

# My AMERICA

...Is Democracy Floundering?



Flanagan Unleashed!

By Fred Flanagan

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many men and women *who have served honorably* in government, and the brave men and women who served their county with ethics and integrity. *Public service for many has been and is an honorable endeavor.*

We Americans, enjoy the right and privilege to vote because of many brave Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice to establish and then maintain a free nation.

The opinions and philosophies expressed in this book are mine, and not those of any other individual or political party.

Fred Flanagan

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## Some Favorite Words!

1. **(to) Flounder** – to make clumsy attempts to move or regain one's balance
2. **Obfuscation** - To make so confused or opaque as to be difficult to perceive or understand.
3. **Prevarication** - to stray from or evade the truth; equivocate.
4. **Democracy** - The common people, considered as the primary source of political power.
5. **Politics** - The art or science of government or governing, especially the governing of a political entity, such as a nation, and the administration and control of its internal and external affairs.
6. **Politician** - One who is actively involved in politics, especially party politics.
7. **Oligarchy** - government by a few, especially by a small faction of persons or families.
8. **Preemptive** - Relating to or constituting a military strike made so as to gain the advantage when an enemy strike is believed to be imminent.
9. **Debate** - A formal contest of argumentation in which two opposing teams defend and attack a given proposition.
10. **Vote!** - To express one's preference for a candidate or for a proposed resolution of an issue; cast a vote.

**Definitions from American Heritage Dictionary**

## Introduction

We all have a responsibility to participate in our American political process. Challenge yourself to ask questions about what you hear. Listen for what is not being said by political candidates and elected officials. Ask yourself why questions aren't answered? Evaluate the use of fear and patriotic symbols to silence opposing views.

My purpose in writing this book is to encourage those not participating in the political process to embrace their responsibility as citizens in a democracy.

We must not allow anyone to successfully use emotional issues to divide our nation. *We are a nation of great diversity.* America is known for eventually correcting flawed policies.

Freedom of speech allows me to write these, my personal views. We need to protect our citizens' rights to express their opinions without fear of retaliation from any political party or administration.

I hope you will discuss the issues and decide for yourself. Listen to both sides of every issue. When you make an effort to listen to both sides of an issue, you can better evaluate the facts on which to base your decision.

If I cause you to think about the dynamics of political events, well designed scripts, and political tactics used to obfuscate the issues, then I will have accomplished my goal in writing, "*My America ...Is Democracy floundering?*" *Flanagan Unleashed!*

*You can make a difference.* Your children and generations to follow deserve the opportunity to live in the greatest country and democracy in the world! We have one of the richest countries in the world, but not everyone is enjoying those riches—or the American dream.

Our American Citizens are the most critical part of our democracy. Our American Citizens are the people who have to fight the wars and make the ultimate sacrifice for their country. It has been the working men and women who made this country great; it is the working men and women who must keep it great!



## Accountability American Style!

We cannot allow government leaders to ignore the people who elected them nor can we ignore our responsibility to be involved citizens.

While our country faces a new level of terrorist threat and new potentially devastating economic trends, the majority of our leaders (on both sides of the aisle) continue to bicker like spoiled children.

The mean spirited struggle for power by both major political parties is destroying the possibility for consensus on serious issues. Members of both major political parties are failing the American people.

### **It is time to take names and kick butt!**

We have serious issues concerning failed border security. Many of our Congressional Leaders side with Corporate America, and cheap labor takes precedence over secure borders. How can we believe that our government can secure other countries, when we can't even secure our own borders?

The trade deficit is a serious problem that our country faces. We are exporting American jobs and technology at record levels. Why?

The American people *can no longer sit back and trust* that all the elected representatives will do what is right for the American people who elected them, unless we hold their feet to the fire.

As an American citizen, I am deeply concerned about the future of our democracy. We have ideologists who believe they were correct in the decision to go to war in Iraq. Anyone who questions the decision to send our brave men and women into harm's way in Iraq, is called weak on defense or even worse a traitor. **It is shameful!**

We cannot have honest dialog on serious issues like war and peace if all we can expect from the opposing side is personal attacks and hyperbole. The American flag, and all it symbolizes, belongs to *all of us*.

We must wake up. **Damn It!** We must pay attention! If the people we elect fail to represent us, we must send a message in the next election. **We must exercise our right to vote! We must believe that one vote counts!**

The American people have *not only* the right to *question* those they elect, but they have an *obligation* to participate in the political process. A democracy can only survive with honest dialog and citizen involvement.

In this book, I cover my perspectives on the behavior of politicians, and the obfuscation and prevarication used to silence opponents and mislead the public. Understanding the sometimes subtle scripts and dynamics used by politicians is helpful in understanding what isn't being said, and what is being *misstated* or taken *out of context*.

### **Libby Liberated ?**

The commutation of the Scooter Libby jail sentence is yet another example of arrogance by President George W. Bush. With the commutation of Scooter Libby's jail sentence for obstruction of justice, perjury and lying to federal officials, Bush reinforces the lack of accountability by elected officials and presidential appointees.

By now the majority of American citizens get the message that our self-proclaimed decider, King George, is above the laws of our nation. President Bush and Co-president Dick Cheney answer to no one — least of all the American people. After all, the American people weren't elected and, they have no political capital to spend.

This latest abuse of power sends a clear signal to the American people — equal justice for all is in doubt and in jeopardy. Was there a “**quid pro quo**” from the outset of the Libby trial? Did Scooter Libby fall on the sword for Dick Cheney with the understanding that if he protected the vice-president he would never spend a day in jail?

Bush loyalists and his highly paid advocates still claim Scooter Libby committed no crime because there was no underlying crime charged. Shouldn't the real argument be that a *possible* crime was under investigation when Mr. Libby *obstructed justice* and *lied* to federal investigators? If Mr. Libby had told the truth, an underlying crime may have been charged: **the intentional outing of a covert agent!**

Bush supporters still claim Valerie Plame was not a covert agent even though both the FBI and the special prosecutor made it clear that Valerie Plame was a covert agent.

The truth appears to be elusive when it comes to the Bush loyalists, and the commutation of Scooter Libby's jail sentence just darkens an already ominous cloud over the White House.

