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Michael Medved



From Liberal Activist to Conservative Champion in 35 Unconventional Lessons

Right Turns

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In the candid, illuminating *Right Turns*, Medved chronicles the lessons and adventures that changed him from a Vietnam protest leader to an optimistic promoter of American patriotism, from secularism to religion, from adventurous single guy to doting husband and father. He skewers leftist orthodoxy, revealing why the Right is right and why his former colleagues on the Left remain hopelessly wrong on every cultural, political, and social issue.

Right Turns: From Liberal Activist to Conservative Champion in 35 Unconventional Lessons Details

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From Reader Review Right Turns: From Liberal Activist to Conservative Champion in 35 Unconventional Lessons for online ebook

Chandler says

ONe of the doctor's I work for recommended this book. I have always been interested in how a person moves from a liberal to a conservative and it was interesting to see his journey. It was also very enlightening concerning the Jewish religion which has always interested me. I didn't have a clue who this guy was and it was interesting to read a book about someone I didn't know but I enjoyed it. He is a very smart man and I agreed with most of his views.

Skylar Burris says

For some reason, I was expecting this to be just another book of political commentary. I enjoyed Michael Medved's radio show when I lived in Seattle (unfortunately, I can't get it in DC), so I thought I might enjoy reading his insights here, even though I am beginning to find the whole genre of conservative nonfiction to be rather hackneyed. It wasn't until I started the book that I realized it was an autobiography. At first, I lamented the fact--I read a great deal of nonfiction, but I rarely select biographies or autobiographies. I usually find them dull. If I am unable to muster enough interest to read the biographies of towering historical figures whose greatness and genius have altered the course of the future, how was I going to get through the autobiography of a mere contemporary movie critic and talk show host? But to my surprise, I actually found Right Turns quite difficult to put down.

Perhaps it is the way he tells his life story, or perhaps it is the weird quirks of his character (exemplified in the unconventional hitchhiking adventures of his youth), or perhaps it is his unexpected insights into the personalities of the various politicians and celebrities he has known, but I found Right Turns to be one of the best politically themed book I have read in the past two or three years--and I've read many. Medved's narration of his journey from leftist activist to conservative activist is interesting, enlightening, and, at times, even suspenseful.

My only disappointments were that he did not go into more detail about those fascinating hitchhiking adventures and that he seems to have partially regurgitated some passages from his earlier work Hollywood vs. America. Other than these flaws, I highly recommend Right Turns to anyone who enjoys political philosophy, explorations of religious life in America, or bibliography.

Jeff says

A decent book, but somewhat uneven in interest level. It is, at its core, an autobiography of Michael Medved. The book starts out, and is probably most interesting, describing his childhood through college years at Yale, including his firsthand experiences with personas such as John Kerry, Hillary Rodham, Bill Clinton, and

many other current day notables. As the book progresses the story begins to drag into less interesting reading, although addressing issues no less important to Michael's life story, concerning his increasing personal involvement with Orthodox Judaism, re-establishing decaying synagogues, etc. This leads Michael to an increasingly conservative *social* viewpoint, which he gets the opportunity to voice increasingly through his books and his movie reviews. It is his social conservatism that ultimately brings him to the realization that the Democratic Party, to which he and his family devoted so much time and energy to in his earlier years, no longer reflects the viewpoints he holds true. Fortunately, the book becomes more interesting in the final chapters as Michael describes his tenure as a national movie reviewer on the PBS series *Sneak Previews*, and the reaction to his socially conservative reviews by Hollywood and his fellow movie reviewers (who, for the most part, never accept Michael as one of their colleagues), and the path that has led him to being a nationally syndicated, conservative radio talk show host.

Martin says

Some of the moments in Medved's life are very interesting and the book is crisply written, but he doesn't do a good job of answering the question he sets out for himself at the start of the book: what exactly changed him from lefty to righty? Was he an anti-war righty the whole time, so there was no change other than a religious conversion from soft Jew to practicing Jew?

Medved's chapter on premature birth and its effect on one's view of abortion mirrors my own, and this is probably the portion of the book that is the best written.

The book would have been better with 80% less coverage of past girlfriends. Last year I read Levon Helm's autobiography. Levon must have gotten laid by 1000x more women than Michael, but Levon provides a written after-action on one-fourth the number of women than Michael reports on. Levon chose the superior reporting ratio in this regard.

Judy says

Don't be fooled by the table of contents: each chapter is a lesson of some sort (i.e., "Lesson One: America Isn't Normal"). But each chapter is vastly entertaining. To illustrate each lesson, Medved weaves pieces from his own colorful personal life story, in order, so that the result is really a memoir/socio-political narrative. Liberals will surely see red if they read the book, given Medved's very anti-PC ideology ("Do-It-Yourself Conservatism Provides the Best Cure for the Do-Something Disease") but if you are conservative to begin with you'll love it, and if you are liberal and open to hearing another side you might be surprised at how compelling and convincing his arguments are.

