

CALLING THE PROVIDER STATE TO ACCOUNT



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Abstract:

The institutions and traditions of the West are a practical outworking of the introduction of Biblical law and the Christian gospel into Europe. Once the spread of Christian missions and monasteries reached critical mass, the continent was transformed religiously, morally, culturally, and legally through a series of clerical and secular revolutions which gave rise to a loosely federated empire, an institutional separation of Church and State, the rule of law, the rise of nation-states, constitutional limitations, representative government, and economic development. Yet as the direct influence of Christianity wanes, the past century of destruction and dislocation is exposing the West's clay feet. New social legislation is undercutting this legacy and producing a generous supply of public services, policy entrepreneurs, and clientele groups. The rise of "expressive individualism" since the 1960s has coincided with the growth of group identity politics and a cultural revolution within all institutions. When these cultural trends are considered in tandem with the increasing reach of the modern Provider State, their mutual dependence is evident. As radical social agendas impinge upon virtually all areas of life, political elites and interest groups seek to enforce their vision of the good life by capturing and controlling the institutional levers of power.

In a revolutionary situation mistakes and failures are not what they seem. They are scaffolding. Error is not repealed. It is compounded by a longer law, by more decrees and regulations, by further extensions of the administrative hand. As deLawd said in *The Green Pastures*, that when you have passed a miracle you have to pass another one to take care of it, so it was with the New Deal. Every miracle it passed, whether it went right or wrong, had one result. Executive power over the social and economic life of the nation was increased. Draw a

curve to represent the rise of executive power and look there for the mistakes. You will not find them. The curve is consistent¹.

Successful revolutions tend to become “invisible” to subsequent generations but leave their imprint everywhere. By pouring over historical archives Alexis de Tocqueville was able to trace the causes of the French Revolution to earlier changes within the elite culture². In similar fashion, it is possible to trace how the countercultural sensibility of the 1960s was incubated on campus over the course of decades³. From there it got past the cultural gatekeepers to spread into the professions and elite institutions⁴.

The convergence of an Antonio Gramsci-style “long march through the institutions” and a new elite political style – born out of the sympathetic interaction of the New Left, the sexual revolution, and postmodernism – helped lift newer forms of group identity politics from its once precarious position within the rough-and-tumble of political competition into an almost unassailable protected status⁵. What Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn decades earlier called identitarianism – an expression of the “herd instinct” – is effectively devaluing the pluralism and diversity that, at first, enriched the republican and covenantal character of the

¹ Gareth Garrett, *The People's Pottage* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Press, 1953). The Garrett piece could be seen as an application of the “science of despotism” developed by Alexis de Tocqueville. <https://www.garetgarrett.org/1944-the-revolution-was-the-revolution-was-garet-garrett.html>

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, ed. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1955).

³ See Ralph de Toledano, *Cry Havoc! The Great American Bring-down and How It Happened* (Washington: Anthem, 2005); Paul Kengor, *Takedown: From Communists to Progressives, How the Left Has Sabotaged Family and Marriage* (Washington, DC: WND Books, 2015).

⁴ See David Gelernter, *America-Lite: How Imperial Academia Dismantled Our Culture (and Ushered in the Obamacrats)* (New York: Encounter, 2012); Kenneth Minogue, “How Civilizations Fall”, *New Criterion* (April 2001). <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2001/4/how-civilizations-fall>

⁵ See Steven Alan Samson, “A Strategy of Subversion”, *The Market for Ideas*, 22 (Mar.-Apr. 2020). <http://www.themarketforideas.com/a-strategy-of-subversion-a541/>.

original American system expressed in the motto: *E pluribus unam*, out of many, one. Instead, “identity and identitarian drives tend toward an effacement of self, towards a nostrism (‘usness’) in which the ego becomes submerged”.⁶

Given the size and scope of the burgeoning administrative apparatus, the increasing standardization of every aspect of life and a narrowing of accepted opinion in the new social media serves the interests of the governing classes and the growing empire of intergovernmental organizations that began with high-level international conferences toward the end of the Second World War. Unlike the original American union, which was knit together through committees of correspondence and other forms of voluntary cooperation in the early 1770s, the postwar economic order grew into an “empire by invitation”⁷ which, among many other things, helped rebuild war-torn economies and infrastructure while also trying to manage the consequences of the forced migration of displaced populations. These crises were the legacy of two world wars, the breakup of four empires, a Great Depression, and the rise of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

Postwar cabinets and the emergence of a managerial “overclass”⁸ drawn from middle-class businessmen and professionals built institutions around an ideal of liberal internationalism and, more recently, global governance. Confronted with the “chaotic syncretism” of a pantheon of religions, rituals, and customs, their favored strategy has been either to turn disadvantaged groups into an increasingly anonymous proletariat of pensioners or to discredit

⁶ Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, *Leftism: From de Sade and Marx to Hitler and Marcuse* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1974), 15-16.

⁷ Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945: From “Empire” by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27-35.

⁸ See Michael Lind, *The New Class War: Saving Democracy from the Managerial Elite* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2020), 6. Lind builds on James Burnham’s theory of the managerial revolution.

as “deplorables” those who resist homogenization into the prevailing ideological pieties⁹.

As the radicalization of racial, class, and gender politics continuously reshuffles the political deck, the very form of the nation-state – which embraces a unique cultural identity and history – has become a primary target of campaigns to discredit traditional norms as expressions of “hegemony” and oppression¹⁰. For at least the past half century America has been beset by a wide range of multicultural demands which, according to the late American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, challenge and seek “to replace America’s mainstream Anglo-Protestant culture with other cultures”¹¹.

The identity fluidity of the present generation is the byproduct of a long-term and wide-ranging project by the stage managers of elite opinion to discredit and break down traditional cultural norms and thwart popular resistance. What Roger Scruton described as a “culture of repudiation” bears a strong resemblance to what Michael Polanyi earlier called “moral inversion” and Michael Oakeshott described as “rationalism in politics”¹².

According to Huntington, significant portions of America’s political and commercial elites favor the cosmopolitanism of “an open society with open borders” while using “subnational ethnic,

⁹ See Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age: The Social and Cultural Outlook* (New York: Dutton, 1941), 250; Joel Kotkin, *The New Class Conflict* (Candor, NY: Telos, 2014); Joel Kotkin, *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism: A Warning to the Global Middle Class* (New York: Encounter, 2020).

¹⁰ See John Fonte, *Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or Be Ruled by Others* (New York: Encounter, 2011), 344-45.

¹¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 171

¹² See Roger Scruton, *A Political Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2006) 23-25; Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002) 68-83; Michael Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: Phoenix, 1964 [1946]), 74; Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1991), 15-16.

racial, and cultural identities” for leverage. Other elite opinion leaders promote an imperial vision which exalts “the supremacy of American power and the universality of American values”.

“In the cosmopolitan alternative, the world reshapes America. In the imperial alternative, America remakes the world. Cosmopolitanism and imperialism attempt to reduce or to eliminate the social, political, and cultural differences between America and other societies”¹³.

