

Conservatives Leading the World Headlong into the 18th Century

By [John Kozy](#)

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Those dastardly French! What arrogance! In 1789, they tried to destroy the *Ancien Régime* (read Old Order).

The Old Order is an aristocratic, social, and political system that prevailed in Europe between the 14th and 19th centuries. In it, power is held by the monarchy, the clergy, and the aristocracy, and society is divided into three Estates—the nobility, the clergy, and the rest of the people who are powerless. The *Ancien Régime* retains the privileges of both the nobility and aristocracy that existed in feudal times, and the people, whose lives have the value of mere livestock, exist only for the benefit of the state. The *Ancien Régime* is also militaristic, aggressive, and imperialistic. Wars are common, and between the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XVI, France fought in at least 27 of them. But wars, then and now, are expensive, and France financed them with debt. When Louis XVI ascended the throne, the nation neared bankruptcy, and the people were impoverished. These circumstances provoked the French Revolution. Its aim was not merely to change the government's form, it was to change the nature of society. Its battle cry was *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité*. The revolution was no mere political uprising; it was a social uprising whose aim was to entirely destroy the Old Order's social structure, to abolish the privileges of the clergy, aristocracy, and nobility, and to uplift the value of and empower common people. The French didn't entirely succeed, but they did create the conditions for the eventual emergence of social democracies in Europe.

This revolution alarmed the monarchs of the remaining Old Orders in Europe. The French were engaged in an ideological revolution hoping to launch a new era in world history; the remaining European monarchies saw the revolution as a life-and-death ideological struggle and sought to reverse it. Austria declared war on France, Napoleon emerged to fight it, and when he was eventually defeated by the armies of the other European powers, many of the worst features of the Old Order were reestablished in France. But even some Frenchmen sought to reverse it. One was François Auguste René, Vicomte de Chateaubriand who began to publish a journal in which he coined the term "conservative," and ever since, that term has meant conserving as much as possible of the old economic, social, and political order with all of its privileges for the established.

If you believe the Old Order is now *passé*, just replace the words, "clergy" and "nobility" in the paragraphs above with "business" and "politicos" and you will recognize present day American society in that description of the Old Order's first and second estates. Then contrast the French Revolution with the American which is sometimes erroneously described as the first Enlightenment revolution. The colonists were not concerned with social injustice. They were happy with the 18th century English social order which they brought with them

when they came to the New World. Although the Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” the revolution’s battle cry was “taxation without representation,” not “life, liberty, and happiness.” The only thing Americans wanted to rid themselves of was the English monarch’s rule. The American Revolution was purely political; it preserved the English Old Order in America.

This difference between the French and American revolutions explains much about America. Just as the European Old Order was militaristic, aggressive, and imperialistic, America has made military incursions into 23 nations more than 30 times since the Civil War, and these numbers don’t include the First and Second World Wars. Only once during that time did a foreign power enter the United States, and that was the very minor incursion of Pancho Villa into Arizona. Over the past several decades, more and more of this military activity has been financed by debt.

This difference between the French and American revolutions explains why no authentic liberal party has ever emerged in America. If Republicans are conservatives, Democrats are merely slightly more moderate conservatives, a political view once known as conservative liberalism.

This difference explains why Americans have a meager and torn social safety net, which the conservative establishment continually tries to abolish. It explains why Americans lack universal access to medical care; it explains the establishment’s abhorrence of labor unions; it explains the country’s lack of an effective pension system; it explains the American tolerance for an economic system that transfers wealth from the poorer to the wealthier economic classes; it explains how the Congress can, often almost overnight, come up with billions of dollars for foreign aid, wars, and businesses, but always claims that social programs are too expensive to fund; and it explains the government’s bailout efforts to counteract the current economic downturn. The common people are being forced to do without to pay for the losses of the nation’s economic institutions and those who have profited from running them. Americans are just as brave as people anywhere when called upon to defend established institutions but are inexplicably craven when it comes to confronting the establishment in defense of their own welfare.