While the Libby commutation story is being debated, the real story is being ignored. Libby was deeply involved in the lead up to an unnecessary war of choice. With over 3500 killed in action and over 25000 wounded, shouldn't the real debate be about how our nation was taken into an unnecessary, preemptive, war of choice in Iraq? Where is the accountability?

I think it is high time for *every citizen to speak out and demand the truth* from this administration. We the people have to speak out if our government of the people, by the people, and for the people is to survive.

It is unlikely that the impeachment of President Bush and Co-president Dick Cheney will occur. It is even more unlikely that President Bush or Dick Cheney will find enough real patriotism, integrity or courage to do the correct thing for their country: *resign from office!*

## Is Democracy Floundering?

The clock is ticking on our Democracy as we envision it. Alarmist? I think not! I believe that government of the people, by the people and for the people, as established by our Founding Fathers, is quickly becoming a government of the (rich) elite, by the elite and for the elite. **Isn't that Oligarchy?**

In the current political climate, it feels like a majority of Congressional leaders have sold out to Big Business and Special Interest Groups. The will of the majority has become irrelevant. The rapidly escalating trend of selling off American assets and out-sourcing every possible job is only one symptom of the American Oligarchy. Profits, at any cost to the people, are the real Religion of those in control. Moral Values! Where?

When the American people can't debate the issue of war without being attacked by government officials and their well paid advocates, our Democracy is seriously at risk.

When a Vice-president refers to people opposing war as "background noise," our Democracy is at risk!

When a President is allowed to ignore the laws of our Nation, trust me, our Democracy is at risk.

When even a *minority* of citizens are not willing to hold their leaders accountable, our Democracy is at risk.

When half of our eligible voters fail to vote, our Democracy is at risk. The future of our Democracy is dependant on citizen involvement.

When the majority of the media sources are owned by big business, our Democracy is at risk. When journalists who ask the tough questions are ridiculed or painted as disrespectful to the President, our Democracy is at risk. Respect is a two-way street.

President Bush continually misled our nation on wiretap programs, leaks of classified information and the justification for the war in Iraq—an aggression, and *a war of choice*.

It is time for serious changes in our government leadership. The American people can start making the needed changes in the next election. It is time to send many in Congress home. The elected officials who fail to represent the will of the people need to be sent packing.

The corruption in our government seems widespread. It will take time to repair our floundering Democracy. The only hope for our government of the people, by the people, and for the people, *is with the people*.

**And, I think we're floundering!**

## Your Vote Counts

I have been cynical, at times, in believing my vote wouldn't make a difference. I have also felt, at times, that it didn't matter who is in power. Years ago, I came to realize that the only way we can affect the direction of our country is to participate in the process.

**Every vote counts.** We send a message to those we elect to office by our interest in the process and by our ballot. Win or lose, we have a responsibility to participate in the process of our democracy.

Over half of the American people neglect their responsibility to vote. Freedom requires effort by every citizen. We cannot defer our responsibility to officials elected by *some*, then fail to oversee their performance. Voting is a responsibility that has to be taken seriously by every citizen in a free nation.

I am encouraging everyone to register to vote. If getting to the polls is difficult, you can request an absentee ballot, so you can vote by mail. There is nothing difficult about voting.

How do you know who to vote for in an election? We need to look at more than a pleasing personality, popularity, and an ability to sound good. We need to look at the background of our candidates.

Check the background on candidates for their experience. *You decide if they deserve your vote.* You can have someone check the voting record on the Internet for each political candidate. You can read newspaper articles on the issues of the day to choose topics to discuss.

Participating in your government only requires that you know what values we should have as a people looking out for our fellow citizens, know who votes those values in congress; and support the candidates who reflect your values.

I encourage every citizen to discuss the pressing issues of our time. Today, we are faced with many new challenges such as: a world economy driven by corporate greed, a shrinking middle class, an increase in poverty, and terrorist threats. The challenges to the middle class and the working poor will require strong leadership. I believe that there is *a disconnect in Washington D.C. from the majority of the people.*

You can organize a family or neighborhood meeting to discuss current issues that affect your life. Find out who the senators are for your state. Check to see who the congressional representative is for your district. Then—ask questions and demand answers.

You can make political discussions interesting. If you set rules that everyone is heard without interruption and keep an open mind until everyone expresses his or her views, you will be better informed while participating in the political process.

We have to support Senators and State Representatives who are concerned about unfair trade agreements, tax reform and social security. We need to support government leaders who are concerned with the increased job out-sourcing crisis we face as a nation.

The men and women seeking re-election have a public record of their votes on legislation affecting the lives of the American people. You can view the voting records on the Internet and write to your House Representatives and your Senators. Today with the Internet, you can e-mail your concerns to government leaders. You can write to U.S. Senators from neighboring states as well.

I strongly suggest that the American people start an honest dialog with family and friends regarding the men and women representing them in government. How did your government leaders vote on recent trade agreements? How did your representative vote on the legislation regarding the credit card industry?

How do you feel about tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans when the nation's debt is at record levels? You can send a message to your elected officials with your vote.

Your views are just as important as the views of corporate heads and special interest groups, but not if you don't make them known, and express them and participate!

We cannot defer our responsibility to protect and preserve our government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." **It is ours. Every single one of us.**

**The government, which was designed for the people, has got into the hands of the bosses and their employers, the special interests. An invisible empire has been set up above the forms of democracy**

President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924)

## Just Answer the Damn Question!

One political tactic used to deflect criticism is to defend something no one questions. For example: When President Bush was once asked the question, “Where is the world coalition supporting the war in IRAQ?” He didn’t answer the question. He defended those few countries that had military in Iraq. The president answered the question with an attack on the question. He said, “That question is an affront to the brave men and women dying in Iraq in support of the United States.” *Good dodge.* And a lot of Citizens bought it.

Certainly no one would demean the sacrifices of any nation supporting the war in Iraq or any military men or women making the ultimate sacrifice. The question was never answered. Where *is* the large coalition of nations supporting the war in Iraq with troops on the ground? The reality is, the war is an *American* military action with the loss of mostly *American* military lives.

When a reporter asked why the response was not good in every parish in New Orleans, the National Guard general responded in the same manner. He said, “That’s BS. Tell that to the brave men and women saving lives.” Again, the question wasn’t answered. Why was the response to the flood victims in many areas so slow in coming?