Nevertheless, this dichotomy does not exhaust the possibilities for America’s engagement with the world: “The alternative to cosmopolitanism and imperialism is nationalism devoted to the preservation and enhancement of those qualities that have defined America since its founding”. However much the elites may deplore this fact and seek to discredit any signs of resistance to their preferred vision of transnational progressivism,¹⁴ “the overwhelming bulk of the American people are committed to a national alternative and to preserving and strengthening the American identity that has existed for centuries”¹⁵.

The jury is still out as to whether this protracted campaign will succeed in sufficiently discrediting historical American ideas, folkways, and institutions as to reshape American public opinion. Various facets of the campaign to repudiate America’s political and cultural foundations continue to filter down through the media into public attitudes. Even so, the wide geographical distribution of centers of power within the political system helps preserve diversity. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, as friends and families living in different parts of the country share their wildly contrasting experiences with Covid-19 restrictions, popular resistance and pushback against some of the more stringent

¹³ Huntington, *Who*, 363, 364.

¹⁴ Fonte, *Sovereignty*, 160ff; see also Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret, *Covid-19: The Great Reset* (Cologne, Switzerland: Forum Publishing, 2020).

¹⁵ Huntington, *Who*, 366.

policies is strengthening, particularly in response to the seemingly endless social and economic lockdowns – especially the escalation of moralistic hectoring over vaccination, masking, and social distancing.

It remains to be seen whether the electorate comes to recognize the interconnectedness of these trends and take timely action. Francis Schaeffer noted the difficulty even in 1984: “The basic problems of the Christians in this country in the last eighty years or so, in regard to society and in regard to government, is that they have seen things in bits and pieces instead of totals”¹⁶.

THE PURSUIT OF A GREAT RESET

Huntington devoted his last book, provocatively entitled *Who Are We?* (2004), to examining a “global crisis of identity”. In America, the assimilationist “melting pot” ideal of a century ago has lost considerable ground to the ideology of multiculturalism. Huntington noted that nationalism and patriotism began to fade in the 1960s advised choosing to revitalize the “Anglo-Protestant culture, traditions, and values that for three and a half centuries have been embraced by Americans of all races, ethnicities, and religions and that have been the source of their unity, power, prosperity, and moral leadership as a force for good in the world”¹⁷.

The urgency of the issue has only intensified in recent years. In view of the wholesale adoption of Critical Race Theory and the 1619 Project by curriculum developers in America, the effect of such intense campaigns to detach students’ loyalties from God and country – while transferring them to other institutions, groups, or ideologies – is to discredit and disrupt every aspect of American national life. The historical wounds wrought by slavery in America and colonialism in Europe have certainly made the West vulnerable to attack, especially given its global reach¹⁸. Through

¹⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 17.

¹⁷ Huntington, *Who*, xvii.

¹⁸ See Joshua Mitchell, *American Awakening: Identity Politics and Other Afflictions of Out Time* (New York: Encounter, 2020).

an indiscriminate rejection of the entire system many young people are falling into a trap George Washington's identified in his 1796 Farewell Address when he urged for precautions be taken against showing undue favoritism or hostility to anyone, either at home or abroad. This advice has gone largely unheeded:

In contemplating the causes which may disturb our Union, it occurs as matter of serious concern that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by geographical discriminations, Northern and Southern, Atlantic and Western; whence designing men may endeavor to excite a belief that there is a real difference of local interests and views. One of the expedients of party to acquire influence within particular districts, is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts. You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heart burnings which spring up from these misrepresentations; they tend to render alien to each other those who ought to be bound by fraternal affection (...).

Excessive partiality for one foreign nation and excessive dislike of another, cause those whom they actuate to see danger only on one side, and serve to veil and even second the arts of influence on the other. Real patriots, who may resist the intrigues of the favorite, are liable to become suspected and odious; while its tools and dupes usurp the applause and confidence of the people, to surrender their interests¹⁹.

At issue is a set of presuppositions that Gunnar Myrdal identified as the American Creed in the 1940s. He called it "the most explicitly expressed system of general ideals in reference to human interrelations. This body of ideals is more widely understood and appreciated than similar ideas are anywhere else". Indeed, Myrdal acknowledged it was accepted even by those he identified as "subordinated groups" and who did not share in the full measure of their enjoyment:

¹⁹ <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/george-washington-s-farewell-address/>

These ideals of the essential dignity of the individual human being, of the fundamental equality of all men, and of certain unalienable rights to freedom, justice, and fair opportunity represent to the American people the essential meaning of the nation's early struggle for independence²⁰.

The original basis for this American identity is well summarized by Huntington himself:

Religiosity distinguishes America from most other western societies. Americans are also overwhelmingly Christian, which distinguishes them from most non-Western peoples.

Along with the idea of America as a nation of immigrants, however, Huntington regarded this American Creed as only a half-truth whose origins he attributed to the early influence of a culture of Protestant dissent during the lead up to the War for Independence. Its intellectual sources included natural and common law, the constitutional rights of Englishmen, limits of government authority, and some Enlightenment ideas:

The Protestant emphasis on the individual conscience and the responsibility of individuals to learn God's truths directly from the Bible promoted American commitment to individualism, equality, and the rights of freedom of religion and opinion. Protestantism stressed the work ethic and the responsibility of the individual for his own success or failure in life. With its congregational form of church organization, Protestantism fostered opposition to hierarchy and the assumption that similar democratic forms should be employed in government. It also promoted moralistic efforts to reform society and to secure peace and justice at home and throughout the world²¹.

²⁰ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 2.

²¹ Huntington, *Who*, 68. Huntington also called on the testimony of Alexis de Tocqueville, Francis Grund, Philip Schaff, James Bryce, Gunnar Myrdal, and others to conclude that Americans are a religious and an overwhelmingly

These qualities were shaped and reshaped over a long period according to accounts by C. Gregg Singer and Walter McDougall²². James Kurth argues that the character of the American experiment has undergone a long “Protestant Deformation”, a decline away from its original Reformed Christian precepts. The original Reformation opposed assigning a role in salvation by faith to the church hierarchy and community. The Protestant Deformation, however, undercuts all authority by stripping hierarchy and community, traditions and customs, from every area of life²³. Individuality has been detached from its original Christian context, leading to the generalized individualism of the American Creed²⁴ and, most recently, a generic set of universal human rights which are easily reset according to utopian and revolutionary agendas²⁵.

Huntington acknowledged the tension by describing the American Creed as “Protestantism without God, the secular credo of the ‘nation with the soul of a church’”. Although America’s civil religion is “thoroughly Christian in its origins, content, assumptions,

Christian people. See also B. F. Morris, *Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States, Developed in the Official and Historical Annals of the Republic* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1864).