Paul Krugman has recently written that “falling wages are a symptom of a sick economy. And they’re a symptom that can make the economy even sicker. [<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/04/opinion/04krugman.html>]” Of course, he’s right, but being part of the establishment himself and not having mastered the techniques of root cause analysis, his claim is shallow. America’s economy is sick, but it’s sick because the 18th century English social structure that Americans have preserved is sick.

What’s worse, it can be argued that this social structure subverts the goals of the Constitution. Its Preamble states that the Constitution was enacted to “establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” But if the government has promoted “the general welfare,” most Americans haven’t shared in it. And it has long been known that the legal system allows “justice” to be bought. Iustitia, the Roman Goddess of Justice, who stands in many American courtrooms, is not blindfolded to symbolize the view that justice is blind, she is blindfolded to keep her from seeing what happens in those courtrooms. And America is a violent nation; it cannot be said to be domestically tranquil.

Americans imprison more criminals *per capita* than any other nation. And although Americans claim to value life, especially when opposing abortion, killing is ubiquitous. Parents routinely kill each other and their children, children kill their parents and other children, strangers kill strangers, highways are killing fields, not only by accidental means but by “road rage” shootings. And this claimed American respect for life doesn’t extend to foreigners. Not one prominent American has lamented the deaths of more than a million Iraqis since that nation was invaded by America and its coerced coalition.

American society is in such disarray that it has been said that Americans no longer live together, they merely live side by side. The establishment media was quick to report how Americans came together after nine-eleven, but it never reported how that togetherness came apart by ten-eleven.

The 18th century English Old Order still exists in America. The government exists for the sake of the nation’s established institutions and those who run them. The lives of common people have little value; they are little more than livestock who exist only for the sake of those institutions. Having fought a revolution to keep from being taxed without representation, they now, ironically, find themselves taxed by their elected representatives who represent not them but the established who finance campaigns. The nation is not tranquil, welfare is not general, justice is scarce, and the blessings of liberty are meager. The national defense, however, is substantial, but what is America defending?

The government justified the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as a means of protecting America. But neither of these nations ever posed a threat to America. About three thousand Americans were killed on nine-eleven, however. Do these wars now protect Americans from similar fates? Well, more than 4,000 Americans have been killed and more than 43,000 have been maimed in these wars. That’s almost 50,000 Americans who have not been protected, a number equivalent to sixteen times the number of casualties on nine-eleven.

Why were the American colonists so different from the French in 1789? And why have Americans acquiesced in maintaining this 18th century social system which has such horrendous recurring consequences?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that in the 18th century, the American colonies were sparsely inhabited, communities were small and somewhat ideologically pure, and business was local. In such circumstances, social problems were not likely to be a major concern. Those circumstances changed long ago, and America is now beset with what appear to be intractable social problems.

Why haven’t the attitudes of Americans changed? The answer can only lie in its educational system. Local control of the public schools perpetuates ignorance and out of date values. The American university system, long known for its emphasis on vocational training, has never tried to impart the classical educational values of truth, goodness, and beauty to its students. The result is that Americans are very good at teaching people how to do things, but not very good at giving them the means to understanding anything. And the American failure to understand the horrid consequences of 18th century social structure means that Americans will continue to endure them.

Is it likely that American attitudes will change? Doubtful at best! The French in 1789 had an ally that Americans lack. The common people of France had the press on their side; it was even referred to as the Fourth Estate. Americans do not. The American press has been

incorporated into the establishment's Second Estate. Without an active, sympathetic press that tells the people the truth about what is going on, the people mired in ignorance will remain there, and as leader of the so called "free world," America is leading the world headlong into the 18th century. We can only hope that the world will not follow.

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who blogs on social, political, and economic issues. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, he spent 20 years as a university professor and another 20 years working as a writer. He has published a textbook in formal logic commercially, in academic journals and a small number of commercial magazines, and has written a number of guest editorials for newspapers. His on-line pieces can be found on <http://www.jkozy.com/> and he can be emailed from that site's homepage.

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