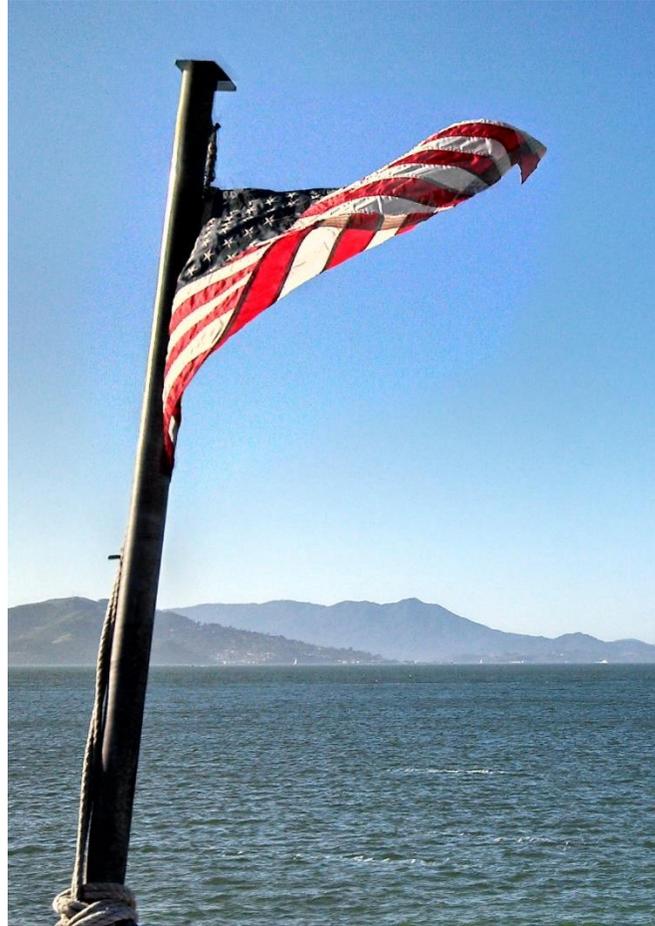


# RENAISSANCE AMERICA

A Light for the 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY



## The Renaissance Conservation Project

Political movements are like bowel movements. They begin with unresolved tensions; then they reach a crisis point (portending trouble of the kind that infected Weimar Germany and pre-Soviet Russian democracy). In the absence of the archetypal authoritarian “rescuer” on a mean horse (Hitler and his thugs come to mind), most such movements simply end, leaving a mess for someone else to clean up.

As I first wrote these words in spring 2010, the arc of the new Obama administration seemed to eerily track that of a political movement designed to cycle through all of its stages within the first 24 heady months of power. As I write this in 2016, the healthy dialogic political culture of the Cold War is a distant memory. Now we are witnessing a predictable blowback, a quasi-populist reaction, the scope, durability and consequences of which are still to play themselves out.

## A CORRECTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Conservatism and Liberalism are capable, **at their best**, of transcending ideological movements and the coalitions-of-convenience movements.

This episodic transcendence tends to happen only during those periods when Liberalism and Conservatism become part of the ongoing creative-constructive dialogic of civilization. These rare moments in history are the Dialogic Periods, for example the post WW II, early Cold War period during which patriotic liberal and conservatives were in a long constructive conversation, united by a common revulsion of communism. The future of western liberal civilization may well hinge on whether Americans can initialize another Dialogic Period of unprecedented scope and duration.

In the most generic sense, conservatism is about the defense of essential human boundaries, while liberalism is the arbitrary boundary-dissolution project. In this universal sense, Conservatism and Liberalism are the most fundamentally relevant voices in any vital political system. When they function effectively in the dialogic role, each operates as a constructive check and balance against ideological excess. Within the resulting creative dialogic, their respective advocates are confident, but humble as well, mindful of the larger purposes in play, knowing that neither side can claim exclusive ownership of the best future for humanity.

***Political parties are the carriers of the Enduring Principles...or they are opportunistic coalitions held together by the promise of sharing the spoils of victory. Rarely are they both.***

When competing political parties are clear about their Enduring Principles and are committed to achieving practical outcomes that benefit the great majority, a fruitful political dialogic naturally develops between them. In this essential role, conservatives and liberals remain actively conscious of the great dialogic of which they are an essential voice, but never an exclusive one.