²² See C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1981 [1964]); Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

²³ James Kurth, *The American Way of Empire: How America Won a World – But Lost Her Way* (Washington: Washington Books, 2019), 57-79. Kurth identifies six stages in this process of declension, culminating in a highly individualistic idea of universal human rights defined to the exclusion of hierarchy and community, tradition and custom. <https://phillysoc.org/kurth-the-protestant-deformation-and-american-foreign-policy/>

²⁴ Francis Lieber recognized the problem by contrasting two traditions of liberty, the decentralized Anglican and the more regulated Gallican. See Steven Alan Samson, “Rival Traditions of Liberty: America vs. the European Union”, *The Review of Social and Economic Issues*, 1:4 (2017) https://works.bepress.com/steven_samson/579/

²⁵ See Steven Alan Samson, “An Imperium of Rights: Consequences of Our Cultural Revolution”, *The Western Australian Jurist*, 7 (2016): 171-91. https://works.bepress.com/steven_samson/570/

and tone”, he observed that “two words, nonetheless, do not appear in civil religion statements and ceremonies. They are ‘Jesus Christ’”²⁶. Seymour Martin Lipset summarized its “five key principles” as “liberty, egalitarianism (of opportunity and respect, not result or condition), individualism, populism, and laissez-faire”²⁷.

The American Creed’s resemblance to the Biblical faith lent it both respectability and credibility. Yet the liberal/modernist redefinition of the faith diverted many churches and denominations from sound doctrine into such social issues as prohibition, socialism, and progressive education. A loss of cultural relevance has been their reward²⁸.

EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE CHARACTER OF NATIONS

Successful revolutions leave traces of their influence on folklore, fashions, and customs. In retrospect they exude a sense of inevitability almost as a force of nature. The legacy of the French Revolution of 1789 has never lost its endemic ability to disrupt the continually renegotiated truces required to keep its excesses at bay, even today. In the 1960s – through the media of “sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll” – the spirit of 1789 returned with astonishing swiftness in the form of countercultural and antiwar movements which culminated in Paris 1968 with the riots of May 1968 and in America with the protests at the Democratic National Convention in August. Its active phase dissipated or went underground for a time following the Kent State shootings but its cultural influence has never slackened. By 1987 rock-and-roll music was so embedded in the youth culture that Allan Bloom could remark of his more serious-minded students, sympathetically,

²⁶ Huntington, *Who*, 69, 106.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 67

²⁸ The chief critique, as Walter Lippmann acknowledged in *A Preface to Morals*, is J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974 [1923]).

that “their musical sans-culotteism won the revolution and reigns unabashed today”²⁹.

Four decades later, classroom teachers actively promote a Maoist-style cultural revolution through the curriculum in Portland and neighboring Oregon cities.

*The schools have self-consciously adopted the “pedagogy of the oppressed” as their theoretical orientation, activated it through a curriculum of critical race theory, and enforced it through the appointment of de facto political officers within individual schools, generally under the cover of “equity and social-justice” programming. In short, they have begun to replace education with activism*³⁰.

Undermining civic order continues in many of the places that, in 2020, were torn by weeks and months of daily demonstrations. At times, elected officials themselves take the lead to curtail or eliminate police services, withhold protection from private and public property, permit homeless camps to impinge on public thoroughfares, and refuse to prosecute property crimes.

It is not difficult to discern a guiding purpose behind the politicization of education as part of a larger strategy of subversion. George Bernard Shaw explicitly made the case a century ago:

In the case of young children we have gone far in our interference with the old Roman rights of parents. For nine mortal years the child is taken out of its parent's hands for most of the day, and thus made a State school child instead of a private family child. [...]To put it quite frankly and flatly, the Socialist State, as far as I can guess, will teach the child the multiplication table, but will not only not teach it the Church

²⁹ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 70.

³⁰ Christopher F. Rufo, “Portland’s Child Soldiers”, *City Journal*, 31 (Spring 2021): 14.

*Catechism, but if the State teachers find that the child's parents have been teaching it the Catechism otherwise than as a curious historical document, the parents will be warned that if they persist the child will be taken out of their hands and handed over to the Lord Chancellor, exactly as the children of Shelley were when their maternal grandfather denounced his son-in-law as an atheist*³¹.

As far back as 1917, the Progressive movement in America downplayed the intellectual side of education. John Dewey wrote: "I believe that the social life of the child is the basis of concentration, or correlation, in all his training or growth. [...] I believe, therefore, that the true center of correlation on the school subjects is not science, nor literature, nor geography, but the child's social activities"³².

A similar step away from an earlier emphasis on intellectual rigor was taken by the National Education Association in 1918 when it issued a report entitled *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*. The report criticized what it called educational "selfishness" and intellectual independence. In place of mastering the disciplines of history, civics, and geography, the pupil would now dabble in social studies – a poorly defined smorgasbord of idealistic clichés³³. By jettisoning the mastery of content, public education has left the citizenry vulnerable to subtle forms of manipulation. Given these beginnings, no one should be astonished at the consequences.

Nevertheless, the radical chic of socially-approved sympathies cannot suspend society's dependence upon far older verities. In "Revolutionary Revelation", for example, Sara Yoheved Rigler tried to imagine an alternate New York in a "world devoid

³¹ Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism, and Fascism* (New York: Random House, 1928), 412.

³² <http://dewey.pragmatism.org/creed.htm>.

³³ See Samuel L. Blumenfeld, *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education* (Boise, ID: Paradigm, 1984), 65-71.

of Torah”. Although the scenario is interesting both for what is present – the Brooklyn Bridge, skyscrapers, Lincoln Center, Wall Street – and what is missing – schools, hospitals, ambulances, local courthouses – it is difficult to imagine a high-tech New York, even on a far smaller scale, in the complete absence of the Jewish and Christian contributions to civilization. One might as well imagine a technologically advanced Inca Empire which had not yet developed the wheel³⁴.

The Bible’s teachings are empirical and concrete rather than abstract. Bodily motifs, such as having (or not having) the eyes to see and the ears to hear, run through Scripture from beginning to end. Modern advances in general literacy, the institution of hospitals and public schools, Sabbath days of rest, the concept of linear time, protecting the defenseless, and a widespread sense of the sacredness of human life were once unthinkable and would be so today except for the foundational influence of the Bible. As Thomas Cahill summarized:

Without the Jews, we would see the world through different eyes, hear with different ears, even feel with different feelings. And not only would our sensorium, the screen through which we receive the world, be different: we would think with a different mind, interpret all our experience differently, draw different conclusions from the things that befall us. And we would set a different course for our lives³⁵.

The nominally Christian West still thrives in the afterglow of an identifiably Torah-based moral culture, even as the light and warmth of the original has been dissipating from public consciousness, for decades if not centuries. Near the end of *The Servile State* (1912), Hilaire Belloc wrote: “There is a complex knot of forces underlying any nation once Christian; a smoldering of the old fires”³⁶.

³⁴ <https://www.aish.com/h/sh/t/48962111.html>

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Hilaire Belloc, *The Servile State* (London: T. N. Foulis, 1912).

As Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy argued in *Out of Revolution* (1938), we live in a world shaped and reshaped by successive waves of revolution which transformed a peninsular extension of Asia into a hub of entrepreneurial innovation. The terrible sacrifices that accompanied these secular revolutions – led in turn by Martin Luther’s Protestants, Oliver Cromwell’s Roundheads, Robespierre’s Jacobins, and Lenin’s Bolsheviks – rendered them “immortal” as agents of a growing “solidarity of mankind”³⁷.

Yet these were far from the first of the upheavals that have redirected the trajectory of history. A thousand years ago, the Church had become as universal in its outreach as the economy remained local. Monks, missionaries, and scholars crisscrossed Europe and parts of Asia at a time when most people lived out their entire within a few miles of where they were born. Today, however, Church and economy have virtually traded places on the scales of geographic penetration and measurable productivity. Yet appearances can mislead.

