

# *Forty Years* *in the* *Fight for Ideas*

By Roger R. Ream

Ideas are powerful, but they're also perishable. While they can change lives, they need to be defended and passed on to each new generation. The Fund for American Studies champions a core set of principles—freedom, individual responsibility, and free markets—which, we believe, define the essence of America. The Fund is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, and, true to our mission, we strive to have a profound effect on the lives of our students by passing on the ideas that have made America free and prosperous.



Washington, D.C., and four are conducted overseas. We teach our students, who in our U.S. programs are typically juniors or seniors in college, how contemporary issues relate to the perennial questions and ideas of American democracy. We educate them to recognize how each branch of government has a proper and circumscribed role, how the media has a responsibility to report honestly, and how business must be an effective voice for a free economy. Our students study the Constitution's vital check on the power of government and learn how it and other founding documents still illuminate the issues our nation faces.

Today, The Fund conducts nine programs, each presenting the principles of freedom in the context of a particular field of study. For instance, one such program studies government institutions, another concentrates on the media, while a third examines the role that nonprofits play in civil society.

We have been successful because each of our programs is unique. Our summer programs offer eight weeks of classes for academic credit, housing, social and cultural outings, and full-time internships at some of Washington's most important institutions. Our semester-long programs offer the chance for students

Of our nine programs, five take place in





*Clint Bolick (middle) receives the 2006 Bradley Prize. With him are Roger Ream (left), President of The Fund for American Studies, and Randal C. Teague (right), Chairman of The Fund for American Studies.*

to come to Washington during the academic year and continue their education while they intern. Our international programs introduce promising foreign students to the ideas and principles that define America.

Once students recognize how the ideas of limited government, personal responsibility, and a free-market economy relate to a given policy question, they can apply these principles again and again throughout their careers and lives. This truly does change lives. It allows students to draw connections to the historical debates that have shaped America, and become better, more reflective citizens.

Of course, it is easy to assert that our work changes lives, but to truly appreciate the difference we can make, concrete examples work best.

The Fund was established in response to the political and social upheaval of the 1960s. As that decade was drawing to a close, there were widespread protests of government policy, and confidence in the American system of govern-

ment was under assault. This was especially true among the college students of the time. The counterculture and many of the youth movements of the 1960s not only rejected the American tradition but also actively worked to undermine and subvert the ideas and principles on which America was built.

Surveying this political and social landscape, Charles Edison—former governor of New Jersey, Secretary of the Navy, and son of inventor Thomas Alva Edison—recognized that college students needed a balanced perspective on American political and economic institutions. In 1967, Edison’s realization led him to take the first steps in establishing the institution that today is known as The Fund for American Studies.

Edison recruited others who shared his concerns, but as they were discussing how best to reach the young people of that era, Governor Edison died suddenly in 1969. To honor him and carry his mission forward, the Charles Edison Memorial Youth Fund was created by



founding members William F. Buckley, Jr., Dr. Walter H. Judd, David R. Jones, and Marvin Liebman. The newly organized institution's inaugural Institute on Comparative Political and Economic Systems hosted 56 students during the summer of 1970.

The Charles Edison Memorial Youth Fund grew and matured, and in 1987, to honor Edison's request that his name be used in association with the organization for only 20 years, the organization was renamed The Fund for American Studies. Since then, more than 8,000 students have graduated from The Fund's various programs.

And while that is the story of The Fund's institutional beginnings, our real successes come at the personal, individual level. Our accomplishments are best measured by how well we convey to our students the importance and substance of the ideas of liberty. To illustrate this point, consider the career and accomplishments of one of our alumni.

In the summer of 1978, Clint Bolick was an undergraduate student finishing his junior year at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. That June, he arrived in Washington to attend The Fund's program, a part of which entailed an internship in the office of then-freshman Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah).

"It was my introduction to real politics and government," Bolick has said, "and it definitely changed my perspective."

Although, as Bolick explains today, his first brush with the legislative process shocked him, his introduction to real-world government and politics kindled a fighting spirit.

"That summer with The Fund was the first time I really saw, in a concrete way, why we need to fight for these principles," Bolick has explained. "Without that opportunity, who knows how things would have been different?"

After graduating in 1979, Bolick went on to the Hastings Law School at the University of California at Davis, and from there he

returned to Washington to hold positions at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Department of Justice's civil rights division.

In 1991, Bolick co-founded the Institute for Justice, serving as litigation director. He defended school choice programs, culminating in the landmark 2002 Supreme Court ruling in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, upholding the Cleveland school voucher program. Bolick also successfully argued the 2005 Supreme Court case striking down regulatory barriers to direct interstate shipment of wine to consumers.

In 2006, Bolick was the recipient of a Bradley Prize, which recognizes outstanding contributions to the defense of freedom. His most recent nonfiction books are *Voucher Wars: Waging the Legal Battle Over School Choice* and *David's Hammer: The Case for an Activist Judiciary*, which was published this year by the Cato Institute. Rounding out his intellectual interests, Bolick published his first novel, *Nicki's Girl*, in 2007.

Bolick's accomplishments are very distinguished now, but that first summer of 1978 was his introduction to the battle of ideas. The Fund encouraged Bolick to see the connection between the ideas that make freedom possible and the actual policies that can and should give these ideas real muscle.

In all of his jobs and with his writing and advocacy, Bolick has been a flesh-and-blood testament to The Fund's belief that ideas matter and should guide decisions and lives.

It is impossible to say how Bolick's life and career—and the lives he has touched—would have been different without The Fund. Thankfully, because of our commitment, he and many thousands of others will have had the opportunity to learn about the principles of freedom and the power of ideas.

—Mr. Ream is President of The Fund for American Studies, a position he has held since 1998.