

The Rootless "Roots": Defects in the New Conservatism

Author(s): Peter Viereck

Source: *The Antioch Review*, Summer, 1955, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Summer, 1955), pp. 217-229

Published by: Antioch Review Inc.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4609791>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Antioch Review Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Antioch Review*

JSTOR

The Rootless "Roots": Defects in the New Conservatism

By PETER VIERECK

To the new conservative, not the least of the ills of our society is a tendency, as we wholesomely consolidate against communism and outmoded Marxism, to become *smugly uncritical* and self-satisfied, content with orthodoxy, conformity, and national power. Thereby we may lose or suppress that fundamental ethical and philosophical radicalism so vital to the purification of our traditions.

—Professor Thomas I. Cook of Johns Hopkins University,
a leading political philosopher of the new conservatism.

It is not remarkable that the new conservatives should take *particular* care to disassociate themselves from what often goes by the name of conservatism, but which for them is a dangerous perversion or misrepresentation of an honorable faith: blind resistance to change; a tyrannical elite; ignorance of the social process; negativism which leads to the stifling of dissent. . . . The new conservatives regard the nineteenth century Spencerians and their modern equivalents as false conservatives, anarchic if not reactionary.

This attitude of reasonable conservatism, which seeks to moderate between the claims of the past and the future, is better or at least more interestingly exemplified by our writers than by our political leaders. The modern conservative, it seems to me, will find a kind of political wisdom in the works of Cooper, Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, Whitman and Henry James that is rarely discernible in the nineteenth century political tracts customarily discussed in our social science courses. They remain the keenest observers, the shrewdest commentators of the nature and *price of progress*, and they are all troubled men of divided allegiances. . . . The prophets of liberalism have not dealt with these considerations as seriously or as profoundly as they might have done, but contemporary conservatism will do

PETER VIERECK is the first American professor to occupy the newly founded Chair in American Poetry and Civilization at the University of Florence, Italy. The present article is part of a book to be entitled *The Unadjusted Man* and to be published late in 1955.

no better if it ignores its own reformers and constructive thinkers and permits a noisy riff-raff to speak for it.

—Daniel Aaron, "Conservatism, Old and New," from a paper read May 8, 1953, at 46th Annual Meeting of the *Mississippi Valley Historical Society*.

I

EXAMPLES of a conservatism of living reality are Madison and Burke in their day, Metternich in his Austria, Calhoun in his ante-bellum South, or Adenauer and Churchill today. In contrast, the time has come to examine more rigorously the role in America today of a conservatism not of living but of yearning, not of life but of nostalgia, based not on existing roots but on roots either never existent or no longer existent. Such a conservatism of yearning can still serve salutary purposes, first of all in the realm of literature and secondly as an unusually detached perspective toward current foibles. Such a conservatism becomes useless or of bad use when it leaves literature and enters short-run politics, conjuring up mirages to conceal sordid realities or to distract from them.

In America, southern aristocratic agrarianism has long been the most attractively sincere and most intellectually gifted form of the conservatism of yearning. The most important intellectual expression of southern agrarian conservatism has been *I'll Take My Stand* (1930). The book, it will be recalled, is a symposium of a dozen southern writers and, in the best sense of the word, literary intellectuals, starting off with John Crowe Ransom. The symposium contrasts the cultivated human values of an aristocratic agrarianism with the dehumanized mechanization and crass commercialism attributed to modern materialistic liberalism and to the northern post-Civil-War industrialism.

At their best, these and other expressions of the conservatism of yearning are intelligent warnings against the betrayal of deeper values by shallow utility. The fact that such warnings come from the losing side of history is in itself a merit, insofar as they caution a nation of success-worshippers against the price of success. But at their worst, such writings of the 1930's, and again of the 1950's, are merely a futile back-to-1788 kind of conservatism, reflecting not the organic traditions of genuine conservatism but the lifeless ones of a contrived synthetic substitute. They are a Nescafé of conservatism.