The original impulse that lent its dynamic to this transformative renewal was religious rather than political in substance. Early in the sesquimillennium before “Columbus sailed the ocean blue”, the Apostle Paul brought the Christian gospel to the gentiles of Greece and Rome. The enterprise and sacrificial dedication of subsequent missionaries and monastic movements helped transform Europe into a new world of faith and industry, thereby establishing the trajectory for a long cooperative odyssey to reclaim its waste lands, plant missionary outposts, and rebuild the remnants of classical civilization along distinctly Biblical lines. It is a tale worth retelling.

³⁷ Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Out of Revolution: Autobiography of Western Man* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1938), 25, 31.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF INSTITUTIONAL LIBERTY

Our passions give life to the world. Our collective passions constitute the history of mankind. No political entity can be formed into the steel and concrete of government, frontiers, army and navy, schools and roads, laws and regulations, if people are not swayed out of their rugged individualism into common enterprises, such as war, revolutions, adventure, cooperation, by collective passions. Any political effort must single out the peculiar human passion which, at that moment in history, will create unanimity and coherence among men³⁸.

Like the imaginative works of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, Rosenstock's "Post-War Preface" to *Out of Revolution* (1938) echoes the experience of battle by someone who knew its costs. Without the sacrifices of soldiers and civilians alike, liberty – perhaps civilization itself – might have perished at such places as Tours, Lepanto, and the Gates of Vienna. By 1914, he observed, war in Europe had become civil war rather than a clash between alien cultures. Contrary to wartime propaganda, the depiction of German forces as Hun invaders was no more honest than the postwar use of referenda to break up defeated empires at the cost of decades of ethnic violence, scapegoating, and displacement. One lesson of the Great War is that the new technical and administrative means acquired by political leaders and their enablers – total mobilization, conscription, surveillance, disinformation and other active measures – permit concentration of power into fewer hands, inviting a pursuit of utopian schemes.

It is useful to recall this penchant for moralistic meddling – for the indulgence of Michael Oakeshott's "rationalism in politics" – when considering that the most prominent voices on campus and in the media today treat western civilization as a depraved exotic invader of some aboriginal Arcadia of lost innocence. The divisive rhetorical smokescreens favored by political moralists obscure

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

their origins in an internal political debate over how and whether the public interest – including that of future generations – is to be represented. There is a larger context to consider beyond the aggressive rejection of conventional norms by the “culture of repudiation”.

At stake are the realities – the truths – out of which civilization grows and upon which alone it flourishes. As Rosenstock noted:

*Christianity came into a world of divided loyalties – races, classes, tribes, nations, empires, all living to themselves alone. It did not simply erase these loyalties; that would have plunged men into nihilism and cancelled the previous work of creation, and Jesus came not to deny but to fulfill. Rather, by its gift of a real future, Christianity implanted in the very midst of men's loyalties a power, which, reaching back from the end of time, drew them step by step into unity*³⁹.

Today this “gift of a real future” is once again threatened by force, fraud, fear, and folly. In the third chapter Rosenstock summarized what been put at risk for his generation – its liberties and loyalties – while noting the ancient provenance of each particular: 1) the peace of the land, 2) institutions of higher learning, 3) the free choice of a profession, 4) the right to dispose of one's personal property through a last will and testament, 5) and freedom of the mind. Every stage of this revolutionary legacy has this in common: “They have emancipated the various elements of our social existence from previous bondage”⁴⁰. Then as now, they provide the historical supports for the “institutional liberty” which helps sustain civil society⁴¹.

It has been said that an institution is the lengthened shadow of a single man, usually its founder. The founder of what was later

³⁹ Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Christian Future: or the Modern Mind Outrun* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966 [1946]), 62.

⁴⁰ Rosenstock-Huessy, *Revolution*, 30-31.

⁴¹ See Steven Alan Samson, “Francis Lieber on the Sources of Civil Liberty”, *Humanitas*, IX, 2 (1996): 40-62. <http://nhinet.org/samson.htm>

called the Holy Roman Empire, Otto I, claimed only to be a vicegerent, a placeholder until the return of the King, Christ.

No nation, no cities, yet an emperor, was the paradoxical situation a thousand years ago. [...] The unique experiment of the Western World consists in rebuilding a former world. [...] An emperor, a thousand years ago, did not represent pre-eminently the power of this world. He was considered the state witness of a world beyond. [...] The Empire was a remembrance and a desire. [...] It was European civilization as a whole which was called upon to represent the idea of the ancient city-state! The civilized nations are sectors of one city. The concept of a universal civilization opposing a multitude of local economic units was the emperor's gift to the European tribes⁴².

Christendom was born under the aegis of a revived but decentralized Roman-style empire. Pope Leo III set the precedent when he crowned Charlemagne Emperor of Rome at St. Peter's on Christmas morning in the year 800. Interrupted for decades, the imperial office was revived by Otto I in the tenth century. Decentralized, lacking a fixed capital city, presided over by an emperor chosen by an electoral college, the empire was knit together more by the word than by the sword. The emperor's "rule was unique, not central"⁴³.

A century later, Pope Gregory VII clashed with Emperor Henry IV when asserted the primacy of the Church over the investiture of its officers. Rosenstock regarded the Dictates of the Pope (1075) as the first revolutionary manifesto, opening a seesaw struggle that persisted for generations and helped turn the

⁴² Rosenstock-Huessy, *Revolution*, 488-89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 489. On the rise of Otto, Augsburg, and the conversion of Hungary, see Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic, 2019), 214-21; on Europe as a product of two "secondarities" – Rome and Christianity – see Rémi Brague, *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*, trans. Samuel Lester (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002 [1992]). What purists decry as "cultural appropriation" is endemic to both.

continent into a playing field of revolution that reverberated to all corners of the continent⁴⁴. In similar fashion the founding institutions of the West were secured at great cost. Requiring periodic renewal, they are equally – if not more – at risk today.

Let us consider each of these revolutions briefly. Today most westerners take for granted the ability to travel unmolested. This was not the case a thousand years ago before a far-flung, federated monastic order centered at Cluny devised a number of reforms, including an enforceable “truce of the land” in the tenth century. As Rosenstock stipulated: “The constitution of Cluny is the first trust, the trans-local corporation”. As early as 1027, the Catholic Church’s modest Truce of God similarly set aside and dedicated four holy days – Maundy Thursday through Easter Sunday – to honor “the passion and resurrection of the Lord”.

Many centuries were required to advance an institutionalized “peace of the land” to overcome the feuds and vendettas of families and clans – the memory of which is preserved, for example, at Florence’s Piazza della Signoria and in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. This practice was subsequently extended to other holidays – eventually to all the weeks of the year. In England, the king’s peace was already a part of Anglo-Saxon law. Its protections were similarly extended to holidays, highways, and the safeguarding of public order.

Even so, following a “war to end all war”, the postwar emergence of a “general new gospel of ‘Violence for the sake of Violence’” threatened to reverse what had centuries of concerted effort to construct. Rosenstock singled out George Sorel and Vilfredo Pareto as “engineers of the new art”⁴⁵.