Maybe it is just human nature to avoid taking responsibility. I find it disheartening to see every official response so scripted. The American people deserve answers to simple, direct questions.

When a reporter asked the White House spokesperson if the President still had confidence in FEMA director Mike Brown. Again, the question wasn’t answered. A simple question! The White House spokesperson had a scripted response. He said, “I’m not going to play the blame game.”

### ***Just answer the damn question!***

We don’t get answers to questions from our politicians instead we get spin on everything and anything except a simple answer to a question. When you listen to political responses, you can learn a lot if you focus on the original question. The response may sound comprehensive, but was the question ever really answered?

Make a point to listen closely to the questions asked in press conferences. You will be surprised by how few questions are ever really answered.

I call these tactics the *non answer response*. You can learn a lot about hyperbole, obfuscation, and plain political rhetoric in the White House briefing room—but little about the truth.

**Government is not reason; it is not eloquent; it is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and fearful master.**

President George Washington (1732-1799)

## Morality and Government

Leaders and members of both major political parties speak of moral values. What are moral values? Who decides? Morality is a system of ideas of right and wrong conduct—and that’s trouble in any language! Too often religious beliefs are confused with morality.

I am sick and tired of politicians claiming the moral high ground with hyperbole and political rhetoric!

For instance, promising to deal with poverty, so all American citizens can realize the American dream. We have an unacceptable poverty rate for the richest nation in the world. The poverty rate continues to climb. Morality?

Providing jobs so families can afford to educate their children, providing health care to all American children, and protecting social security—those are moral values. Assuring truthful reasons for sending our brave military men and women into harm’s way is a moral value.

We have politicians claiming that the problem with America is our families. Families in this country among the working poor and middle class are doing the best they can to feed, shelter and educate their children. Most families require two incomes to make ends meet. We don’t need a lecture on families from politicians who are obviously disconnected from the reality of the working poor and middle class in America.

Our Congress passed legislation supporting credit card companies making it more difficult for people with catastrophic medical debt to file bankruptcy. What is moral about that kind of logic of right and wrong?

We hear a president claim that every life is sacred. Yet, call the loss of life to civilians in a war zone “collateral damage.” Wow! That’s sensitive! I think some of our politicians should take a course in the meaning of morality. I think they cut that class!

Then, we hear that social security should be changed so people can put their money into private accounts. Isn’t that the purpose of social security in the first place? Looking out for our senior citizens is a moral value.

### ***What the hell is this?***

Voting for trade agreements with no protection for American workers is just simply immoral. Is exploiting foreign workers for cheap labor moral? We export our resources and technology so we can import cheap goods for record corporate profits. *Is that moral?* The people making .80 per hour in Mexico, Central America and China can’t afford to buy American goods. Maybe that explains why we have a record trade imbalance with China and Mexico. *What do you think?*

Certainly, we need a strong economy with corporate profits; however, the American workers are not benefiting from the corporate success.

We do have Senators and Representatives in government with high moral values; however, until *the majority* of our government leadership thinks about what is morally right for the American citizens, and the world citizens that America influences, we will have policies without morality.

If the American people wonder why the members of Congress can’t seem to act on border security, health care issues, exploding trade deficits and unfair trade agreements, perhaps the answer is *complicity* with special interests groups and big business.

Campaign and Lobbying reform can minimize the intended (or even unintended) complicity by government officials; however, electing honest people is the only real solution to the corruption problem in government.

Our government leaders have a “moral obligation’ to help our less fortunate citizens. Racism is still a huge problem in our society. Only a fool would deny this truth. I believe we have equally serious morality problems with class discrimination. Unfortunately, racism and poverty are linked. Racism and poverty are serious moral issues that must be addressed by our government.

**Morality is of the highest importance – but for us, not for God.**

Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

## Fear Tactics

I find the use of fear tactics by both political parties to be cruel, opportunistic, and immoral. Fear is a feeling of anxiety and agitation caused by the presence or imminence of danger. Fear is a powerful emotion. We should be aware of imminent danger; however, the power of fear is often used to unjustly influence the population. And, it takes unfair advantage of the innocent who may be ignorant of the relevant facts.

A person promoting something undesirable is a Monger. Mongering fear is a tactic often used to influence people to action or inaction. In the case of politics, fear mongers will exaggerate possible dangers to influence opinion on who can better protect the people.

Causing anxiety and fear in the population for political gain is despicable. I see fear mongering used to defend unpopular positions and to justify the use of force. We all know that we live in a dangerous world, so fear mongering is a powerful tactic.

When we understand the difference between real threats and exaggerations, fear mongering can become less effective for those seeking political gain by raising fear levels. Constant patterns of fear mongering actually help expose the use of fear to influence and incite the desired action.

One of the worst examples of using fear tactics was perpetrated by Vice President Dick Cheney. In a staged town hall meeting with obvious Republican supporters, Dick Cheney said, "if the American people don't vote the right way, we could get hit again with an attack like this country has never known." Mr. Cheney goes down in my history book as the worst offender in fear mongering.

I wish I had been in the room and had been allowed to ask Mr. Cheney two questions. I would have asked, "Who was in power when 911 occurred? Why should we believe if you're returned to office that we won't be hit again in a way that this country has never known?" (But, I'm sure he would have responded with something that was not asked!)

The justification for the war in Iraq was based on building up fear about and embellishing the capabilities of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. Again, fear was used to justify going to war.

Fear tactics were used to sell Mr. Bush as the man to keep America safe. I think its appropriate to return the damaged goods to that ranch in Texas.

The Republicans and Democrats have both used fear to some degree to present their agenda regarding social security. The Republicans' fear strategy on social security is if it isn't fixed now it won't be there for the young people in America. The Democrats use fear as a "caution" to support their view that seniors won't get their checks if the Republican agenda goes forward.

The truth is that both tactics are wrong, but more importantly fear shouldn't be used to illuminate the need to make changes to social security. The facts should be able to illuminate whether the need for change even exists. I think we need to protect a program that gives retired citizens a small safety net.

Social security can only work if we all participate. The wealthy cannot opt out just because they don't need social security. Changes will need to be made to preserve social security but it isn't a crisis that can't be fixed with some adjustments to tax levels and future benefit increases. And, by discontinuing the misuse of the Social Security Trust Fund.

