had some work for me to do. Good work, but work, nonetheless when I felt tired. A neighbor's child was making an incredible racket with a tricycle. And the air was unnaturally humid. There had been a titanic rainstorm in Washington. A relative who was there was supposed to see if there was any damage to my apartment at The Watergate, but I haven't heard from her yet, and I am worried. Maybe she has bad news, and she doesn't want to scare me. Another friend called to borrow money.

In a word, I was unhappy. Sick, put upon, nobody helps me, nobody appreciates me. Boo-hoo. Only my dog cares about me, and she's busy chasing lizards. But wait. As I passed by my garage, I saw something that stirred my soul. My car. My gleaming new car. My Caddy.

It is ready at a moment's notice to take me anywhere I want to go. It only demands an occasional bath of gasoline. It is never in a bad mood. (Well, the steering makes a weird sound, but only sometimes....) In hot weather, I press a button and the inside of the car is cool and dry. In cool weather (rare here) I press a few buttons and my seat warms up miraculously and my the car is suffused with warm, dry air.

If I feel slow and weak, all I have to do is press my foot ever so slightly on the accelerator, and the car goes a hundred miles an hour uphill. If I feel old and fat, I need only look at the engine of this beauty—muscular and squat and irresistible. And I own it, just as surely as I own this old, sagging body. In fact, this car is part of me and it works great, like a world champion athlete. It can lift great weights, go long distances without a murmur, even jump (small) spaces. This car is not only my best friend, it's a better version of me: the me I always wanted to be.

When I am in it, if I am restless, I press a button and a phone connects me without dialing to anyone in the nation—maybe in the whole world: I haven't tried that yet.

And a pleasant female voice thanks me for making the call and says, politely, "good-bye."

If I want to hear music, I have dozens of stations, plus some weird thing I don't quite understand that gets music from satellites up in space. I can listen to CDs. I can hear The Weather Channel.

My dog, my other best friend, lies on the

passenger seat and puts her head on my lap. Sometimes she knocks the car out of gear, yes, but usually it's fine. My two best pals right next to each other. Perfect. The sun coming through the window, the ocean to the side. If it gets dark while I am on my way home, my pal has NightVision that allows me to see about a quarter of a mile ahead in the dark. The car never asks me for money because it has a warranty. It never has other plans. It never shows up stoned. Plus, it understands me. It has machinery that massages me in my seat while I drive when I am sad. It plays loud rock music when I am happy. It has big air bags to keep me from hurting myself. It's everything I always wanted.

Thank you, General Motors, for sending me a friend.

THURSDAY Los Angeles

A busy day. Up at six a.m., early for me, and off to The New Regency Club, a restaurant in Westwood open to members only, where Pepperdine is having a little breakfast for Dennis Hastert, speaker of the House of Representatives. As usual, the crowd is cheerful and well behaved. By some strange chance, I'm sitting near a man who insists that there are creatures living on the moon, who stood on a ridge watching our astronauts when they landed. I assumed he was kidding me, but who knows.

We had a fine breakfast and then Speaker Hastert spoke to us about his life. He had been a high school wrestling coach in a small town in Illinois. He also taught history, economics, social studies, and coached football. He ran for state assembly and then for Congress, and it's been up, up, and away ever since. He seemed like the most down-to-earth guy you could imagine. He talked a little about politics. He really did not say anything remarkable, but he had a delightfully sincere quality I found charming.

Then he talked a bit about defense because I asked him about it. To tell the truth, I am very upset about the reported plans for big defense cutbacks. Defense is so important that if we have to have a deficit again or raise taxes to have an adequate defense, I think we should. Nothing, no fiscal principle, no social program, is more important than defending the nation. What do we do if China attacks Taiwan? Or what if North Korea attacks the South the same day Iraq

invades Kuwait again? What if they all happen at once? What do we do?

What if a revanchist Russia emerges? It looks unlikely now, I agree, but what if? Mr. Hastert gave a rather non-committal answer. He did point out what we all know—that the Clinton regime basically used up the defense establishment without making adequate maintenance or replacement. But we all knew that.

What we need is more money for wages and benefits, more for modern equipment, more for training, more for everything. And if we waste half of it, as my father said, give them twice as much. It's that important.

Then lunch with Al Burton, always a treat. Then a guest stint on an astonishing show called "The Test". It's a funny show. And the other guests were really pleasant except for an unfortunate part when several of the panelists started making jokes about the pope. Not good. He's one of the great heroes of our era, a genuinely holy man, and I hate to see or even be near people who mock him.

The most interesting part of the day though was a limousine driver, a black man who turned out to have been a major war hero in Vietnam. Winner of the Silver Star. Winner of several Purple Hearts. He stayed at his M-60 and fought off human wave attacks hour after hour. Terrifying. His stories of wounds were breathtakingly scary. And here he is driving little me in a Lincoln Town Car. After the show, he told me another big fact of his life: his son is the musical star, Snoop Doggy Dogg. Yes, the famous gangstah-rappuh, Snoop. My driver used to be in his son's

entourage but got sick of it. Too much partying. Too much extravagance. Too many people in his retinue wasting his son's money.