Shirts of all colours indicate the return of private armies, taking the name of free associations in order to build up semi-governmental authority. Feuds and vendettas are cultivated

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 537-39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

again under the new name of strong racial sentiment. The World War, as we can see, has rehabilitated ways of thinking and forms of action abolished a long, long time ago⁴⁶.

Private armies of the sort that helped elevate Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler to power roiled the interwar political landscape. Although they receded for a time after the Second World War, they have not disappeared. In many respects they simply evolved into political machines, martial arts clubs, and criminal syndicates that operate within a netherworld of drug smuggling, human trafficking, and ancillary enterprises.

Rosenstock attributed the liberation of vocation – the free choice of a profession – to the closure of monasteries during the Reformation when Martin Luther and “thousands of monks and nuns returned into the world and took up trades”.

These people could not return to their fathers’ trades, as had been universal tradition before. They came from their monasteries as individuals, stripped of their clannishness and their family loyalties as no human being ever had been before. As the Truce of God had needed a superhuman effort, so it needed this superhuman emergency of some hundred thousand individuals to establish the right of every living generation to rearrange society⁴⁷.

Just as American doughboys could not stay on the farm once they had seen Paris, so the dissolution of monasteries and the dislocation of small farmers in England by the enclosure of common lands left their mark on history in countless ways, including social legislation, such as the Elizabethan Poor Law, and the growth of cities.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 27. See also Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals (La Trahison des Clercs)*, trans. Richard Aldington (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969 [1928]) on the politicization of intellectuals.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

Postwar demobilization, mass population displacements, increasingly itinerant employment, family breakdown, and the descent of the most vulnerable into various forms of peonage are all wrenching experiences in their own right. Rosenstock also cited the “*numerus clausus*” laws in many countries which restricted the total number of students – particularly Jews and other minority groups – in both universities and the trades. An increasingly urban proletariat characterized by growing dependency coincided with greater influence, wealth, and electoral control for a powerful few. Speaking of the pattern of government planning in his own day, Rosenstock concluded:

A hereditary peasantry is one of the goals of the present [1938] rulers of Germany and of many leaders in other countries. Workers are sent out by the hundreds of thousands in a more or less compulsory way, on public works, whole districts are evacuated or resettled, and emigration and immigration checked to such an extent that for all practical purposes they have ceased to exist. [...] It almost approaches the methods of cattle-raising when such and such number of aviators, teachers, watch-makers, is called into existence each year according to plan. However, a whole public school system was erected on the basic principle that a man was free to choose his profession⁴⁸.

Rosenstock here alludes to Reformation-era experiments in public education to support the new-found ability to choose or change one’s vocation. These were repeated in Scotland, Puritan New England, and Prussia. Yet despite all the “talk of progress on this line” at the time Rosenstock wrote, “the principle and the particular institution which has enabled them to go forward in that direction for the last four hundred years is crumbling”⁴⁹. Nearly a century later, the disintegration of public education points in the direction of what Joel Kotkin calls “neo-feudalism”⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁵⁰ Kotkin, *Neo-Feudalism*, 94-95.

The fruits of the later English, American, and French revolutions are similarly at risk. Sphere sovereignty or subsidiarity was established in principle by the English revolution of the 1640s along with the practice of philanthropy.

The world owes it to the British Commonwealth that during the last centuries, donations, endowments, voluntary gifts, have been the mainspring of progress in many fields. Were it not for the right of man to do what he liked with his property little would exist in religion, art, science, social and medical work today. No king's arbitrary power was allowed to interfere with a man's last will as expressed in his testament. On the independence of 10,000 fortunes a civilization was based that allowed for a rich variety of special activities introduced by imaginative donors and founders. The ways of life explored under the protection of an independent judiciary form a social galaxy. Our modern dictators, however, are cutting deeply into this tradition. This is achieved through progressive taxation of inheritance or imitation of a man's right over his property, by subsidizing institutions, like Oxford, which were independent formerly⁵¹.

Yet these principles and practices are increasingly at risk even in the Anglosphere where they took early root. The subsequent spread of administrative law and regulation reveals how vulnerable genuine pluralism is both to arbitrary rulers and to those democratic leaders more concerned with strengthening the financial “bottom line” than in protecting what the early American political scientist Francis Lieber called “civil liberty and self-government”.

The famous Dartmouth case which Daniel Webster against the State (a striking example of the progressive significance of the Whiggish principle) was tried only a century ago; yet the conditions which made it possible for Webster to win are rapidly vanishing, at least in Europe⁵².

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 29-30.

Equally at risk is freedom of the mind. “For the first time in the history of the world, it has become possible for a man, thanks to patents and copyrights to capitalize on his talents and genius”. Lieber, for example, wrote pamphlets and sent memorials to Congress in support of international copyright protections and in opposition to tariffs. Abraham Lincoln took out a patent for a device to lift boats over shoals. Entrepreneurship commanded such great respect that traditional riparian rights were modified to favor what J. Willard Hurst called “the release of energy”. Even so, the support for free markets diminished in the twentieth century.

But again, the institutions which thus protect genius are losing their former energy. Great trusts are taking over the movies, the arts, and the process of invention. A chain-gang of hundreds of thousands of collaborating brains – in chemistry, electricity, and the whole realm of technique and medicine – asks for protection⁵³.

Today’s heavily subsidized high-tech industries have become not only too big to fail but also too powerful a cultural influence. In the manner depicted in Václav Havel’s parable, the greengrocer’s willingness to go along to get along helps legitimize the regime⁵⁴. A similar role played by these media behemoths in the management of news and enforcement of speech codes, which enables them to impose the ideological straitjackets that turn citizens into subjects⁵⁵.

We live at a time when guest speakers are canceled or forced to change their venue after traveling great distances for an

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁴ On the “excusatory function of ideology”, see Václav Havel, *Living in Truth: Twenty-Two Essays Published on the Occasion of the Award of the Erasmus Prize to Václav Havel*, ed. Jan Vladislav (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 41-43.

⁵⁵ Steven Alan Samson, “Ideological Straitjackets Turn Citizens into Subjects”, *Townhall Finance*, October 28, 2020.

<https://finance.townhall.com/columnists/stevenalansamson/2020/10/28/ideological-straitjackets-turn-citizens-into-subjects-n2578930>

engagement. News stories which fail a political litmus test are easily spiked or roundly denounced. A professor is said to create a “hostile learning environment” if he fails to acknowledge gender-fluid students’ preferred pronouns or issue “trigger warnings” over sensitive topics.

Our system of higher learning has strayed far from its origins. Universities designed to offer a plurality of opinions on important issues in one place at the same time were an innovation that predated Renaissance Humanism. Rosenstock found the sources of the Christian university – and the basis for academic freedom – in Biblical precedent. “The voice of the prophet speaking to the kings of Israel, the voice of Paul speaking before the governors of Rome, was made a public institution of the German nation when Luther offered Frederick his protection”. Luther’s authority “in the beyond” gave him authority in this world. Vesting the professor’s chair with a prophetic vocation, Luther turned the German university into a church-like institution.

