

Advance Praise for *High Attitude*

“Aspen, Colorado, is one of the most celebrated places in the United States, but like any other community it has its preening airheads, community-minded heroes, political bigots and rip-off artists. What most communities don’t have, however, is an alert critic who has seen it all and can write it up. Glenn Beaton is to Aspen as Thornton Wilder was to *Our Town*. He lived there for many years, got to know it all, and finally, in disillusion, abandoned it. This book tells you why.”

–Peter Wallison, author and White House
counsel to President Ronald Reagan

“I, like 327 million of my 328 million fellow Americans, could not care less about Aspen, Colorado, but Glenn K. Beaton did the impossible. His witty and charming history of Aspen magically makes you care. He takes readers from its silver-mining roots to its ski resort days laughing all the way. In between are visits from Johnny Depp, Hunter S. Thompson, and the 10th Mountain Division. I want Glenn to come back in one hundred years and write the sequel in which liberals are driven away by some Pied Piper.”

–Don Surber, retired
newspaper man and Substack writer

“Glenn Beaton tells the history of Aspen with grace and bite. Although the history is one of dramatic cultural decline, Beaton displays his wicked sense of humor throughout. Reading the book is a pleasure I greatly enjoyed. Beaton both entertains and instructs, for Aspen’s story as he tells it illuminates alarming national trends that threaten our survival. Indeed, I am afraid it may give the avant garde thinkers of my hometown ideas that will hasten its further destruction.”

–Scott W. Johnson,
Minneapolis attorney and Power
Line co-founder/contributor

HIGH ATTITUDE

**H O W W O K E L I B E R A L S
R U I N E D A S P E N**

GLENN K. BEATON



**BOMBARDIER
BOOKS**

Published by Bombardier Books
An Imprint of Post Hill Press
ISBN: 978-1-63758-949-6
ISBN (eBook): 978-1-63758-950-2

High Attitude:
How Woke Liberals Ruined Aspen
© 2023 by Glenn Beaton
All Rights Reserved

Cover Design by Conroy Accord

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted
by any means without the written permission of the author and publisher.



Post Hill Press
New York • Nashville
posthillpress.com

Published in the United States of America
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface:	The Trouble with Aspen	vii
Chapter One:	Silver Boom, Silver Bust: Aspen in the Early Days	1
Chapter Two:	Cows, Potatoes, and Ghosts: The Quiet Years	9
Chapter Three:	Snow Is the New Silver: The Business of Skiing in Aspen	15
Chapter Four:	Soldiers of Fortune and the Republican Box King	21
Chapter Five:	The German Cultural Invasion: How the Paepckes Reinvented Aspen	29
Chapter Six:	Fear and Loathing: The Sixties Come to Aspen	37
Chapter Seven:	The Wilding of Aspen: How the Sixties Spawned a Sybaritic Virtue- Signaling Dystopia	55
Chapter Eight:	Make It Free, and They Will Come: Socialism on the Slopes	67

Chapter Nine:	Global Warming Ends World: Black and Gay Skiers Hardest Hit	95
Chapter Ten:	The Death of Excellence: The Aspen Institute Drifts Left	111
Chapter Eleven:	High Attitude: Is It End Times for <i>The Aspen Times?</i>	119
Chapter Twelve:	Paradise Lost: The End of Aspen?	133
Acknowledgments		145
About the Author		147

PREFACE

THE TROUBLE WITH ASPEN

For seven years, I wrote a conservative column for *The Aspen Times*. I called it The Aspen Beat. It enraged the local liberal establishment. The wacky-wokey mayor told me to leave town. Others threatened to kill me, which always struck me as funny in a place that wanted to ban guns. Would the murder weapon be a sharpened ski pole? Fentanyl dropped into my single malt?

The threats were not so overt that I needed to call the police. They were more like, “You’d better hope I never see you on the street, a-hole,” or “Gee, it’d be a shame if something ever happened to you and your house.” But I took the latter threat seriously enough that when I bought a new house, I set up a limited liability company to hold the title without my name on it. I never made restaurant reservations in my own name—I did not want them to know who I was until after they had prepared my food and served me. I made a point of using an old, fuzzy photo for my column mugshot. Even so, I became recognized around

GLENN BEATON

town. One afternoon, I returned to my car in the parking lot at the downtown grocery store to find my windshield smashed.

