

A TOAST TO THE MOST NEGLECTED AND DISCRIMINATED AGAINST MINORITY

I am a member of the most neglected and discriminated minority that exists.

Other minorities, including: race, color, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, religion, gender, age, unborn babies, sexual orientation, gender identity, familial status and disabilities, have been recognized, addressed, provided relief, accommodated, protected, and enabled or are in the process of being so assisted. I do not mean to minimize the need for these minorities to be acknowledged and assisted, and I do not take a position on the pros or cons of the efforts to do so.

Additional groups who have been helped and provided counseling, although sometimes incarcerated, consist of the mentally ill, pedophiles, drug addicts, alcoholics, sex addicts, and others too numerous to mention.

We who share my condition, are disadvantaged in some of the most frequent and routine activities including eating, writing, communicating, playing, driving, practicing religion, manual labor, even [literary club members] reading or just about every facet of life. We are only slightly over 10 percent of the population and yet we quietly adapt to a world built for the substantial majority of human beings.

What is my minority status ? I am...left-handed! Is it a disability, a choice, a preference, a defect, or just an anomaly? Regardless, it is a damn inconvenience! [Those of you in the audience who are lefties, please raise your hand. It looks like about the average percentage.]

Eating brings on a lot of annoyances. Pouring spouts on various kitchen utensils including pitchers, measuring cups which also have the markings on the wrong side), ladles, etc. are only for righties. Messages or pictures are hidden on mugs to those of us who drink with our left hand. Plates, silverware and glasses are positioned for the convenience of the majority. Sitting with someone on your left, means constantly bumping elbows while you try to eat.

In terms of writing, it all begins with school desks that only provide support for the right arm. Handwriting is meant to be pulled not pushed as we lefties must do. (I suppose we should be happy that cursive is going out of style.) The metal on 3-ring binders and spiral notebooks interferes with our writing hand. Most of us write "overhand" and thus constantly smear what we have already written, not to mention the ink, lead and chalk smudges on our hand. And now, signing on credit card machines is almost impossible; it results in basically scribbling.

In the old days, trying to dial a telephone number was awkward at best; fortunately "dialing" now means just pushing buttons. Typewriters and now keyboards are set up to punish the left hand with the more frequently used letters on the left side. Of course, the number pad on a keyboard is on the right slowing down numerical inputs for us, and the

computer mouse is for right-handers (note – I know it can be set up on the left side but that is even more awkward.)

Turn signals and automatic transmissions have made driving less hazardous for us. In the old days, we had to risk injury to our arms when having to stick it out the window to let others know we were about to make a turn, and we had to use our right hand to shift gears (and hope we got it right). Now the major hazard is spilling hot coffee on ourselves because the cup holders are on the right. And, to further add insult to injury, when entering an intersection, the vehicle on the RIGHT always has the RIGHT-of-way.

Religion has many subtle RIGHT preferences. In Christianity, Jesus sits on the “right-hand” side of God. Christians are baptized with the right hand. In the Episcopal Church, bishops are addressed as “Right Reverend”. When taking communion, the wafer is to be placed in the right hand. The Devil is usually depicted as left-handed. And to top it all off, lefties, on the average, die nine years younger than righties – perhaps that is due to the constant frustrations we experience.

The difficulties, when using manual labor are endless. Buttoning a shirt is awkward (women’s are the opposite because proper women in the past didn’t button their own blouses; they had a servant that did it for them – thus the need to have the buttons reversed. Even zippers are right-handed. And ever try to subtly get into your shirt pocket with your left hand? Winding a watch used to be almost impossible; fortunately most watches today are either self-winding or digital. Turning things are set up for right-handers such as tightening screw, replacing a light bulb, opening a jar, turning on appliances and cold water faucets (the hot faucet favors lefties but is used far less frequently). They actually have left-handed scissors, but fortunately once one learns how to cut with a right-handed pair, it is impossible to cut a straight line with left-handed ones. Elevator buttons are generally on the right side; it’s no fun constantly ending up on the wrong floor.

The impediments to playing are numerous. Musical instruments are set up to enable to right hand to do the more intricate or difficult movements. In baseball, a leftie cannot play the infield positions with the exception of first base, and a left-handed batter must turn around after hitting the ball in order to begin to run. The selection of gloves is far more limited. Left-handed golf equipment was inferior in the past; now it just harder to find and takes longer to get.

When one is reading, pages must be turned with the right hand – need I say more?

By the way – August 13th is officially left-handers’ day. Do they think we are unlucky giving us the 13th? Are the other 29 or 30 days each month right-handers’ days? It seems like that to us lefties.

Even the English language is discriminatory. The word “right” means good and proper; “righteous” is morally correct, and “upright” is honest and just. “Civil rights” are constitutionally guaranteed, and someone “in the right” has legal backing. The “right to

die” may be controversial, but it is certainly better than being “left to die”. One’s “right hand man” is an indispensable assistant. “The Right Stuff” is a movie about intelligence and courage. “Right-on” encourages one in a positive manner. We all have sympathy for someone who has “his heart in the right place”. And, of course, everyone knows “might is right” and women wait for “Mr. Right” to come along and sweep them off their feet.

One the other hand, “left” means to go away or leave. In terms of word origins, the Latin word for “left” is “sinister”, and the Anglo-Saxon word for “left” is “lyft” (l-y-f-t) which means weak or broken. A “left-handed compliment” certainly isn’t one, and people are dead wrong if they’re “out in left field”. Being “left out” is no fun, and who wants to be “left in the lurch” have to eat “leftovers”?

Characteristics of lefties are interesting, to say the least. We are quicker to anger – so have patience with us and let us have our way. Examples of infamous lefties include: Jack the Ripper, the Boston Strangler, Fidel Castro, Osama Bin Laden and John Dillinger. We are more creative but we have a higher risk of brain disorders, such as schizophrenia, dyslexia and ADHD – so give us the freedom to be weird. Some creative lefties include: Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, Leonardo da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Ford, Alan Turing and Bill Gates.

From a literary standpoint, Mark Twain, H.G. Wells, Lewis Carroll, Hans Christian Anderson, Frank Kafka, James Michener and James Baldwin (to name just a few) were all left-handed.

The US Presidency had a seismic shift in the 1970s. Of the first 37 presidents (Washington through Nixon), there were only two or three lefties. Beginning with Ford, there have only been two who were right-handed (Carter and Bush 43). The left-handers were and are: Ford, Reagan, Bush 41, Clinton and Obama.

[So let us toast those who have been neglected for far too long. Raise your glasses with me. Now look around – what’s wrong? Almost everyone has raised his glass with his right hand! Please switch to your left hand to properly toast this group.]

“May you relish differences, overcome your hindrances, conquer your obstacles, and supersede your impediments knowing full well that you are right even though you proudly remain left-handed. Cheers.”

Wonderful! I only question the length. Is it too long? But I cannot say what I would cut. Thanks for doing this and cutting my task in half.