Luther, the man who offered comfort to his prince, was no isolated individual like Thomas Paine; he was the rightful spokesman of the City of God, the guardian of the opened and re-opened Bible, the trusted interpreter of Holy Scripture, one of the ordained seventy interpreters of the old Church, with the power of binding and loosing, but with the authority to open and close a public discussion in matters of national interest. The German professor was always careful to keep as part of his title the addition, ‘Public Professor,’ in order to make clear his political sovereignty. [...] The salvation-character of scholarship, utterly foreign to the rest of the world, is the religious key to the political building erected by the Reformation⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ Rosenstock-Huessy, *Revolution*, 397-99. The Gramscian strategy to capture and repurpose institutions, such as the university, is illustrated by section on the University and Social Change of the 1962 Port Huron Statement. ww2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS_Port_Huron.html

Five centuries later, the general amnesia of a civilization in its dotage is actively, perhaps with malice aforethought, forgetting the foundational character of the institutions which “have emancipated the various elements of our social existence from previous bondage”.

*A police force means nothing less than the emancipation of the civilian within myself; for without it, I should be forced to cultivate the rugged virtue of a vigilant man. [...] The paradoxical truth about progress, then, is that it wholly depends on the survival of massive institutions which prevent a relapse from a stage which has once been reached*⁵⁷.

If history has a default position, it is to leave the unprotected and the improvident exposed to the will and whim of the powerful. In place of capricious Fortune, the Biblical narrative – with its high view of man created in the image of God – offered Providential blessing to the faithful. This brought to the West a creative dynamism – expressions of faith, hope, and love – which still carries it forward. Should the West yield to the temptation to despise this institutional birthright and sell it cheap, it should not count on it being restored or ever winning it back.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL ORDER

Guilds, universities, endowments and trusts, police forces: these are among the fruits of a dynamic Christian civilization that spawned great reform movements as well as revolutions. “The problem is how to go forward and take the next step without losing the gains secured by previous institutions”⁵⁸. Part of the answer is to reject policies that discourage initiative subsidizing a greater state of dependency.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

Ralph Raico and many others have attributed “The European Miracle” – its trailblazing political and economic development – to the widespread influence of Christianity through churches and families.⁵⁹ An obvious failure to invest in the moral and spiritual infrastructure led Stephen Moore to ask: How is it that America, “sweet land of liberty”, has become a nation of takers rather than makers⁶⁰?

The paradox is that the state and society depend upon virtues they are not well-equipped to instill. As the Christian political philosopher J. Budziszewski puts it: “Through *subsidiarity*, the government honors virtue and protects its teachers, but without trying to take their place”⁶¹. Public virtue enables free markets and civil society to flourish without a vast regulatory apparatus to take care of every need. Corruption seems to correlate with a shift toward greater intervention and regulation by the state. While this trends predated the early twentieth-century Progressive movement, but during this period that government regulation reached its full flowering.

⁵⁹ See <https://mises.org/library/european-miracle-0> or http://works.bepress.com/steven_samson/134/. Especially recommended on the subject are M. Stanton Evans, *The Theme Is Freedom*, which is also cited in David Gress, *From Plato to NATO*; scholars who have reflected on the diverse elements that brought western civilization into being include Vishal Mangalwadi, Remi Brague, Pierre Manent, Philippe Nemo, Christopher Dawson, Roger Scruton, and Rodney Stark.

⁶⁰ <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704050204576219073867182108?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052748704050204576219073867182108.html>. See also Nicholas Eberstadt, *A Nation of Takers: America's Entitlement Epidemic* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2012), 23: “[B]oth political parties have, on the whole, been working together in an often unspoken consensus to fuel the explosion of entitlement spending in modern America”.

⁶¹ J. Budziszewski, *The Revenge of Conscience: Politics and the Fall of Man* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1999), 70.

THE PROGRESSIVE ASCENDANCY

The State has an “annexationist” character tending toward centralization and the development of a Provider State. We must uphold the principle of subsidiarity. Action should always be taken by the smallest possible unit, starting with the person.
– *The Portland Declaration*⁶².

The principal reliance of Progressives was on political reform. The reform movements of the turn of the century that gave rise to Progressivism were directed toward rooting out political corruption, especially in the cities, and developing a generally acceptable form of democratic socialism in politics, religion, education, and law. It should be emphasized, however, that most Progressives rejected what is today understood to be socialism. They represented, in part, a counteroffensive by the middle-class and professionals against the urban political machines.

The purpose of the New Nationalism of Herbert Croly and Theodore Roosevelt was to convert the national government into a countervailing force that could regulate business practices on behalf of the public interest⁶³. Big Government was seen as necessary by some to control Big Business.

During the Progressive Era (1901-1920), reformers in both political parties sought “to use the [national] government as an agency of human welfare” and as a means of regulating the marketplace. High-minded philanthropists and demagogic muckrakers in their own ways sought to bypass state and local government in order to convert the national government into an instrument of change.

The social sciences appeared to offer the best laboratories for reform. Academic political science and sociology were early

⁶²Point 12 of the 1981 Portland Declaration. <https://phillysoc.org/collections/tributes/tributes-to-erik-ritter-von-kuehnelt-leddihn/the-portland-declaration/>

⁶³See Sidney M. Milkis, “Why the Election of 1912 Changed America”. *Claremont Review of Books*, February 15, 2003. <http://claremont.org/index.php?act=crbArticle&id=1247>

dominated by German-educated Ph.D.s who founded professional associations, introduced a German academic culture, and favored the introduction of German administrative law into the growing body of regulatory agencies that added an exotic legal overlay to the constitutional system⁶⁴.

Progressives generally believed that “the positive State must be substituted for *laissez faire*; the ideal of the public interest must transcend that of private interest; purposive planning must replace drift”⁶⁵. Efficiency was one of their catchwords. “They put their faith in science”. Herbert Croly, the chief political philosopher of Progressivism, expected a transformation to come from some “outburst of enthusiasm” which would be “partly the creation of some democratic evangelist – some imitator of Jesus, who will reveal to men the path whereby they may enter into spiritual possession of their individual and social achievements, and immeasurably increase them by virtue of personal regeneration”⁶⁶. The words sound respectably Christian but Progressivism was simply a liberal, even socialist, version of the American Creed.

ATTRIBUTES OF PROGRESSIVISM

Marc Allen Eisner has identified four major attributes of Progressivism: a heavy emphasis on scientific expertise, an immersion into evolutionary theory, a celebration of democracy, and a rejection of constitutional formalism⁶⁷. Let us consider each factor.

⁶⁴ See Dennis J. Mahoney, *Politics and Progress: The Emergence of American Political Science* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004); Murray N. Rothbard, *The Progressive Era*, ed. Patrick Newman (Auburn, AL: Mises Institute, 2017), 443-44.

⁶⁵ Ralph Henry Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought: An Intellectual History Since 1815* (New York: Ronald Press, 1940), 336.

⁶⁶ From *The Promise of American Life* (1909). Cited in Dick Bishirjian, “Modern Political Religion”, Voegelin View, October 23, 2018. <https://voegelinview.com/modern-political-religion/>

⁶⁷ Marc Allen Eisner, *The American Political Economy: Institutional Evolution of Market and State* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 42-44.