Sometimes the more doctrinaire of new conservatives ignore or minimize the fact that much of modern American liberalism (like it or not) does have real historical roots. They ignore the fact that, unlike Europe, more of our roots go back to the rationalist eighteenth century than to the conservative and religious Middle Ages. They ignore the fact that there is more rootlessness today in their own program for an aristocratic agrarian restoration than there is in democratic liberalism, even at its crassest and worst. By such an un-Burkean ignoring of actual concrete history, they become as rootless and abstract as the eighteenth-century liberalism they rightly criticize. They become doctrinaire counter-revolutionaries rather than evolutionary conservatives. Theirs becomes an unhistorical appeal to history, a traditionless worship of tradition, a rootless appeal for roots.

The above distinction represents the spirit of the anti-reactionary conservatism of an Irving Babbitt and the Burkean-conservative half of a contemporary like Reinhold Niebuhr, as opposed to the counter-revolutionary abstractions of the more extreme contributions of *I'll Take My Stand*. Their rootless appeal to roots is reviving among much younger writers and educators in the 1950's. These achieve some acute psychological and literary perceptions but ought not to be confused with a genuinely rooted, history-minded conservatism. The latter conserves what history it finds and what roots it finds, including Lockean-liberal history and Lockean-liberal roots, exactly as Edmund Burke did when he conserved not only throne and altar but also several of the deep-rooted, Lockean-liberal aspects of the heritage of the bloodless revolution of 1688. 1688 was a conservative as well as a liberal revolution because "a revolution averted." Here the difference in history between Europe and the Anglo-American experience requires the conservatism of the latter to synthesize with 1688 liberalism or else to become window-dressing for greed or for authoritarianism.

In central Europe, with its feudal past and lack of liberal traditions and liberal roots, a sound conservative during the age of Metternich still could be rooted in aristocratic and monarchic principles and in whatever was still alive of feudalism, if only as a freedom-enhancing check and balance (countervailing force) against middle-class attempts to set up—in the name of liberal democracy—a mechanizing dictatorship of urban capitalism over peasants and workers. Such indeed is the profound historical justification of the nonrepressive half of the

Metternich era and the Congress of Vienna era of 1815-1848: that era slowed up into a sane and gradual industrial evolution what in England had been a mad and hectic industrial revolution. And evolution is to be preferred to revolution because it is less disruptive to the moral and psychological framework.

Consider only the aesthetic and moral harm done by the trauma of overhasty industrial *revolution* to the post-industrial Anglo-American culture, in terms of making it more shallow (for example, the notorious Benthamite equating of push-pins with Shakespeare). A non-evolutionary industrial revolution, triumphing too overwhelmingly, brought with it the materialist schools of philosophy, whether a soulless, Benthamite utilitarianism or a heartless Manchester liberalism, the former hostile to art and religion and the latter hostile to a decent compassion for child labor and slum conditions. That decent compassion, from 1800 right through the Tory reform laws of Lord Shaftesbury and the battle of Disraeli's Tory socialism versus Gladstone's Manchester liberalism, was more often felt by aristocratic conservatives and by democratic socialists than by nineteenth-century liberals.

In central Europe, feudal and aristocratic remnants were valuable because they slowed up the industrial revolution into evolution. In England, they were unable to slow it up, but they were valuable because they afterwards undid much of its harm. They undid its harm by sometimes allying with the factory workers against industrial inhumanity, so long as there was a Disraeli around with sufficient vision to conceive that alliance. After his death in 1881, the alliance gradually faded, so that by the turn of the century the workers turned either to the Liberal party or to the new Labor party. Disraeli preached the Tory-worker alliance in his two great books of the 1840's, *Sybil* and *Coningsby*. Refuting doubts about his sincerity, he put that preaching into practice during his second ministry by enacting his charter of trade union liberties in the 1870's. His "Tory socialist" laws protected the rights of trade unions, of striking, and of picketing.

In contrast with Europe, America has always lacked those feudal roots which central Europe still possessed during the age of Metternich and which England under Disraeli possessed at least in the literary imagination, even if not in economics. And when have economic statistics been able to stand up against the magnetic intensity of a literary imagination? America's literary as well as economic and political tra-

ditions are more liberal and more democratic than feudal. Therefore, the American kind of conservative is not being truly Burkean, truly historical and organic, unless he includes the liberal and democratic tradition as the cornerstone he builds on. His conservatism becomes a qualifying adjective to that 1688-Lockean liberalism, a rightist deviation of liberalism rather than—as in central Europe—something anti-liberal or something historically separate from liberalism.