I hope you will pay attention, with me, to every side of the pressing issues that affect our lives. But, don't fall for the fear tactics used by politicians.

**What a cruel thing is war; to separate and destroy families and friends, and mar the purest joys and happiness God has granted us in this world; to fill our hearts with hatred instead of love for our neighbors, and to devastate the fair face of this beautiful world.**

General Robert E. Lee (1807-1870)

## Smoke Screens

Politicians are great at creating smoke screens. By raising highly emotional and divisive issues, they manage to divert our attention away from the serious issues facing the nation.

The Republican campaign rhetoric for the 2004 presidential election used the same old divisive fear tactics. An amendment to make flag burning illegal, an amendment to preserve marriage as an institution between a man and a woman and the usual use of the word “liberal” as if the word “liberal” was the very embodiment of evil.

An amendment to make flag *burning* illegal is strictly a flag *waving* tactic. The American people respect the flag and see anyone burning the flag as ignorant. Who is really burning the American flag? Adversaries abroad?

Will our enemies stop burning the American flag if we have an amendment making it illegal? We have more important issues facing this nation than flag burning. One is our first amendment right to free expression—including flag burning—as much as it personally offends me.

Freedom of expression must be protected even if it means some morons will protest by desecrating what they should be protecting—The American flag.

As for the supposed attack on the sanctity of marriage by gay people, I think the arguments being made are absurd. I have never known any married couple who got a divorce because a gay couple lived next door! Marriage between a man and woman isn't under attack by gay people. The lack of comparable considerations within committed relationships is the real issue.

We as a people need to respect our fellow citizens regardless of their sexual orientation. Morality isn't defined by marriage between a man and a woman. Many of the people making the argument for the sanctity of marriage have been married several times. Where is the sanctity in that for the institution of marriage?

Are we so weak and fearful of our own ability to be moral people that we need a government to legislate our moral behavior? I don't need politicians lecturing me on family values or morality!

“Oh! Those damn liberals!” I am a liberal with many conservative views. For example, I believe in a strong military to defend our nation against any attack from any enemy. However, I don't favor preemptive war or a war of choice.

Liberals are responsible for Social Security and advancements in civil rights. “Damn liberals!” I wish the liberal voices had been stronger leading up to the war in Iraq.

We need both conservative and liberal views to keep our nation great. We are a nation of diversity. We are also a nation in need of real moral leadership in government, leadership that respects and reinforces the “for the people” part of our foundation.

Some of the issues I want discussed by politicians are being ignored. We need serious debate on fair trade agreements, dealing with the excessive trade deficit, the national debt, a quality education for every child, better jobs for the American workers and a *serious debate* over preemptive war.

# Security Starts at Home

We need a strong military to ensure the protection of our nation; however, Homeland Security requires much more than a military response to any nation or individual with the intention to harm the American people.

*We need to have secure borders, secure ports, financial security for all of our senior citizens and good jobs for our American workers.*

## Border Security

We have to deal with border security and fair immigration policies. Our government in conjunction with the wishes of big business has looked the other way on illegal immigration. Millions of Mexican workers have been exploited for cheap labor by American big business. And, in turn, Mexicans (and other illegals) have exploited our negligence and lethargy by avoidance of the law, creating families of children born in the US, and using their children's citizenship as their rationale to malingering.

It is time for our government leaders to do the right thing in dealing with the illegal workers from Mexico, and the right thing by our immigration laws.

I believe we can have a secure border *and* a fair temporary workers program. The only roadblock to a reasonable resolution to the immigration problem is the will—arrogance?—of the people we elected to our government.

It isn't rocket science. The millions of non citizens living and working in America could be part of a temporary workers program that could lead to citizenship. We as a nation can certainly develop a reasonable strategy and plan that addresses the need for foreign workers and the essentiality of secure borders.

We are not a secure nation as long as we have porous borders. *We must demand that our political leaders take steps to protect America now.* We can use the National Guard to protect the borders or give the border patrol the resources and man power they need to secure the borders.

*There is no legitimate excuse for this huge failure in U.S. security.*

## Social Security

Social Security is a big part of security at home.

In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the "Social Security Act" into law. That law created "a system of Federal old-age benefits" for workers and their families. It took the form of a "trust fund."

A **trust** is a process relationship in which a person or entity (the *trustee*) holds legal title to certain property (*trust funds*), but is obligated by a fiduciary responsibility to exercise that legal authority exclusively for the benefit of the individuals (the *beneficiaries*).

The **trustee** for the Social Security Trust Fund is our United States Government. Our government has borrowed from and used the proceeds of the Social Security Trust Fund for other government expenditures.

The IOU's alone would pay benefits projected further than 2042! Yet, many politicians desperately want to change a system they claim does not work—**solely to cover up their breach of that trust.**

A suggestion to create Private Accounts was the worst possible idea of a cure for long term funding concerns over Social Security. ***Social Security can only survive if we all participate.***

Our elected leaders must protect the Social Security program and earn the trust the American workers place in them.

The Social Security program is an important part of Homeland Security. Social Security is as important as border security and military security.

We need to preserve the Social Security Program for the common good and security of all American families.

## **Military Security**

We continue to hear “We need to fight terrorism there, so we don't have to fight it here.” We haven't even secured our own borders! Putting a bull's eye on the backs of our brave men and women in uniform isn't the answer.

It isn't logical or acceptable to send American fighting men and women to die in Iraq—or anywhere else—in the belief that we are safer at home. I think it is a shameful example of contrived logic!

We have to work with other world leaders to fight terrorism around the world. We do need to find terrorist cells and eliminate them; however, fighting them there before they kill us here may sound good but it just makes no sense. It simply reinforces excuses for preemptive conflicts and for foreign occupation.

Don't let anyone shout you down or threaten your right to freedom of speech. Understand that personal attacks on patriotism are only a diversion to avoid answering the tough questions.

Security at home is about more than fences, border patrol agents and a strong military. We need to provide jobs and education to the millions of working poor in our great nation. ***Taking care of all our citizens is part of homeland security.***

# The Elusive Truth

## What was the real truth and motivation for going to war in Iraq?

We have heard weapons of mass destruction as the original justification for war which turned out to be false. We then heard the justification was human rights for the people of Iraq. We also heard the justification for war was that Iraq was part of the war on terrorism and somehow Iraq was connected to 911. And, lets' not forget creating a democracy for the people of Iraq, an Islamic nation, as still another justification.