***But all political parties eventually misbehave. One thinks of miscreant teens when Mom and Dad leave them unsupervised with the house, car and beer supply. But misbehaving teens prompt a police visit. Misbehaving political parties devolve: left too long without 'supervision' (i.e., competition) they will try to rig the system to cripple any organized opposition. Degraded political parties are opportunistic coalitions bound together by the prospect of shared power but lacking any coherent purpose other than self-perpetuation***

***As long as this state of deterioration persists, meaningful political dialogue withers, then virtually vanishes, drowned in the chatter of "D3" weaponry - Disinformation, Dissimulation and Derision. In a third world environment – think Venezuela here – the D3 Arsenal is augmented with politicized "security forces."***

*But even in the USA the dominant party, when tempted or desperate, will exploit its advantage, using its D3 arsenal in an attempt to exterminate the opposition through defamation and intimidation, or to permanently embed its policies in agencies and bureaucracies immune from public opinion or electoral “interference”.*

*Meantime, the people seethe with dissatisfaction. Populist and other resistance movements begin to boil up.*

Archetypal conservatism and liberalism are more than mere movements. At their best, each is a valuable way to address political and social change. And each represents a complementary Enduring Principle:

- Liberalism challenges arbitrary boundaries
- Conservatism defends essential boundaries.

The “*at their best*” part of liberalism and conservatism are fading memories at the moment.

It is time for a new paradigm, a creative-adaptive dialogue grounded in the constitution and the moral principles on which the American founding was based. This will be, of necessity, nothing less than an America-led Renaissance.

Its advocates will be the **Renaissance Conservationists (Re-Cons)**. Re-Cons are the creative subset of conservatives and liberals who are committed to rescuing civilization from a new Dark Age., who understand that creative freedom is grounded in the moral law that supported the American constitution, who know that this country’s founding held a universal wisdom that must be conserved at all costs.

**Renaissance Conservationists (Re-cons) promote and mediate a new Dialogic Period, one in which liberals and conservatives share the same firm ground in these eight core-value affirmations:**

1. **ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPITALISM**
2. **FAMILY INFRASTRUCTURE**
3. **LAW & ORDER**
4. **NATIONAL SECURITY**
5. **RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY**
6. **PROTECTION OF FREE EXPRESSION**
7. **INTEGRITY OF DEMOCRATIC/REPUBLICAN GOVERNANCE**
8. **FISCAL INTEGRITY = PRUDENT DEBT, FAITHFUL REPAYMENT**

**...And within the Renaissance Context, framed by three relationships:**

1. Between society’s commercial & technological innovations and our other creative endeavors, especially in the arts and exploration;

2. between the vitality of our creative endeavors generally and the health and ultimate survival of civilization;
3. And between the conditions of security, freedom and their life-affirming moral foundations on which the very survival of all human creative enterprises, commercial and artistic depend.

## **A Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Sparked by a creative renewal, the USA triumphs over all the recent historical and institutional challenges to creative civilization (atavistic, faux-modern and postmodern) that have targeted America as their main obstacle. A political renaissance arises within American conservatism, embracing and incorporating human creativity, and within American liberalism, embracing and incorporating the morality of limits. A vital, creative conservative-liberal dialogic emerges, founded in a common set affirmations rooted in the American Enlightenment, leading in turn to robust, self-consciously creative nodes civilization within the USA.

The USA's creative renewal sparks a world renaissance. The robust emergence of the American Experiment becomes the world's first, truly vital creative civilization.

The malign view that Western civilization is founded on "just" the cultural mumblings of "dead white men" is finally discredited and rejected.

Freedom, ordered liberty and a life affirming moral order (as the foundations of creative accomplishment) are recognized as discovered universal truths, promoted and exemplified by the Great American Experiment, but beyond national and tribal ownership, in the same way that we moderns can credit the Neanderthals with the "invention" of fire without disparaging the universal utility of their early discovery.

The USA becomes the archetype of anti-imperialism, the model of a practical crucible of liberty and the creative engine of civilization, Athens without slavery, royalty or the impulse for territorial conquest.

America, once again, becomes the vanguard of a benign, a world revolution.

## **THE LIBERTY BREAKOUT**

### **The Historical View**

#### *The First Renaissance*

The European Renaissance (ER) was the first sustained period of creative efflorescence after the Golden Age of Athens about two millennia earlier. The ER appeared in Florence in the late Medieval period, achieving cultural traction circa 1450 and rapidly spread

throughout Western Europe, driven by the reintroduction of Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and all those other “highfalutin’ Greeks” (credit- Meredith Wilson in the *Music Man*). The ER was also seeded by the ancient pagan heroic legends and the related romantic inspirations which led to a romantic creative revolution in the arts.

For me, there are two paradigmatic ER figures: (a) *Leonardo da Vinci* (1452-1469) who personified a spirit of iconoclastic innovation (note his engineering drawings) **and** artistic brilliance, all in the context of gently pushing the boundaries of the dominant tradition; and (b) *Johannes Gutenberg* (1398-1468) whose single technological contribution, the printing press, democratized literacy and in a few decades decisively dispelled the last clinging fog of the Dark Ages.

### *From Darkness to Light Elites and Their Attempted Monopolization of Virtue & Wisdom*

The monopolization of “wisdom” by the elites is a recurring problem. In the original Dark Ages of Medieval Europe, this was facilitated by the prevalent illiteracy. The ecclesial classes concentrated on biblical texts to the exclusion of the pagan ancients, and in turn constituted the largest literate class. But when the dam broke, it was Irish monks who had faithfully maintained copies of the ancient Greek and Roman manuscripts. See Tomas Cahill’s, “How the Irish Saved Civilization” (Doubleday 2005).