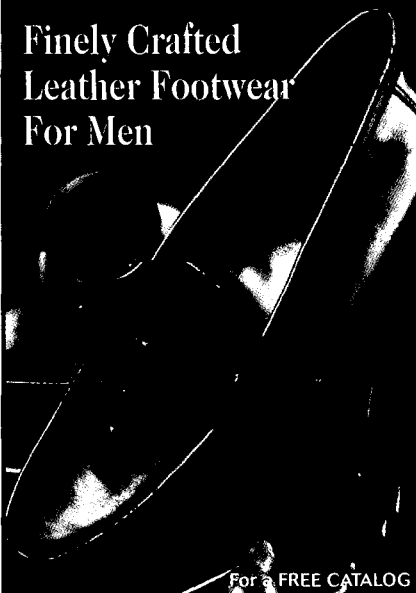
So now the Dad drives a car, His wife is an accountant who saves their money. "When Snoop is our age," said the driver, "I wonder if he'll even have any money."

"I hope he reaches our age," I said.

Dad is making a website to share his experience about his son. I hope it works, whatever that means.

And now, home to bed.

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Be As Wrong As You Like, Just Do It In A Good Cause

—WASHINGTON—

It is very difficult to speak ill of those who supposedly do nothing but good. Christopher Hitchens, the left-wing controversialist (and regular contributor to these pages) manages it with flair. Not long ago he wrote a book depicting as a scoundrel the soon to be beatified Mother Teresa. Yet, I can think of no one else successfully engaged in such arduous undertakings. Perhaps that explains the enduring affection the world has for those famous false prophets who for forty years have almost always been wrong, the environmentalists. They claim to be doing so much good.

How can one possibly hold their many erroneous pronouncements and botched prophesies against them? For instance, who out there would call Dr. Paul Ehrlich, president of Stanford University's Center for Conservation Biology, a humbug or a fool? Admittedly, he has been stupendously wrong about most of his environmental declarations. Yet, protecting the world from famine and depletion is a noble thing. Hence, the public admires and forgives him his errors and the occasional nervous breakdowns they have caused among the environmentally sensitive.

In his 1968 best-selling compendium of imminent catastrophes, *The Population Bomb*, Ehrlich predicted that "hundreds of millions" of people were going to starve to death owing to overpopulation and agriculture's inability to feed the masses. His readers flourished buttons reading "Famine '75." Yet because he was wrong in a good cause, he went on to become widely admired.

In 1980 Ehrlich put money behind his claim that industry was pillaging the world's natural resources, making them scarce and expensive. A critic, the late economist Julian Simon, bet him that by 1990 any five metals that Ehrlich considered headed towards extinction would actually become cheaper. Ehrlich took the bet, chose the metals, and lost on all five. He is honored today and Simon is forgotten, though Simon's predictions of the planet's happy longevity, free of starvation and depression, proved to be as accurate as Ehrlich's gloom proved to be wrong.

One is more admired for claiming to do good than for proving to be right. Thus, I

worry about the fate of Dr. Bjorn Lomborg, a 36-year-old Danish political scientist and statistician from the University of Aarhus. In his new book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, he demonstrates just how wrong Ehrlich has been, and he throws in the Worldwatch Institute, the World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, and all the other environmentalist alarmists as traffickers in error. Lomborg—a former Greenpeace member and avowed leftist, incidentally—demonstrates that the global warming statistics used, for instance for the Kyoto accords, are based on falsehoods; and "the typical cure of early and radical fossil-fuel cutbacks is much worse than the original affliction." He accuses the environmentalist hysterics of basing their hysteria about scarce resources on selective short-range studies that ignore reassuring long-range studies of environmental improvement. Sometimes they are aware of the misinformation they spread.

So what will happen to Bjorn Lomborg? Will he slip into oblivion with Julian Simon? Lomborg reminds us that most intelligent people are environmentalists. Almost everyone wants a healthy environment. Moreover, the American environmental movement did not begin with Dr. Ehrlich or any of the other 1960s zealots. It began with our conservationists a century ago. It has proved to be a success worldwide. Or as Lomborg says in *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, "Mankind's lot has actually improved in terms of practically every measurable indicator." Apparently there have been more people out there worthy of the public's admiration.

Rescue Welfare Reform From The Welfare Reformers

—WASHINGTON—

The Welfare Reform Bill of 1996 is now widely recognized to be a tremendous success. Thus allow me to render a prophesy. Throughout this fall, we shall hear ululation throughout the Republic: poor children at risk, unwed mothers in grim straits, people living under conditions that only Charles Dickens could describe—all because of the Welfare Reform Bill of 1996. The reason we can expect this is that the very successful Welfare Reform Bill is up for renewal in 2002.

PUBLIC

BY R. EMMI



Many old welfare hands do not want it renewed. They are going to have a difficult time making their case, but they will have on their side some conservatives. There will be an alliance of welfare's most ardent opponents and welfare's die-hard advocates. The conservatives are going to try to bring welfare back to Washington where they believe they can make its requirements more stringent. Welfare's advocates believe that bringing it back to Washington will give them the opportunity to kill off reform and advance to pure socialism.

My guess is that they know the Washington bureaucracy better than the conservatives. When the 1996 bill was passed such students of welfare as Daniel Patrick Moynihan predicted that the very poor would be removed from the welfare rolls and thrown into the street. That has not happened. What has happened is that the social pathologies associated with welfare have diminished, hence, the applause from observers left, right, and center. In poor neighborhoods there has been a substantial decrease in crime, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and the incidence of unwed mothers heading households. Among the very poor, marriage is increasing and employment is up. Moynihan was wrong.

It is perfectly understandable that welfare advocates want to end welfare reform. These supposedly compassionate reformers want a return to the pre-1996 system, in which welfare was a stepping stone to their ideal society with a guaranteed income for all. In the 1960s, 1970s, and even the 1980s, they had been making progress in realizing their goal of a guaranteed national income and with it vast income redistribution. Their first step had been to nationalize welfare.