## *What were the real justifications, motivations and truth for the war in Iraq?*

One motive we rarely hear anyone dare to discuss is oil and the impact oil has on the U.S. economy—the military industrial complex. Think about having a friendly government in a country with the second largest oil reserve in the world. Do you *really believe* oil wasn't a big part of this equation?

We have concerns over the stability of Saudi Arabia's royal family being over-thrown by Muslim radicals. How would a hostile government in Saudi Arabia affect the world economy? The U.S. Military needs oil to protect American interests at home and abroad. The American economy is highly dependant on foreign oil.

I believe these factors were the real reasons for going to war in Iraq. Would the American people really support preemptive war to have a “friendly” government in Iraq? If the American people felt our military and economy were in peril, would the American people support a war of aggression and occupation?.

In a perfect world, maybe a democracy in Iraq would be better for the stability in the Middle East. But, I believe the decision to invade Iraq was a huge blunder. ***The world is not a safer place today because the U.S. invaded Iraq.***

In my opinion, the invasion just added fuel to the fire of hatred by radical Muslims towards the U.S. The U.S. needs to fight the war against radical Muslims with better human intelligence, and perhaps some thought to coexistence. We might even want to *protect our own borders* before more terrorists enter the U.S. across our porous borders.

Only time will tell if the War in Iraq served the U.S. and the world well. It will take a long time to judge the results of the decision to go to war in Iraq. In the meantime, the cost has been too high for the brave men and women and their families who made the ultimate sacrifice.

The American people deserve the truth about the reasons for going to war in Iraq.

## What was the real truth and motivation for going to war in Iraq?



## Your Flag / My Flag

The American flag has been the symbol of our nation's strength and unity for more than 200 years. The American flag is a source of inspiration and national pride. As I look at the American flag, I can't imagine a more perfect flag and symbol for our nation.

Today the flag consists of thirteen horizontal stripes, seven red and six alternating white stripes that represent the original thirteen colonies. Fifty stars represent the fifty states of the Union. Red symbolizes Hardiness and Valor, White symbolizes Purity and Innocence and Blue represents Vigilance, Perseverance and Justice.

The Continental Congress passed the first Flag Act on June 14, 1777, in order to establish an official flag for the new nation. According to legend in May of 1776, Betsy Ross sewed the first American flag. Elizabeth Griscom Ross, a Philadelphia seamstress, reportedly sewed the American flag from a design brought to her by George Washington.

The thirteen stars and the thirteen stripes represented the first thirteen states: Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Virginia, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island.

September 14, 1814 - The flag that flew over Ft. McHenry was made by Mary Young Pickersgill. Her home in Baltimore was later enshrined as the "Flag House." Situated on the corner of Albemarle and Pratt streets in Baltimore, it is preserved as a National Historic Landmark.

The American flag is no doubt a heart warming and emotional symbol of a proud nation. The American Flag belongs to all the citizens of our nation. I can see no reason to desecrate our national symbol in protest to government policies. Many brave men and women paid the ultimate sacrifice to give birth to this great symbol. (But one of the rights our flag secures, is that right to free expression)

Sadly, the use of the American flag by some government leaders to claim patriotism, and righteousness while furthering their personal (and sometimes, religious) agendas is a misuse of the great symbol of our nation.

And, we have seen politicians wrap their political agendas in the American flag claiming all that oppose them are unpatriotic.

The flag is used often in photo ops and powerful television campaign ads to evoke a feeling of patriotism. Our politicians have a right to be proud of the American flag and they have the right to display the American flag. ***The American people just need to understand the impact these powerful images have on their perspective, and how the power of that image can obscure divisiveness.***

The American people proudly display the American flag to honor our fallen leaders and brave men and women in uniform. We proudly display our flag to illuminate the accomplishments of a great nation. **The American flag and its symbolism must be respected!**

When I see my American flag, I see a perfect symbol of a free nation. We must respect our nation's colors. Yes, the American flag belongs to all citizens. Misuse of this powerful symbol of a free nation was not the intention of those who saw the need to have a uniting and powerful symbol for a free and united society.

## Political Appointments

Political appointments, unfortunately, are often a thank you for support during a political campaign. The citizens of America deserve much better than the level of incompetence displayed by some of the appointments to positions for Political pay-offs; appointments with no consideration for the necessary experience and qualifications.

**Moral values?** We have seen government officials promoted and given Medals of Honor after displaying almost total incompetence.

The lead up to and the aftermath of hurricane Katrina is a prime example of *irresponsible* political appointments. As if the unnecessary deaths and suffering during the hurricane Katrina weren't enough, the victims had to listen to the finger pointing and failures of their leaders to take responsibility for unforgivable failures.

**Sad!** Too many cronies have been given positions in government as a thank you. Qualifications were not a requirement.

At every level of government, we have seen awful decisions in emergency management and preparation. Most are related to incompetence as a result of inappropriate appointments.

Excuses are made that just make no sense to anyone of average intelligence. Everyone knew that there was a strong possibility that the weak and stressed levees would break in New Orleans; yet, government leaders still say the levee breaks were unforeseen. **Wow!**

The incompetent FEMA director (at the time) said the government didn't know about the people stranded in the convention center! I guess he was the only person (besides the Katrina victims) without a television. When asked, "why the National Guard wasn't sent sooner?" the response was, "it isn't *safe* to send in the National Guard."

Was it was *safe* to send the guard to *Iraq*? It seems as though the government leaders felt it was safe for 20,000 people to be stranded in the convention center.

At the local government level, buses were left in harms way. Food and water was not pre-positioned in designated shelters. The response from FEMA was feeble. Our citizens suffered. Our citizens deserve better.

When questioned about the failures, our leaders use the same old, tired non answer responses. They defend what no one questions like: the bravery of the men and women responding to the disaster. The American people don't need a lecture about supporting their fellow citizens. The American people always rise to the occasion and support their fellow citizens. It would be a good thing if that were always the priority of the current leadership. Including appointing qualified individuals.

I believe that if hurricane Katrina was predicted to hit Washington D.C., Maryland, or Delaware the government response would not have been so lame.

If those in power had seen the people of New Orleans as equals and colleagues, I believe concern and response for victims would have been more urgent.