Peter D'Souza says

This is a thoroughly enjoyable account of Michael Medved's transformation from radical liberal to Reagan conservative. His wit, observations of people, and insights into the flaws of Liberal thinking make for an entertaining read. His target audience is bound to stay away from this book.

Joseph D. Walch says

Right Turns was a highly enjoyable, well-written retrospective of Michael Medved's life and providential turn towards God, Orthodox Jewry and political conservatism. He recounts his time as a young leftist at Yale including his friendship with Hillary Clinton and his campaigning for Robert Kennedy. Medved conducts us through his improbable life from the base self-gratification (sex, drugs, victim/identity/special interest politics) of leftist politics to the reason and passion of conservative principles that germinated from the tenets of Jewish faith into becoming one of the most powerful voices combating the counter-cultural revolution that had begun to undermine the foundation of the American Dream.

He breaks up each chapter into specific lessons he learned on the way (e.g., Father really does know best, Hollywood vs. America, There is no Planned Parenthood, etc.). For the political junkie, there's a lot of interesting portraits of people and events such as the assassination of Robert Kennedy, which Medved personally witnessed. Very well worth the read.

Scott Poelman says

This morning I finished Right Turns by Michael Medved. I found his life story and reflections fascinating. I identified with his desire for deeply held religious beliefs and his desire for practical politics. I don't agree with all his political views, but I appreciate his point about "do it yourself conservatism," the idea that we should take responsibility for the wrongs we see and do something, whatever we can no matter how big or small, to address them. He argues that some people suffer from "do something disease," which inclines them toward government intervention. This intervention, he continues, often is less about real results and more about satisfying a desire to do something. I appreciate this challenge and look forward to further self-examination about my motivations. Ultimately, this world surely would be a better place if we all took personal responsibility for ourselves and our communities.

Harry Lane says

This is an engaging memoir. The "lessons" are chapters, each focused on some aspect of the author's life, and arranged in roughly chronological order. Medved describes the arc of his life as a journey from liberal to conservative. He is obviously a bright guy, and displays genuine concern for the health of our society. At the same time, there is that in our society that relishes a good fight, and Medved appears to have developed a talent for finding and engaging on issues in a way that has provided him with a good living. I don't in the least begrudge him this; it's that my personal journey followed the exact opposite arc -- from conservative to liberal. From that standpoint, my criticism of Medved's book is that he is selective in his reminiscences about the positive aspects of the right, and equally so about the shortcomings of the left. Because the book is of a 2004 vintage, there is no indication of his view regarding the more recent political and philosophical attitudes being expressed on the right. One who listened to his daily radio show would no doubt know this.

Some thoughts, pro and con, about the content of the book. Lesson 4, "Business isn't Exploitive, It's Heroic," extols the virtues of small businesses. I have no quarrel with what is said, but he seems to extent that umbrella to cover all business. You can do that only if you ignore the sad history of sweatshops, exploitation

of agricultural workers, willful violations of mine safety, a variety of abuses of the environment and other instances corporate misconduct.

Lesson 11, "The 1960s Counterculture Promoted Stupidity and Self-Destruction," by way of contrast illustrates the nature of conservatism in the fundamental sense of retaining what has been demonstrated to be of value when the culture around you is in a state of upheaval. Lesson 20, "Affirmative Action Is a Racist Scam," relates an experience with someone taking unscrupulous advantage of affirmative action provision in the law. Inferring from this experience that affirmative action is a poor tool for overcoming discrimination is one thing. Offering an alternative solution is quite another, and totally lacking.

Lesson 21, "Police See Reality More Accurately Than Professors," relates Medved's experience working with Bay Area police. His key conclusion: more vigorous policing puts more violent criminals behind bars. This is correct, as far as it goes, but fails to examine questions of our propensity to jail nonviolent offenders or periodic instances of police abuse. Lesson 22, "Everything Worth Defending Depends on Military Power," discusses situations in which US military might made a positive difference. Given that the book was published in 2004, I find the absence of any mention of the Iraq war puzzling, and since that war was clearly an inappropriate use of our power, seems a counterexample to Medved's thesis. Sometimes things worth defending are better served by nonuse of military power.

Lesson 24, "For the Most Part, Conservatives are Both Nicer and Happier Than Liberals," is arguable on its face, statistics notwithstanding. Medved approvingly cites the Randian "virtue of selfishness" which he seems to equate with Adam Smith's "invisible hand." But when the desires of the individual are paramount selfishness becomes purely greed, a trait that has been much on display in the past decade or so. Lesson 32, "Hollywood Has Lost Touch with America," is in my opinion the best of the book except for one thing. He says, "The politically correct, properly liberal notion is that we should never dig deeper -- to consider whether a given work is true, or good, or spiritually nourishing -- or to evaluate its impact on society at large." This reviewer, a self-confessed liberal, fully supports digging deeper and considering the impact of trashy displays of sex and glorification of gore on our society. I am sure I am not alone. Methinks he has fallen into the trap of characterizing a lot of people based only on the actions of a vocal minority.