The Greek rational tradition was effectively suppressed during the Medieval Dark Ages. The recovery of these important works eventually led to the period called the Enlightenment starting about 1650. In this “Age of Reason”, critical logic and democratic ideals began the project of demolishing the moral standing of tribes, theocracies, autocracies and royal privilege. The scientific revolution began at about the same time and from the same roots (noting particularly the contributions of Leonardo and Galileo).

### *The Great Enlightenment Schism*

But Enlightenment thinking quickly split onto distinct branches. The bloody French Revolution (1789-1799), was the product of the French Enlightenment. The American Revolution was the product of a more civil tradition.

The Anglo-American branch of the Enlightenment tended to respect popular traditions while remaining more closely aligned with the natural moral law. That spirit was perfectly captured in Thomas Jefferson’s eloquent introduction to the Declaration of Independence.

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, 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. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”*

The French branch of the Enlightenment led to rampant assassinations, the guillotine, horrific visions of blood running in the streets of Paris and, ultimately it served as the midwife of those bastard children of the French Revolution, the mass-murdering Marxists, Stalin and Mao.

The American branch of the Enlightenment led to the firm rejection of all royal privilege and the adoption of a limited government dedicated to “the consent of the governed” where rights were founded in the natural moral law, the gift of the Creator.

### *Postmodern Nausea*

The so called “postmodern” movement began in the 1950’s as an attempt by intellectuals to escape the “limitations” of the Enlightenment. Postmodern intellectuals used the tool of critical reason to take apart (deconstruct) all belief systems. As I argue in a separate essay, deconstruction was a double-edged sharp instrument, “weaponized doubt” (see <http://jaygaskill.com/WeaponizedDoubt.htm> ). Unbridled doubt became the Sorcerer’s Apprentice of cultural change.

Postmodernism was presaged by that French coffeehouse intellectual, Paul Sartre (1905-1980) who promoted the “radical freedom” to believe or disbelieve anything at all, embracing the resulting “nausea”. Ironically (but predictably) postmodern thinking led to a resurgence of tribalism (tribes based on oppression ideology, facilitated by moral relativism and multiculturalism). It also opened the door to the return of paganism (note its New Age manifestations) and even planted the seed conditions for atavistic fascism by disarming the critics of Islamic extremism and infecting the West with moral ambivalence. In a signal triumph of postmodern influence, even one Archbishop of Canterbury (Williams 1991-2002) has supported a parallel system of Sharia Law in England.

## **Enter the Renaissance Conservation Project**

**Allow me to introduce the Renaissance Conservationists (Re-Cons).** They are all around you, but mostly silent at the moment. They are the subset of liberals and conservatives who are committed to the conservation of the essential moral and practical wisdom of the American enlightenment. They/we clearly understand that:

Liberty without limits is the suicide pact of any freedom-supporting civilization. In the real world, there is no liberty to destroy liberty.

The resolution and orderly mediation of all “my-liberty-vs.-your-liberty” conflicts require that the moral law be well represented in a rational legal system, incorporating robust norms that protect life, liberty and property from the predators.

The postmodern ethos has gravely weakened the case for real world liberty, by (a) undermining the moral underpinnings of the governments dedicated to its protection and promulgation; (b) taking liberty outside the protection of a self-limited system of

governance into a Darwinian my-world and your-world are equally valid fantasy (c) and downgrading liberty to a “Western cultural preference”. This postmodern trend is an insidious form of unilateral cultural disarmament of civilization itself.

Personal freedom requires ordered liberty, and together they form the seedbed for all human creative progress. Ordered liberty requires strong institutions tasked to guard and protect creative freedom, economic freedom and political freedom – because all liberties are indivisible;

Conservatives, liberals and constitutional centrists must overcome the real world threats to their shared essential freedoms. They and we must unite to overcome all the looming dangers to the protected liberties essential to any life affirming, creative civilization, including:

- THE atavistic lunatics engaged in jihad;
- THE faux-modern ideologies of authoritarian utopia;
- THE culturally reinforced soft-Marxism of guilt-driven egalitarianism –thinking here of political correctness and victim politics;
- THE populist thug movements;
- THE growing cancer of authoritarian bureaucracy in all its malign forms, BOTH private and government;
- THE cultural forces supporting civilization’s unilateral disarmament - thinking especially of leniency for thugs, the pervasive spirit of moral/cultural relativism, the postmodern tribalism of politicized grievance;
- THE chilling prospect of a totally amoral approach to technology, leading to incremental dehumanization of humanity, the surrender of our decision making authority to machines and the subordination of human sovereignty to eco-worship.
- THE deadly pessimism of the dying empires, replacing it with the relentless optimism of life affirming, free, creative peoples everywhere.

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**Re-Cons of the world unite.  
We have nothing to lose but our pessimism.**



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