The comment section to my column in *The Aspen Times* was routinely filled with so much vulgarity that a decent person dared not click into it. If I pointed this out to the editors, they would usually remove the vulgar comments but not always. When they did, it sometimes took them several days.

The threats and vilification culminated one Christmas Eve when the editor at *The Aspen Times*, without warning or discussion, sent me his own little piece of hate mail. It was an email terminating my column. Safely crouched behind his keyboard three blocks from my house, he chided that “your column no longer represents the values we hold.”

Ah, the Left’s values—sacred totems they do not just have but bravely “hold.” The Left always frames a disagreement with the Right not as a policy issue but as a matter of values. They have them, they hold them, they exhibit them, and they, they imagine, are magnificent—even as they couch them in vulgarities.

I moved to Aspen in 2009 after retiring early from a large international law firm that had a Denver office. Our family had vacationed in Aspen for years and owned a vacation house there. I threw myself into the place. The Sunday cacophony from the church two doors down the street initially annoyed me but later became an important part of reinventing myself. I put some of my lifetime of Colorado climbing experience to work by joining Mountain Rescue Aspen.

And I read the local newspaper. I learned that the reporters, editors, and staff of *The Aspen Times* are uniformly liberal and that both their opinion pages and news pages were slanted that

HIGH ATTITUDE

way. But they traditionally had a token conservative columnist. After I had lived there for a few years, I befriended the person writing the conservative column, and she invited me to write a guest column. My piece was more philosophical than political. It was about a recent mass shooting by a deranged teenager and what the incident said about our crumbling culture.

Readers liked it, and I started writing more guest columns. After a half year, a position opened, and the paper invited me to fill the spot.

I was supposed to be a faint and lonely counterpoint to the newspaper's ordinary leftie fare. But my column caught on and grew very popular, or at least very clicked. It often out-clicked front-page news. When it was picked up by national publications like *RealClearPolitics*, it generated far more clicks than the rest of the newspaper combined. For that, the editors never once congratulated me. In fact, it seemed to bug them.

Many of my topics were related to national politics. I applauded the Republican wins in 2016, along with the new administration's approach to the Middle East, energy, and immigration. As a retired lawyer who had argued before the Supreme Court and other federal courts, I especially liked the Republican judicial appointments.

Although my positions were usually at odds with the newspaper's editors and reporters, I was not invariably on the hard right. For example, I wrote that President Trump was unnecessarily polarizing. I also wrote that abortion is a human tragedy to be avoided but that I would not criminalize it prior to fifteen weeks. And unlike most conservatives, I am opposed to the death penalty.

GLENN BEATON

No matter. The Aspen establishment decided that because I was unwilling to toe the leftie line, I was from the wrong tribe. Aspen is not just liberal—and is not liberal at all in the classic sense. It is instead tribal, leftist, incestuous, intolerant, and, importantly, very conscious of image and fashion. It is something like the modern Democratic Party but more so.

The leftie community of Aspen consists of two parts, the rich people and the un-rich people. There is nothing in between. The rich people are disproportionately from Hollywood and the rest of the entertainment industry, along with Wall Street and the rest of the finance industry—including or perhaps especially their divorcées.

Such people are often obsessed with public perception. Aspenites flatter themselves in saying that what attracts people to Aspen is the winter skiing, and what keeps them there are the glorious summers. The summers are indeed glorious, but the winter skiing, while excellent, is not as good as, say, Alta and might not even be the best in Colorado.

What really attracts people to Aspen—at least these particular rich people—is the safe fashion statement, and what keeps them there is the same thing. *Aspen* is right up there with Prada and Givenchy as impractical and overpriced brands but safe ones.

These fashionistas private-jetting to Aspen pack their chicness into their Gucci bags. Indeed, they never leave home without it. When they arrive, they want to display it, along with their jets, their trophy wives or girlfriends, their new skis, their \$1,100/day ski lessons, their ability to ski fast on easy slopes, and—of course—their “values.”