**Accountability?** It is time for our government leaders to take responsibility for their decisions. We must have leaders interested in filling important government positions with only the most qualified men and women. It is a moral responsibility to the citizens to insure that we have the best people serving in critical government positions.

## Citizen Government

**It seems that our government policies and the policies of Corporate America have become one and the same. We do not seem to have our “citizen government” with elected leaders representing the will of those they represent anymore.**

I find it interesting when I hear the argument that we have to protect the voice of the minorities in America. The real minority is running the country. The wealthy, influential and “connected” people are making all the decisions. Don’t believe for a minute that politicians are the smartest people in the world. Your judgment on what is best for your family and your country is probably better than the judgment of some of the people elected to office.

I believe it is the responsibility of every citizen to evaluate issues and demand answers to the questions they have on proposed government polices that will affect their lives. We elect government representatives and pay their salaries with the understanding that they will represent the views of their constituents. Too often, I don’t see a real representation of the people.

All American citizens have a responsibility to participate in the political process. I see a trend of blindly following and supporting a chosen *political party* similar to the manner in which people support their hometown sports team.

Do we have the best government money can buy? The Congress is dangerously indebted to the special interest groups and corporate America. The American majority has raised concerns and expressed opposition to unfair trade agreements that are responsible for accelerated out-sourcing of American jobs and technology, yet, Citizens’ concerns over exploding trade deficits are being ignored by our elected leaders.

*The working men and women of the middle class, and the working poor, are the majority!* The backbone of our great industrial nation was built on the backs of the American majority made up of many hard working minorities.

The real majority wants to secure our borders. The minority in control prefers to pander to corporate America in favor of cheap labor. What will it take to get their attention?

We have *many minority groups within* the majority of the working middle class and working poor. We have people of many different cultures and races in the majority middle class and working poor.

**I think it is time to protect the majority.** The real minority, the connected and wealthy, have had their chance to make decisions for the good of everyday working men and women. They blew it! Our leaders are failing to look out for the future of our children.

We are all equal in value and should be valued as equal—even though it is true that some of us are more fortunate than others. Some have better opportunities than others; better educations than others; and live in better environments than others.

*We must take care of our fellow citizens who are less fortunate.* As a society, we need to realize the true value of each citizen—all of us with our different skills and important contributions to society. No member of our society is better or more important than any other citizen.

It is difficult to see and feel the true pain of those you look down upon. Most American citizens reach out and help their fellow citizens. We need our government leaders to do the same, to implement our compassion, and to understand and appreciate the value of every American citizen.

**No man is good enough to govern another man without that other’s consent.**

President Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

# The Two Party System

## The work of the people isn't getting done!

Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson are most responsible for the two party system. The differing philosophies regarding the power of government led to the two party system.

Hamilton believed in a broad interpretation of the U. S. Constitution. Today, he would be considered a conservative. He believed in strong government powers.

Jefferson feared too much central authority by the federal government. Jefferson had experience with the tyranny of one government over its people. Jefferson believed in limiting the powers of government over the people. Jefferson would be considered a liberal today yet he fought for a free society.

The two party system can only work when moderates in both parties can be bipartisan in deciding policy. Unfortunately today, we have partisan politics to a level of crippling government. The need to maintain power by both parties makes it very difficult for our current government leaders to have honest debate and achieve consensus. The work of the people isn't getting done.

Why do these two parties have a difficult time working together? The pressure from leadership to vote party lines and defend party views takes away the ability for individual thought and the courage to vote one's conscience.

Many men and women elected to government office go to Washington D. C. with the best intentions; however, the party whip quickly lets them know the cost of not supporting the party views and voting the party line. New Representatives and Senators have little chance of serving on committees or getting future campaign support from their party if they don't appear loyal to the party, and willing to "go along."

We need courageous men and women in Congress willing to break from party lines when their conscience tells them a party viewpoint isn't in the best interest of the American people, and doesn't conform to the intent of their personal electorate.

We have had courageous men and women in Congress; however, the majority is influenced by the party leadership and special interest groups contributing to re-election campaigns.

Politics have become more about power, control and money than debate over the greater good of our citizens. We can change this log-jam by sending a message to our leaders at the voting polls. **Do your job or pack your bags!**

If the American people vote for the best candidate, and not just along party lines, we can make a difference. There is great arrogance among those in government leadership today. Many political leaders believe they can do what they want without taking responsibility. You can change the arrogance by voting your conscience regardless of continued party affiliation.



## Media and the Tough Questions

The media must ask the tough questions. However, too often, government and political press conferences are too tightly controlled by those in power.

Today we have many news outlets heavily influenced or owned by political parties. The media must play an important role in a democracy. A democracy is the will of the people. Freedom of speech must be protected, and accountability by our elected officials is critical.

If a reporter wants access to the Administration's briefing room, they have to behave. If seen as a problem, the reporter will disappear to a local newsroom some where in small town USA. Only the most popular news reporters dare ask tough questions and insist on a follow up question.

We need to get the pool reporters back on track—asking the tough questions in the White House briefing room, and demanding an answer to the non answer response. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are what keeps some pressure on elected officials and the public informed.

### The News

We cannot confuse the real news media with the talking heads who promote strong network views, and, of course, most of the television personalities can hold their own in arguing the network point of view. Some of the television personalities are even entertaining, but the problem is they make no allowance for the opposition to express a valid point as well!

Fortunately there are some talented and professional media personalities who do present both sides of every issue. I see some cable networks with fair news coverage. It is rare indeed to see television personalities present both sides of important issues fairly.

There are those who would say, we need to *show respect* to our leaders. I say to them we need to get respect and honesty *from* our leaders as well.

### Debate

Most town hall meetings are staged events. Political debates? Where? With pre-approved softball questions, we don't get to ask the tough questions of our elected officials. I believe the next presidential debate should include several citizens from both major political parties. The questions should *not* be pre-approved by the candidates. The candidates should be required to answer the questions with a follow-up question allowed. **Let's have a real debate!**

During a vice presidential debate, Dick Cheney said, he never met his opponent Senator John Edwards before that night. The facts are Dick Cheney did meet John Edwards before and even shook his hand.