Lesson 33, "Never Apologize for Partisanship," professes admiration for Newt Gingrich's promotion of partisanship as a political tool. But as recent history has shown, it can be carried to an extreme, resulting in an obstructionism that is not good for the country. This is illustrative of one of my major gripes about Medved's approach, namely that it frequently lacks nuance. He attacks the media and liberals for taking Dan Quayle's "Murphy Brown" statement out of context with nary a bow to the right's sins in that regard. Lesson 34, "Talk Radio is a Source of Hope Rather Than Hate," also displays this bias. I cannot believe an objective observer would characterize Rush Limbaugh's rants about Sandra Fluke as messages of hope!

Having said all that, I still recommend this book.

Walter says

In the world of autobiographies there are several categories. There are those of great history makers such as Presidents, Generals and CEOs. There are the "tell-all" biographies written by professional athletes and movie stars that name names and reveal salacious gossip. And then there is the often neglected conversion story. St. Augustine's "Confessions", John Henry Newman's "Apologia" and even Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" fall into this category. A conversion story is the narrative of the author's journey from some

misguided past into the light of truth and right living (at least as seen from the author's point of view). Michael Medved's "Right Turns" is an excellent example of this type of autobiography.

Medved's story begins with the immigrant experiences of his parents and grandparents. He discusses the family values of hard work and intellectual stimulation that characterized his upbringing. But ultimately he talks about the secular success that he achieved, first in gaining admission to Yale University at the age of 16, and then admission to Yale Law School, his lead role in various Democratic campaigns of the late 1960s and early 1970s and his rise in the professions of book writing and movie reviews. But all the while, Medved discusses his more profound growth, away from the liberal, big-government and atheistic views of his youth and toward the faith-centered, entrepreneurial focus of his later years.

Medved's book is very balanced. He avoids the typical pitfalls of the autobiography, the temptation to demonize his enemies, the tendency to overestimate the impact of his own life on the world at large and the downplaying of his faults. Medved is remarkably frank about his failures and the misconceptions of his youth. When reading the autobiography of a divorced author, it is interesting to see how the author treats his first marriage and his ex-wife. Medved is quite positive about his first marriage, and he has nice things to say about political opponents such as Hillary Clinton and others. More importantly, Medved uses the trials and tribulations from his life to provide the reader with life lessons. He is adamant about the role of his Jewish faith in his conversion, and explicitly ties his politically conservative views with the renaissance of his faith life. He shows the reader that his view of his fellow man changed as he changed his political and religious views. In the end, Medved makes a convincing case for the conservative worldview as well as a traditional Jewish lifestyle.

While I highly recommend this book overall, there are just a couple of small downfalls I have found. Medved's writing style tends to jump from one period of his life to the next in a difficult to follow manner because of his intent to group his life experiences into life lessons. There are some questions that are raised in the book that Medved never really answers. Like why did he not finish law school? And why did he and Jeffrey Lyons never go the way of Siskel and Ebert and start a movie review program independent of PBS when their show was cancelled? It seemed as though Medved did not follow up on the successes in his life as he jumped from the political phase to the movie review phase to the radio talk show phase, and it is unclear why he never stayed on one track for very long. Perhaps this criticism is a bit psychological, but it bothered me as I read the narrative. I would imagine that Medved himself may have never given it too much thought.

Overall, this is a very good book and is highly recommended.

Brian says

Big fan of Michael Medved, listen to his show almost daily, as he is one of the leading conservative thinkers. Though I dislike his views on libertarians and some other minor issues.

This book is his auto-biography and well worth reading if you like him. He went to college with some interesting folks like Hillary Rodham (Clinton). Michael was a liberal for a good portion of his early years, and now fights against their ideas daily on his syndicated radio show, its quite fascinating to see the transition.

Dav says

Medved's progression from Lib to centrist conservative seemed a result of becoming an observant orthodox Jew. I enjoyed his sharing of his life story.

I do not know, but it seems he is not aware of the vitriol arrayed against him now that he's turned to the right.

Overview--

Nationally syndicated talk-radio host and noted film critic Michael Medved has taken an extraordinary journey from liberal activist to outspoken conservative. Along the way he has earned millions of admirers—and more than his share of enemies—with his disarming wit and slashing arguments on issues of pop culture and politics.

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Peter Galamaga says

I enjoy reading the life stories of men who spent their youth as passionate, crusading liberals and then - for a variety of reasons - rethink things and become prominent conservatives. That is the core of this book. Filled with interesting anecdotes about his encounters with the famous and infamous.

Dale says

I read this book because Michael Medved is one of my heroes. It was most interesting to see how Michael evolved his thinking through some fascinating life experiences. I would have enjoyed, however, a little more hard core book on his positions but I guess that was not the purpose of this book. A good read, especially for those who enjoy a political book that demonstrates the workings of a very logical mind.

Lynn says

Excellent autobiography of a movie critic. talk show host who started out as a very liberal Yale graduate, anti-VietNam war leader/activist. Ended up through observing life's lessons as an orthodox Jewish leader and supporter of conservative values. I had just admitted to myself that I had gone through a moderate liberal to moderate conservative transition so this book really spoke to me. Medved put my incoherent thoughts into well thought out arguments.