HIGH ATTITUDE

(But they don't venture near the bumps or the powder. I once rode the lift with a Hollywood actor right after a great snowfall where I was in powder heaven. He was enraged that the snowcats had not groomed all the deep powder into tame corduroy. He fumed, "When I'm payin' \$170 a day, I expect the slopes to be properly prepared!")

The political battles in Aspen, as in any liberal battlefield—from the Democratic convention to the streets of San Francisco to the grass of Harvard Yard—are on the left flank. Liberals see the Right and the middle as illegitimate, so the only way to win their approval is to outflank them on the left. Other than a few nutjob exceptions, for example, Democrats never really wanted to abolish the police. They just said so to win their endless I'm-further-left-than-you competition among themselves.

Like lefties everywhere, the lefties of Aspen cling to the belief that their leftist displays are edgy. Leftists in America control academia, Wall Street, most corporate boards, the entertainment industry, philanthropy, the media, most book publishing, almost all social media, and countless Thanksgiving dinner discussions. But they preposterously display their supposed edginess—an edginess that they share with herds of like-minded sheep. They pretend this is still the '60s and that they are rebellious teenagers. If you believe these poseurs, all hundred million were at Woodstock and Selma.

In literature, Aspen leftists love one-time local resident Hunter S. Thompson, a lousy writer who was self-absorbed, self-promoting, self-deceiving, and self-killing. More about him later.

In art, they lavishly funded an art museum that was an abstract laughingstock adorned with an \$800,000-a-year director (more

GLENN BEATON

than the Guggenheim pays) whose main qualification was that she was someone's daughter (a someone who went to prison for tax fraud). They demanded that *The Aspen Times* apologize for my column critical of her and the museum.

In music, they are destroying the beautiful harmony built by the founders of the Aspen Music Festival over the course of decades by playing race quota games. More on that later too.

In politics, they think a balanced panel discussion is something like two of Joe Biden's alphabet people on the left and former Rep. Paul Ryan on the "right." Their conspicuously, comically far-left politics surely exceed what they really believe and practice at home. As in the rest of fashion, political fashion is based on posturing and flamboyance for public consumption, not opinions and analysis for personal convictions. It is not designed to solve problems but to virtue signal.

As for the people who are un-rich, many moderate ones have self-selected out of paradise proper, including myself. (I now live in the unfashionable purgatory known as "Down Valley.") The leftist, hypocritical, hateful rich drove us out.

The remaining un-rich people are mostly in taxpayer-subsidized housing. They are on the housing dole. To the extent they were not on the left to begin with, life on the dole drove them there. Public welfare has that effect.

The result is a beautiful but dysfunctional town. It is every bit as dysfunctional as Chicago or Seattle. It takes many years to permit and build a house, even though or perhaps because subsidized housing is a sacred goal advocated by the incompetent class warriors on the city council—along with the 45 percent of city residents occupying that housing.

HIGH ATTITUDE

Aspen is even worse than Democratic-controlled big cities in that there is no accountability for the politicians in Aspen. That is because so much tax revenue is generated by soaking the rich that they will never run out of other people's money to toss around. This soaking of the rich is consensual so long as it comes with a spritz of Aspen cachet.

The current mayor of Aspen is a guy with a single legal name—Torre—whose credentials for overseeing the town's quarter-billion-dollar annual budget are that he is a tennis instructor and a staunch advocate of subsidized housing. A city councilman named "Skippy" agitates for the legalization of more drugs. The mayor who told me to leave town is known for crashing private parties, taking swings at eighty-four-year-old men, and cursing women in the park. Of course, he has resided in taxpayer-subsidized housing for decades, which he got for pennies on the dollar.

A series of Pitkin County sheriffs have called for the complete legalization of all drugs. The Drug Enforcement Administration distrusts them to the point they keep impending drug raids secret from them for fear that they will tip off the dealers.