Where were the questions regarding that blatant misstatement by the Vice President? I would like to ask Mr. Cheney two questions. Why did you say you never met Senator Edwards before when in fact you had met? Is your lack of memory going to affect your ability to serve as Vice President? Where are the tough questions? **Damn it!**

## Creating a War

I have often mentioned the Iraq war. It troubles me deeply, and it should trouble you. As I listen to the (so called) dialog between those supporting the war in Iraq and those who oppose the war, I realize that critical thinking and honesty seem absent. The arguments *for* the war are tired and absurd. And, when someone *opposes* the war, they are accused of being unpatriotic or accused of not supporting the troops.

It is clear to me, as someone who supports the troops and respects their courage, that people can oppose the policy and justifications for the war and also be patriotic. The argument that “we need to fight terrorism over there or we will have to fight it here” doesn’t make any sense. Not when a chief component of that misguided spin is neglect in our overall domestic securities.

The question of how and why we went to war in Iraq is a question with many answers and failures by the Congress, intelligence community, and the media. How did it all come together? I am deeply concerned over the many failures in leadership that enabled our country to go to war preemptively.

A strong surge of nationalism after 911 was used to rally the country in support of the war. We had Neo-cons in government convinced that Iraq was an opportunity to get a democratic foot hold in the Middle East, and I believe some of our hawks in government also saw an opportunity to have a strong influence in a country with the second largest oil reserve in the world.

The Congress neglected their responsibility to ask the tough questions leading up to the war. The Senate Intelligence Committee and the senators failed the American people by not having a serious debate on the justification for war. The Republican Members of the House of Representatives blindly supported their party. And, I believe the Democrats were too cautious to vote against authorization to declare war because they didn’t want to be seen as weak on the war on terrorism.

We know now that the intelligence was seriously flawed and cherry picked by those wanting to make the case for war. Many good and conscientious representatives trusted that intelligence, and later regretted voting to authorize the President to declare war at his discretion.

I am saddened by the lack of courage in Congress on both sides of the isle. Some Democrats now support the war because they see their stand as necessary to run for future office. Those who support the war are afraid they will be seen as weak on defense if they don’t. I also see a lack of courage by those who simply are unwilling to admit they made a mistake in trusting intelligence too quickly, and without demanding more proof.

The Democrats can’t have it both ways. The Democrats in Congress who voted for authorization to declare war without serious debate are guilty of neglecting their responsibility to the American people. It isn’t good enough for House Members and Senators to say, “They were sold a bill of goods to get their vote.”

The news media had a major hand in making the case to the American people. The media sold the case for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the connection by Sadam Hussein to the attacks on 911. We now know that there was no connection between Sadam Hussein and the attacks against America on 911.

Fear tactics and the American sense of nationalism and patriotism were used to sell the need for war to the American people. The war in Iraq should cause all of us great concern over the leadership in the White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

We may never get the full truth on how it all developed, but the American people deserve answers from the men and women they elected to office. We hire our leaders in the voting booth. We can fire our leaders in the voting booth—for failing to represent the people who elected them. **We have a crisis in leadership that must be addressed if our democracy is to survive.**

## Liberal and Conservative Views

Conservative views often argue traditional values, and those views tend to resist change. Often, conservatives are seen as strong on defense and favor conservative courts.

Liberal views are more open to proposals for reform, acceptance and tolerance towards the behavior of others. Liberals get a bad name when, in fact, we have social security and many other important programs because of liberal views.

We need both liberal and conservative views for this country to remain great. The combination of conservative and liberal views gives us a balance needed to protect freedom of speech, freedom of the press, security, the right to vote and the other laws of the land.

I have both conservative and liberal views as do most people. I have conservative views which are: a strong military, secure borders, and a strong legal system.

My liberal views are: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right of women to choose, protections for our seniors, and helping our less fortunate citizens out of poverty. I also believe in the separation of church and state. We need to protect everyone's right to worship (or not) as they please.

We have politicians who can't see the importance of, and who fear, opposing views. It is time to stop attacking the opposing views of our fellow citizens. It is diversity that made this nation great.

Morality and religion are not necessarily synonymous. You can have strong moral values without belonging to a organized religion. In my view too often organized religions separate men and women rather than bring them together. We don't want a theocracy as a form of government. We just need leaders who make decisions in the best interest of their constituents, and within the parameters of our Constitution and laws.

Morality like ethics means different things to different people. I have seen too many immoral decisions made collectively by our government leaders.

The next time a politician evokes morality and moral values, just remember words mean nothing unless the actions taken because of them are truly moral, and show respect for diversity.



## Patriotism

Patriotism is devotion and loyalty to one's country. We are patriotic in many ways. American men and women fight in wars to protect our nation. We take pride in the accomplishments of our scientists and space travelers.

We believe in family and responsibility to care for our fellow citizens. It is also patriotic to question government policies that don't give equal opportunity to all of our citizens.

Patriotism isn't about blindly supporting government policies. When it comes to supporting our men and women in uniform, you can be patriotic and still believe a policy is not in the best interest of our country. Questions and dissent are part of how our nation began.

We have the most powerful nation in the world. We must maintain a powerful military to ensure the safety of our citizens, but the use of our military strength must be for the defense of this nation. And we must use our power *morally*, or see the day when we lose it.

Don't allow anyone to silence your right to dissent with attacks on your patriotism. Thinking about the lost lives in any conflict is also patriotic. Elected leaders can make mistakes in judgment. Questioning the patriotism of everyone who has an opposing view, is not a legitimate defense of those mistakes.

We have a great country because we have citizens daring to question government policies. Those are patriotic people in my mind. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we saw patriotic Americans caring for their fellow citizens. Yes, patriotism is a lot more than supporting a war effort. All the American people support the American men and women in uniform. We had some citizens who opposed the Vietnam War, and who just believe the decision to go to war in Iraq was a very bad decision, and a huge mistake.

No matter what your opinion is on the war in Iraq, I believe the American people mourn the loss of every brave man and woman who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Many citizens just want our soldiers to come home. Patriotism *can co-exist* with dissent.

**Patriotism is easy to understand in America. It means looking out for yourself by looking out for your country.**

Calvin Coolidge (1872-1933)

## Citizenship Equals Responsibility

Our founding fathers envisioned a government of the people, by the people, and for the people; I wonder what they would think about the direction of our government today.