The American kind of conservatism does not lose its importance nor its virtue by the fact of being an adjective rather than a noun. If anything, its capacity for good is increased by being harnessed inside instead of outside the British parliamentary tradition of 1688 liberalism. While building on that shared cornerstone, the American conservative at the same time moves beyond that origin and enriches the variety and the depth of the shared structure by also building into it the conservative insights of John Quincy Adams and Henry Adams, of the Madison of the tenth Federalist paper, of Melville or of Irving Babbitt, of de Tocqueville or of Ortega y Gasset. Such names are all rooted, evolutionary conservatives in the tradition of Burke, not rootless, counter-revolutionary conservatives in the tradition of Maistre.

This distinction between rooted conservatives and rootless, counter-revolutionary doctrinaires is the measure of the difference between two different groups in contemporary America: the new conservatives and the Old Guard Republicans. The latter are what loose journalistic usage means by “conservative”; for convenience and to clarify their antithesis to the new conservatism, let us in this essay simply call them “old conservatives.” However, the term is a reluctant concession to the power of that loose journalistic usage. More properly speaking, the old conservatives are either petrified Manchester liberals, as with the Old Guard Republican of the North, or they are literary conservatives of yearning and nostalgia, as with the feudal agrarian of the South.

Be that as it may, the new conservative does cherish—and the old conservative does not cherish—New Deal reformism in economics and Lockean parliamentary liberalism in politics, as traditions here to stay. Indeed, it is not the least of the functions of the new conservatism to force a now middle-aged New Deal to realize that it has now become conservative and rooted and that, therefore, it had better stop parroting the anti-Constitutional, anti-traditional slogans of its youth. These slogans are now being practiced instead, and to a wilder extent than

even the most extreme New Deal liberal ever envisaged, by the Republican radicals of the right.

Such rooted and philosophical new conservatives in America are found first of all in the literary and educational world. Politics will not be ready for their ideas for another generation; they should shed their illusions on that score. The normal time-lag of a generation likewise separated the literary and university origin of Coleridge's conservatism from its osmosis into the politics of Disraeli Toryism. Until then American politics, with certain distinguished exceptions like Stevenson among Democrats and Clifford Case among Republicans, will be condemned to alternate between an exhausted and unimaginative liberalism and the no-longer-rooted old-conservatism that is forever yearning anachronistically to return to 1788 or to 1932.

Elected to the Senate in November, 1954, Clifford Case of New Jersey has explicitly called himself "a conservative," an unpopular word most politicians fear to use. In contrast, Old Guard Republicans like Senators Taft and Wherry used to insist on calling themselves "old-fashioned liberals"; in several interviews they protested against being labelled "conservative." Their protest was justified. It was wiser than they themselves knew. For they and their current Republican successors are indeed no conservers, no traditionalists. They have lost their old roots in Lockean-liberalism and in 1688, without having gained new roots to replace them. They fall between two chairs, performing neither a liberal nor a conservative function but only the unintentional function of provoking class-war radicalism.

The Republican Senator Clifford Case, a man of scholarly learning in political philosophy as well as a practical statesman, has explicitly called himself (in conversations with the author and elsewhere) a genuine new conservative in the tradition of Burke, Churchill, Disraeli, and the Federalist papers. His enemies in the party reveal the bankruptcy of their vision and of their terminology when they denounce him and the equally conservative Flanders as "too liberal"; by that they really mean he and Flanders have too much moral courage for their party; that is, they are too bravely, too outspokenly for civil liberties against the right-wing radicals.

Unless America suffers an unexpected political or economic disaster, there will be an increasing revival of conservatism in the next decade. Some of this revival will be for the right reasons. But much of

it will be for the wrong reasons. The wrong reasons include not merely opportunism. They include those new graduates from immigrant to suburban status who are not opportunistic but sincere about their would-be conservatism. Yet their sincerity is self-deceptive; in order to gain status and to seem upper-class, they overdo the patriotic act and antiradical act to the point of ham-acting. Thereby they not merely assimilate to their new Republican neighborhood: they outdo their neighborhood intolerantly at its own right-wing nationalist game. They become the new minority-group recruits supporting the McCarrans and the McCarran acts, supporting the Rabbi Schultzes, or supporting the several Negro McCarthyite editors.