In my newspaper columns, I railed against all this, especially the sacred cow of taxpayer-subsidized housing for "qualified" residents. The program was created decades ago to provide inexpensive housing for service industry workers, such as ski patrolmen and restaurant workers. From those modest and well-intentioned beginnings, the program has ballooned into a never-ending, never-enough *multibillion*-dollar boondoggle.

This gravy train now benefits not so many ordinary workers but privileged insiders. The income cutoff is \$300,000 a year. Many of the residents are influencers like *The Aspen Times* editors

GLENN BEATON

and reporters. Many others are not even in the workforce because they have been retired for decades.

These upper-middle-class insiders get multimillion-dollar in-town or even slope-side houses and condos for dimes on the dollar. They commonly rent them out in violation of the program rules for tens of thousands of dollars, which is seldom reported on their tax returns.

The program is so metastasized that it includes many of the local poohbahs in addition to *The Aspen Times* editors and reporters. At one point, the mayor and four of the five city council members were on the subsidized housing dole. They tell the rest of us with a straight face that their freebies benefit not them but us because it affords us the privilege of their company.

When I met these types, as I regularly did in this small town, I would do as I was taught when meeting someone. I would tell them my name and offer them a handshake. It was not unusual for them to turn away and refuse the handshake. When I went to sell my last house in Aspen, some realtors advised me to conceal my identity until after closing.

I am glad to say not everyone was so intolerant. Apart from the establishment, many ordinary liberals around town told me that while they usually disagreed with my column, they always wanted to read it because it entertained them and often made them think.

But the mission of *The Aspen Times* and the rest of the Aspen establishment is not to make people think. It is to make people *herd*. They do not want to report the news; they want to cheerlead local leftism. One of the other columnists—which is to say one of the unread and unreadable ones—has declared me “un-Aspen” for refusing to join their squad.

HIGH ATTITUDE

Readers frequently told me they had sent letters to the editor supporting my column or my positions. The paper usually did not publish those letters, but they invariably published the ones that criticized me, even though they typically did so in illiterate and illogical terms.

According to their script, if I dared to express the “wrong” opinions, I was supposed to do so badly and blandly so that nobody would read me except to ridicule me. I was supposed to be the Washington Generals to the liberals’ Harlem Globetrotters. I was never, ever supposed to win an argument.

But The Aspen Beat did win. And that is what got it canceled. In short, the newspaper canceled the column not despite its success but because of it.

Many people were reading my column not to attack or mock me but to agree with me, to be persuaded by me, or at least to be entertained by me. Everyone, of course, loved my mockery of Vail, the ski suburbia strung along I-70 on the other side of a mountain range from Aspen. (I wrote that Vail literally gives me hives, and it does.) They liked my admiration for Caitlyn Jenner. They respected my tribute to a fellow volunteer on Mountain Rescue Aspen who died in an avalanche. They even declined to hate my suggestion that men should act like gentlemen.

But from the standpoint of Aspen’s hard left, even those columns were problematic. That’s because they gave me credibility in enticing readers to read and consider other opinions they normally would not. These included my opinions that perhaps we should not pressure people to vote if they lack the desire or knowledge to do so, that we were asking too much of the Supreme Court and undermining our republic in asking them to formulate

policy that is rightly the task of the people's elected representatives, that jazz music might have been less great if Black musicians had been promoted on the basis of their skin color rather than their musical genius, that it is foolish, dangerous, and undemocratic to let your tribe—conservative or liberal—do your thinking for you.

In short, I was not properly playing the token role for which the newspaper had retained me. I was not a laughable object of ridicule. I was a dangerous force of persuasion. For that, the editors, reporters, and staff of *The Aspen Times*—Democrats, Marxists, or Stalinists to a person—had to cancel me. They had to shut down my forum as an opinionist when I successfully advanced the wrong opinions.

They deny this, naturally. In that same termination email, the editor assured me, “We will continue to have a conservative voice in our paper, but we want one that better represents the local base and does not go off on name-calling, wild assumptions and are [sic] based off a false premise.”

The token “conservative” they engaged to replace me got off on the wrong foot by announcing at the outset that she was not one. Of course not. Having learned from their experience with me, the newspaper would not have taken her on if she were. But tokens are not supposed to reveal that they are tokens.