First, the post-Civil War period saw, beginning in 1876 with the founding of Johns Hopkins University, the advent of the German-style scientific research university, culminating in the Ph.D. Before the end of the nineteenth century, higher education was in the grips of an intellectual revolution that transformed public education and led to the creation of science-based professions and professional associations in such field as law, medicine, education, and theology. During the same period, the United States became the largest investment market in the world as it entered the Second Industrial Revolution with the subsidization of transcontinental railroads, the electrification of cities in the 1880s, the development of new steel-making processes, innovations in precision instruments, a growing emphasis on heavy industry, and the advent of the telephone, the automobile, and the airplane – all in less than four decades.

This was accompanied, second, by an intellectual revolution inspired by the theory of evolution. America's first political scientist, Francis Lieber, may have remained unconvinced by Darwin's thesis, but the social sciences began taking on evolutionary coloring in the 1850s and a new generation of scholars swam with the current. By the late nineteenth century, a paradigm shift had occurred throughout academic circles. The Idealist philosophy of Hegel and other German philosophers had previously made the earlier New England Transcendentalists receptive to progressive ideas. Following the Civil War, constitutional interpretation began to be transformed. Ronald Pestritto notes that Woodrow Wilson, contrary to James Madison, believed that "the latent causes of faction are *not* sown in the nature of man, or if they are, historical progress will overcome this human nature"⁶⁸.

Third, the Progressive reform movement pioneered many specific democratic practices. The so-called Wisconsin Idea placed the university at the center of advice about public policy. Through the efforts of Gov. Robert M. LaFollette, Sr., one of the "heroes of

⁶⁸ Ronald J. Pestritto. *Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Progressivism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 6-7.

insurgency”⁶⁹, Wisconsin came to be seen as a “laboratory for democracy”. This early progressive program as a whole was influenced by a growing German immigrant population inspired by social welfare system established under Otto von Bismarck. Among the innovations associated with Wisconsin were a progressive state income tax, primary elections, workers’ compensation, regulation of utilities, university extension services, and the direct election of senators. In Oregon, William S. U’Ren’s Direct Legislation League promoted the Oregon System, which included the initiative, referendum, direct primary, and recall. Throughout the country, Progressives promoted new forms of city government, such as the commission system and use of city managers, and pushed for the income tax and direct election amendments, along with anti-trust legislation, new regulatory laws, and the Federal Reserve System. At the end of the First World War they were also instrumental in the ratification of the prohibition and women’s suffrage amendments.

Finally, the most revolutionary aspect of the Progressive movement was its reinterpretation of everything according to a process philosophy that arose out of the historicism of Hegel and the evolutionary biology of Darwin. A leading academic Progressive, Woodrow Wilson, who earned his Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins, served for many years as the president of Princeton. In quick succession, he was elected governor of New Jersey (1910) and president of the United States (1912) before publishing a book, *The New Freedom* (1913), that expressed the Progressive credo:

All that progressives ask or desire is permission – in an era when ‘development’, ‘evolution’, is the scientific word – to interpret the Constitution according to the Darwinian principle; all they ask is recognition of the fact that a nation is a living thing and not a machine”⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ Thomas Dreier, *Heroes of Insurgency* (Human Life Pub Co., 1910).

⁷⁰ Woodrow Wilson, *The New Freedom* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1921), 48.

Thus was born the notion of a “living Constitution” that responds to fluidly to changing circumstances. Gone was the language of binding the government with the chains of the Constitution. As a so-called relic of horse and buggy days, the Constitution was relegated to the intellectual and institutional scrap heap.

Support for Progressivism crossed party lines. So it should not be surprising that a broad-based middle class movement which inspired the allegiance of three very different presidents – Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson – was guided more by the pragmatism of William James and John Dewey than by a coherent ideology. In the end, Progressives were more successful at converting the central government into a major power broker than in breaking up the centers of financial and industrial power. A powerful government bureaucracy grew but not as an independent force so much as a pragmatic partnership which tied business with government.

THE IDEOLOGY OF EXPRESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM

What shall we make of such a transformation in which the twin forces of evolution and revolution leapfrog into an endlessly progressive future? In *The Republic of Choice*, the legal scholar Lawrence M. Friedman maintains that “the right to be ‘oneself,’ to *choose oneself*, is placed in a special and privileged position; in which *expression* is favored over *self-control*; in which *achievement* is defined in subjective, personal terms, rather than in objective, social terms”⁷¹. Where once society favored the inner-directed personality type associated with the Protestant Ethic, it now favors the other-directed personality described by David Riesman and his co-authors of *The Lonely Crowd* (1950).

⁷¹ Lawrence W. Friedman, *The Republic of Choice: Law, Authority, and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 3.

What Robert Bellah termed “expressive individualism” in *Habits of the Heart* has led to unprecedented social legislation since the 1960s and expanded government employment while helping produce a network of public services, policy entrepreneurs, and clientele groups⁷². As James Kurth notes:

The ideology of [expressive] individualism thus reaches into all aspects of society; it is a total philosophy. The result appears to be totally opposite from the totalitarianism of the state, but it is a sort of totalitarianism of the self. Both totalitarianisms are relentless in breaking down intermediate bodies and mediating institutions that stand between the individual and the highest powers or the widest forces. With the totalitarianism of the state, the highest powers are the authorities of the nation state; with the totalitarianism of the self, the widest forces are the agencies of the global economy⁷³.

The imperial self, like the imperial state, opportunistically seizes whatever advantages it can:

The Holy Trinity of original Protestantism, the Supreme Being of unitarianism, the American nation of the American Creed have all been dethroned and replaced by the imperial self. The long declension of the Protestant Reformation has reached its end point in the Protestant Deformation. The Protestant Deformation is a Protestantism without God, a reformation against all forms⁷⁴.

When the claims of expressive individualism are considered in tandem with the increasing reach of the modern Provider State, a case can be made for their mutual dependence. Today, the daily

⁷² Robert Bellah and others, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 1985.

⁷³ Kurth, *Empire*, 74.

⁷⁴ Kurth, *Empire*, 74. Harold Berman, Lawrence Friedman, and Herbert W. Titus are among the legal scholars who have discussed the impact of this “revolt against formalism”.

operations of central governments impinge upon virtually all areas of life, leading to widespread efforts by political elites and interest groups to have their vision of the good life implemented through law and institutional dominance.

The economist George J. Stigler helped develop the theory of regulatory capture, one of the mainsprings of public choice theory, in which clientele groups develop mutually beneficial relationships with the agencies which regulate their activities. Writing somewhat tongue-in-check, Stigler observed:

*The first purpose of the empirical studies is to identify the purpose of the legislation! The announced goals of a policy are sometimes unrelated or perversely related to its actual effects, and the truly intended effects should be deduced from the actual effects*⁷⁵.

To the question – *Cui bono?* Who benefits? – the answer is: Follow the money. Those who wish to know the real purpose of a law should look at its practical consequences rather than the reasons given for public consumption. This is as close to an empirical demonstration of legislative intent as we are likely to get, but it substantiates Bastiat’s analysis of the role of legal plunder in politics.⁷⁶ Identity politics is a convenient vehicle for a long march through the institutions.