It is necessary to insure having conservatism revived for the right or Constitutional reasons and not for the above wrong or thought-controlling reasons. Therefore it may be helpful, in the second part of this essay, to anticipate in advance the potential sources of corruption for even the best kind of new conservatism.

II

One source of corruption for conservatism is to see as traditional those empty shells of the past which no longer have a living, organic content. Another corruption is to accept in a merely smug and mechanical manner those traditions which really are living and valuable, thereby devitalizing them into easy respectable pap. A third corruption is to let what is good in value-conserving be used to rationalize inhumane, unjust, or authoritarian aspects of the *status quo*. Thus, under the Tsars the beneficent conservative force of religion was maleficently used to rationalize economic injustices, the lynching of radical and religious minorities, and a revolution-provoking absolutism. Such absolutism forever defeats its own conservative aims by goading even its moderate and friendly critics into radicalism and revolutionary extremes.

Fortunately the Anglo-American heritage of 1688 rules out, as un-historical, any attempt to carry the Tsarist analogy that far in America. No more is meant by the Tsarist example than a timely reminder that only revolution and radicalism can result from a conservatism too rigidly doctrinaire or too indulgent toward outrageous social injustices.

Most of the writers and scholars known as new conservatives,

notably such civil-libertarian and all-out anti-McCarthy conservatives as August Heckscher, Clinton Rossiter, Will Herberg, and Thomas I. Cook, are trying to prevent philosophical conservatism in America from succumbing to the above corruption. For, being historically aware of how such corruptions have often killed conservatism in the past, they and we who admire them are determined this time to avoid such corruptions at all cost, including the cost of being considered unrealistic, paradoxical, merely one more liberal in disguise, or merely a reactionary concealed behind a hypocritical lip-service to civil liberties and social reform. This position, and our joining the liberals in safeguarding civil liberties and New Deal reforms, is nothing new and nothing contradictory for conservatives but in the mainstream of philosophical conservatism, finding its precedent in Burke himself. For few things are more significant of Burke than that he was a Whig, not a Tory; that is, he was a conservative within the more liberal, less conservative of the two available parties; he supported the American Revolution and George Washington (on account of shared 1688 roots) against the king's attempt to imitate that kind of central and eastern European absolutism which, as in Russia, is ever the father of radical revolution.

Aside from Burke's being a Whig and not a Tory, we may more broadly generalize: a conservative is most valuable when serving in the more liberal party; a liberal is most valuable when serving in the more conservative party; a monarchy is firmest and freest (as in Scandinavia) when scooping the democratic socialists in humane reforms (short of what I have defined as "the statist line"); a centralized mass democracy is firmest and freest when it encourages, even to the point of tolerating eccentricity and arrogance, the few remnants it possesses of aristocracy, local and family and regional pride, and decentralized provincial divergencies, traditions, and privileges.

As another example of the salutary balancing process, note that Reinhold Niebuhr, a Burkean conservative and even a reactionary in his view of human nature and of history, is not a Republican but a New Dealer in political party activities; and when the New Deal was in power, was not a New Dealer but a democratic socialist, all the while being denounced as an extreme conservative and Burkean traditionalist in philosophy, not to mention his familiar anti-modernism and anti-liberalism in theology.

III

While a philosophical conservative best avoids corruption by wealth and *status quo* when he serves, like Burke and Niebuhr, in the more reformist party, he yet retains his basic conservatism by leading a united front against revolution whenever revolution or subversive infiltration become a genuine and not merely hysterical or imaginary danger to tradition and to traditional liberties. Such a genuine danger did occur from Jacobin subversion in Burke's day and from Communist and fellow-traveler subversion in Niebuhr's day. Both responded courageously by exposing the subverters, masked as liberals, as the totalitarians they really were. This act takes courage in intellectual circles because one runs the danger of being stigmatized as an alleged "witch-hunter" and "hysteric" and being maliciously classified with bad company (the real witch-hunters, those who really do slander innocent liberals as Reds).