The voting process is where the people hold their representatives responsible for their votes on policy in the House of Representatives and the Senate. One problem with the election process is the cost to run for office. It seems that only the wealthy and connected can easily access the opportunity to serve in government. Where are the teachers, store owners, healthcare workers, etc?

In a Democracy, with citizenship comes an obligation to participate in the democratic process. We need all of our citizens to pay attention to the issues affecting their lives.

Besides citizen involvement in the political process, we need the men and the women of both the House and Senate to find the courage needed to break away from the *extremes* of right and left views in order for government to work.

The men and women who choose political careers have an obligation to the people who elect them to office. Public service requires ethics, honesty, and loyalty. **The men and women who abuse that trust need to be voted out of office.**

You can be a responsible citizen in a political career or from the private sector. The responsibilities for elected officials are greater and more visible, but each citizen has a responsibility to follow the laws of the land, pay taxes, participate in the voting process, freely express their views, and hold their representatives accountable.

We need to ask our leaders the tough questions. Who decides who are the good, the bad and the ugly? We do. Each of us. Responsibly!

We send jobs and technology to China, a communist country, but Cuba is considered an enemy. Why? Do you think it might have something to do with cheap labor?

Our American citizens are the most critical part of our democracy. Our young American citizens are the people who have to fight the wars and make the ultimate sacrifice for our country. It has always been the working men and women who made this country great; it is the working men and women who must keep it great!

**Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.**

James Madison (1751-1836)

## Squandering Our National Treasure

Think about the millions of American citizens living in poverty *not* by choice, but by circumstances *not* of their doing. Without an equal opportunity for a good education, millions of children will never achieve their true potential. It is immoral to squander our most important national treasure and resource—our children.

We as a nation are squandering the potential of far too many of our children. It is the responsibility of every citizen in a society to help those less fortunate to reach their true potential as productive members of society. Our government leaders must take the lead to *ensure that all of our children receive a quality education.*

Mankind is defined as one species. As long as the more fortunate believe they are more entitled or in some way better than the less fortunate, or define quality of life by race or gender, we fail as a society.

Since the beginning of time, mankind has failed the test. Our political leaders speak of moral values. Isn't caring for all of our citizens a moral value? Isn't providing equal access to a good education for all of our children a moral value? Where is the moral leadership in our government concerning this vital matter?

Our government cannot solve all the problems facing this nation, but we must do better. We hear the same speeches during campaign debates. We hear the hollow promises to better educate our children, resolve the problem of oil dependency, and improve health care costs; however, we continue to have the same problems.

Some of us are more fortunate than others, have more and better opportunities than others, better educations than others, and better living environments than others.

It is time for our leaders to really set an example in the world. The richest country in the world must ensure that all of our children *never* go to bed hungry, and never grow without education.

We must ensure that all of our children have *equal* access to a good education. Our future as a great nation is dependant on the potential of our children. We must *not* squander our greatest National Treasure—*all* of our children!

## A Sleeping Giant

America (once again) is fast asleep. It seems that far too few voices are expressing concern. It is time for all the Citizens of American to wake up!

After the successful attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on Dec 7, 1941, the Japanese Admiral Yamamoto said: We may have awakened a sleeping giant. Admiral Yamamoto was correct!

**Not since the lead up to Pearl Harbor has the Giant been in such a deep sleep.**

Sleeping, as the twin towers fell; the pentagon was attacked; and citizen heroes in flight died in a lonely field to save others.

Sleeping, as Katrina bore down on a helpless, deteriorating landfill called New Orleans. Sleeping, as debate droned on and slid innocuously into preemptive war in Iraq. Sleeping while Iran flexes dangerous muscles.

The voices of our Sleeping Giant whisper weakly—if at all—while our democracy drifts into Oligarchy. What will it take to get our American people involved in their Democracy? Far too few voices are raised! Where is the concern, the outrage, over the attacks on civil liberties, the middle class, and the working poor?

Leaders speak of morality while simultaneously voting themselves obscene raises, and voting down a raise in the minimum wage. Where is the Morality?

The Republicans want to discuss flag burning and gay “marriage”, while the national debt reaches record highs! Oil companies are reaping record profits while the cost of driving to work has tripled!

There are serious issues with selling off American technology and assets. The Outsourcing of American jobs, and failed and unfair trade agreements (labor agreements) go unfettered—and unexamined.

Pervasive corruption in government is trying in earnest to destroy our democracy. **We need new leadership!** What will it take to awaken a Sleeping Giant? When will more than 50% of the eligible voters take voting seriously and take control? We cannot leave political discourse solely to the unprincipled politicians.

We, the American people, have been awakened before—and we came up and out of that slumber snarling mad... As a nation, we demanded leadership that cares about every Citizen—not just corporate America and the wealthy elite. It’s time again.

We need to demand accountability from leaders who have failed us—not hand out promotions, accolades, and re-elections, as if corruption and apathy were commendable!

The American people must participate in political discourse and vote on new leadership. What **will** it take to wake the Sleeping Giant?

## So...anyway....

It may be difficult to discuss politics, at times, with partisans, but government can't work or survive without citizen involvement and honest dialog.

Our founding Fathers and Mothers gave us the power to participate in our democracy. Can you imagine the voting power of the American people if we were all united and participating in the democratic process?

Only the people can demand the needed changes in our government to preserve and strengthen our Democracy. I know that I will not see the important changes needed during my remaining lifetime, but I have a responsibility to speak out on the important issues facing our Nation.

We all have a responsibility to work to ensure that future generations can live in a Democracy with freedom of expression, the right to privacy, and the right to due process in a court of law.

We must elect men and women willing to represent all the people. We must elect men and women willing to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America.

**You have the power!**

...Please **Vote!**

*My AMERICA ...Is Democracy Floundering?* - By Fred Flanagan

Fred Flanagan loves his America! He's passionate about our duty to vote, civil rights, respect for the flag, and elected officials with integrity.

In this book, Fred explores citizenship and politics with fresh energy, straight talk, razor-sharp insights, and good old fashioned patriotism. "*My AMERICA ...Is Democracy Floundering?*" is about all of us as Citizens protecting our Democratic way of life—with a very personal touch.

Fred Flanagan was born in 1946 in Cleveland, Ohio. Fred attended St. Joseph's High School in Cleveland, Ohio. After graduation, Fred served in the United States Army Reserve while pursuing a career in business management.

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