In the eyes of Aspen lefties, she partially redeemed herself in her first column by proclaiming that what Aspen really needs is... more taxpayer-subsidized housing.

As for my alleged “name-calling,” “wild assumptions,” and “false premises,” the editor chose not to elucidate. Not then, nor during the previous seven years when *The Aspen Times* had

HIGH ATTITUDE

published nearly two hundred of my columns without objection by this editor or his predecessor.

He concluded his email not with thanks for my seven years of free writing (I had always declined their stipend) but with a gracious, “you are welcome to take your column elsewhere.”

That permission was not only unneeded but insincere. The other Aspen newspaper is part of the same hard-left Aspen crowd, as are newspapers throughout the Roaring Fork Valley. And *The Aspen Times* was owned at the time by a chain of twenty-seven newspapers located in small mountain towns of Colorado and the West, so they, too, were out. I had effectively been canceled from at least thirty newspapers.

I thought about shutting down my laptop. But in my previous life—my real life as a lawyer—it was writing that I enjoyed most, followed, in roughly this order, by court appearances, dealing with clients, timekeeping, and mandatory continuing legal education, where I was forcibly injected with the American Bar Association’s latest political pablum while they pretended to teach me updates on the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

I’m also a political junkie. Plus, I think I’m funny.

I decided to continue my column as a blog. It is not hard to do. You can rent space at WordPress, Substack, or elsewhere for practically nothing. Then all you need are readers and something for them to read. I had both.

I gave my blog the same name as the byline I had chosen at *The Aspen Times*. It is called “The Aspen Beat.” You can still subscribe at theAspenbeat.com or at Substack, and, as of this writing, it is still free.

My readership from *The Aspen Times* quickly migrated to The Aspen Beat. I also increased the frequency of my column to about ten a month. Liberated from the cloister and Kool-Aid of *The Aspen Times*, my writing became unleashed, unreined, unfettered, undiluted, unshaven, unkempt, unplugged, and unapologetic.

The blog took off and now dwarfs the little newspaper that fired me. My first piece described my Christmas Eve massacre. It was picked up by six or seven national outlets and generated tens of thousands of clicks. In comparison, the entire circulation and click count for *The Aspen Times* was a fraction of that on a good day, and my column had been responsible for many of those.

Meanwhile, karma came calling. *The Aspen Times* publishes an annual “Best Of” competition each autumn where its readers vote on such matters as “Best Bartender,” “Best Restaurant,” “Best Realtor,” and so on. One of the categories is “Best Columnist.” The marquee category is “Mr. Aspen.”

The 2020 competition came around nine months after I had been fired on Christmas Eve in 2019. The readers of *The Aspen Times* voted me “Best Columnist,” even though—or perhaps because—*The Aspen Times* had fired me the year before. When the competition rolled around again in 2021, they voted me “Mr. Aspen.” That was gratifying, to be sure, and I thank my readers for that.

But I tell my story and the story of Aspen for a broader lesson. Bias and corruption are not just the product of out-of-touch newspapers whose trust ratings are near zero. It is not just by uneducated leftists living in taxpayer-subsidized slope-side digs who demand free stuff while lacking any math skills beyond the concept of “more.” It goes deeper.



HIGH ATTITUDE

Democrats outnumber Republicans at least three to one in Aspen. Absent accountability to opposing viewpoints, the hard-left media, the limousine liberals, and the local leeches are intertwined in a soiled, stinky, incestuous bed.

This is not unique to Aspen. Small, rich, and beautiful towns—towns that were a paradise in the past and could be again—have been radicalized into something resembling Venezuela or Cuba, except with more money to push people around. Something similar has also happened to America’s big cities. Why is that?

In short, Aspen’s ills are bigger than Aspen itself. Aspen is a canary in the coal mine of western civilization, a leading indicator of where the rest of us may soon be headed.

As Barack Obama liked to say when he was about to scold someone, this is an opportunity for a “teaching moment.” I will try to teach in what follows, but—trigger warning!—there will also be some scolding.