⁷⁵ George J. Stigler, *The Citizen and the State: Essays on Regulation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 140. Stigler’s comment anticipates the remark by then Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi before passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 that “we have to pass the bill so that you can find out what’s in it”.

⁷⁶ http://bastiat.org/en/the_law.html. Peter Schweizer uses the term “legalized extortion” in *Extortion: How Politicians Extract Your Money, Buy Votes, and Line Their Own Pockets* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013). Jonathan Hughes focuses on the role of rent-seeking – using political leverage to control a political turnstile operation – and protectionism. Jonathan R. T. Hughes, *The Governmental Habit Redux* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11, 16, and 220. A website, *Crony Chronicles*, features of cronyism around the United States. <http://cronychronicles.org/>. See also <https://investinganswers.com/articles/10-most-popular-stocks-owned-congress>.

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

So we come full circle. Americans live in the midst of an ongoing cultural revolution orchestrated by the most recent successors to the old Progressive Ascendancy. Angelo Codevilla's recent analysis of this ruling class pronounces an unsparingly harsh verdict:

The sense of superiority to the rest of America had been the animating force behind the Progressive movement around the turn of the twentieth century. From their embryo, the disparate parts of the American administrative state/oligarchy shared this sense. Beginning in the 1960s, however, the will to hurt and to demean the rest of the population grew among these stakeholders, to the point that today, this vengeful approach overshadows and endangers their very power⁷⁷.

Recent events suggest, however, that the partisan manipulation of identity politics is reaching a terminal phase. Like the gerontocracy of the late Soviet ruling class, the current American leadership is losing its ability to moderate the perverse incentives generated by the breakdown of party discipline over the past half century and by the ability of policy entrepreneurs to create their own power bases. In America's Democratic Party, the "circulation of elites", as Vilfredo Pareto characterized it, has brought increasingly radical stakeholders into the coalition even as it elevates a gerontocracy of its own. Here is Codevilla again:

As the power of stakeholders grew, other kinds of modern progressives lent support and demanded coequal attention to their grievances against the rest of the American people. That is why America's ruling oligarchy is a coalition based on little but grievances, which the several sets of stakeholders usually do not even share.

⁷⁷ Angelo M. Codevilla, "The Specter of Chinese Civilization", *New Criterion*, 40 (November 2021): 4-11. <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2021/11/the-specter-of-chinese-civilization>

Codevilla argues that it is in the self-interest of high-tech firms such as Google and Facebook to protect this coalition by “forcefully restricting and managing the information available to the general population”. From one generation to another, the same scare tactics are used to control the political narrative by discrediting and marginalizing dissenting voices⁷⁸. Yet those classes of citizens which suffer the greatest derision and disdain are still capable of pushback, as shown by the 2016 and 2021 elections⁷⁹.

The modern Leviathan state is the product of endless emergencies⁸⁰. The mobilization and regulation of personnel and materiel for two world wars, a Great Depression, and a succession of “moral equivalents to war” helped bring about a managerial revolution which has converted democratic and republican political forms into oligarchies – constitutional limitations to the contrary notwithstanding⁸¹.

While serving as governor of New York, Charles Evans Hughes remarked, long before he became Chief Justice: “the Constitution is what the judges say it is”. A later Chief Justice, Fred Vinson, added: “Nothing is more certain in modern society than the

⁷⁸ Theodor Adorno’s “The Authoritarian Personality” (1950) and Richard Hofstadter’s “The Paranoid Style of American Politics” (1960) are still used in the manner. See Lind, *War*, 108-14.

⁷⁹ Republicans in Virginia swept into power in all three statewide offices and the House of Delegates. Voters in Minneapolis voted against closing its police department. On 2016, see the four-part series that finishes with Steven Alan Samson, “Revolt of the Disdained: Sovereignty or Servitude”, *Townhall Finance*, January 27, 2020

<https://finance.townhall.com/columnists/stevenalansamson/2020/01/27/revolt-of-the-disdained-sovereignty-or-servitude-n2560167>

⁸⁰ See Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (New York: Oxford, 1987).

⁸¹ William James’s essay, “The Moral Equivalent of War”, helped shape the work of Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy while yet in Germany. Later he helped start Camp William James for the Civilian Conservation Corps. The New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontier, Great Society, and the War on Poverty are political applications of the idea. See also James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1960 [1941]).

principle that there are no absolutes. [...] To those who would paralyze our Government in the face of impending threat by encasing it in a semantic straitjacket we must reply that all concepts are relative”⁸². It appears that logic was not the strong suit of Progressive jurists. The American Constitution was never designed to be the mere creature of its interpreters and may yet again prove to be a strong bulwark.

It is evident that a studied disregard for the forms and standards of the Constitution – once described by a prominent historian as “wounded in the house of its guardians”⁸³ – has spread from the Court through the entire system, much like the march of Hegel’s deified State. As with the sculptor in Percy Shelley’s “Ozymandias”⁸⁴, the economist Thomas Sowell has assessed the ambitions of today’s political elite and “well those passions read”.

The great vulnerability of the Constitution today is that it is an obstacle in the path of groups that are growing in size, influence, and impatience. The most striking, and perhaps most important, of these are the intellectuals, especially in the politicized “social sciences”. Politicians, once constrained by national (voter) reverence for constitutional guarantees, now operate more freely in an atmosphere where intellectuals make all reverence suspect and make “social justice” imperative. The decline in political party control (“machine politics”) has given the individual politician more scope to be charismatic and entrepreneurial about causes and issues. Politicians ambitious for themselves as individuals and intellectuals ambitious for recognition as a class must discredit existing social processes, alternative decision-making elites, and the accumulated human capital of national experience and tradition which competes with their product, newly minted social salvation⁸⁵.

⁸² *Dennis v. United States*, 341 U.S. 494, 508 (1951).

⁸³ George Bancroft, *A Plea for the Constitution of the United States, Wounded in the House of Its Guardians* (Sewanee, TN: Spencer Judd, 1962 [1886]).

⁸⁴ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46565/ozymandias>

⁸⁵ Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 382.

In 1938 Rosenstock-Huessy described a Protestant Deformation at work in his native Germany and the havoc it caused, writing: “men pervert their worldly governors into idols, messiahs, tyrants”⁸⁶. Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn drew similar conclusions from examining the regional voting patterns which brought Hitler to power⁸⁷.

The question to ask today is: What are the prospects for thwarting tyranny and restoring constitutional limitations? Much of the answer remains in the hands of the electorate – if it has the will and wit to take action. Centuries of barnacles and excrescences require assiduous cleansing and removal. Only when the electorate itself is willing to be “bound by the chains of the Constitution”⁸⁸, and demand that officials restore its restraints, will it be possible to bring to heel the hegemonic “long march through the institutions” which appears to have begun with the Progressives over a century ago.

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⁸⁶ Rosenstock-Huessy, *Revolution*, 393.

⁸⁷ Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, *Liberty or Equality: The Challenge for Our Time*, ed. John P. Hughes (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1952).

⁸⁸ <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/kentucky-and-virginia-resolutions>

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