Burke's exposure of Jacobin agents of the French Revolution disgraced him, just as in similar cases today, among those liberal literary intellectuals who were purposely blind to the real suppression of liberty under Jacobinism (or under Communism today). Similarly Niebuhr, by his dramatic act of resigning from the masthead of the *Nation* magazine on grounds of disagreement about the nature of Soviet Russia, set off the most important recent controversy over the fellow-traveler in the world of literary intellectuals. Doubtless only a tempest in a small and unnoticed teapot. But if that teapot is the world that we as writers and teachers live in, then we have an ethical duty to take it seriously, even while retaining enough sense of proportion to realize that, in the big extraverted outside-world, the main internal danger today is not the few remaining fellow-travelers but the coercive conformism of Republican nationalists.

The latter danger, rather than the lingering Popular Frontists, concerns the present pages; for it goes without saying that one first of all hits those foes of liberty who are the strongest and most popular in one's country. Nevertheless, we must never retrospectively forget how urgent it was several years ago (when the Yalta spirit still lured) for some of us, at the risk of being called conformists and witch-hunters and philistines, to follow anti-communists like Niebuhr and Norman Thomas in forcing the liberal and intellectual community to distinguish with full ethical clarity between valid liberalism and the ambiguities and silences of the *Nation* about slave labor and foreign

policy. Today the fight has been more than half won for the soul of “the liberals who haven’t learned”; it would be ungenerous to belabor them disproportionately so long as every radio blares forth the voices of coercive Republican nationalists who not only have never learned but never will learn. But had that fight for the souls of the liberal intellectuals not been fought and won during 1945-1953 (a fight for which George Orwell deserves most of the credit), had we as writers and teachers not learned during that struggle to face up to Popular Frontists and Yalta myths and ethically to set our own house or teapot in order, then our whole world of anti-fascist literary intellectuals would surely have succumbed to the McCarrans, the Jenners, the McCarthys, the Dirksens, and the rest. Our world would in that case have succumbed because it would then not have been able with a clear conscience to refute their slanders against intellectuals and anti-fascists as “Reds.”

Instead, we have been able to rally the successful counterattack of our literary media against McCarthyism because the intellectual has been rehabilitated as a leader against both kinds of totalitarianism, and not merely against one kind alone. What rehabilitated him was his facing-up ethically, with ruthless self-criticism, to the dishonesty of anti-anti-communism. That facing-up involved not only a teapot tempest over the *Nation* and over its unjust libel suit against the *New Leader* (and for a second time, not apologies but quixotic pride about living in a teapot); the facing-up also involved the exposure in 1948, by “Americans for Democratic Action,” of the Stalinist control of the Wallace Progressive party. By that act of “premature” anti-Communism, done long before the McCarthys showed any interest in the Soviet danger, the ADA has earned a lasting place of honor among all veterans of genuine anti-Communism.

That special and unequalled honor of the anti-Communist liberals of ADA can never be tarnished, not even by the subsequent decline of that increasingly peripheral organization. While it partly consists of some of the sanest and most courageous civil-libertarians in the country, it consists even more of zombie Gaylord Babbitts, the dead who walk, aging ambitious professors with a frustrated will to power, still mumbling dead liberal clichés from a long-since conservatized New Deal and eternally waiting with their ideological hope-chest for an economic depression to call them back to Washington, just as in their nostalgic 1930’s:

“They liked their dictaphones a lot;
 They met some big wheels and will not
 Let you forget it.”

Be that as it may, only the accumulated moral capital, gained by that resistance to the *Nation* mentality and to the Wallace Progressive mentality, has enabled our world of anti-fascist writers and teachers to draw upon that same moral capital against the nationalist radicals of the right today. Those who accumulated that capital against the Communist fellow-travelers but who now hesitate to spend it fully and freely against the fellow-travelers of McCarthyism, are guilty of the same double standard of morality which they rightly attacked in the anti-anti-Communist kind of liberal. Even more guilty are those who call themselves conservative and yet hesitate to expose themselves to the slanders and other unpleasantnesses that fall upon forthright anti-McCarthyites. The same law of balance that makes the exposure of Communist fellow-travelling the particular duty of liberals and socialists, makes the exposure of right-wing and nationalist coercers the particular duty of conservatives.

IV

The Burkean conservative builds on the concrete existing historical base and not on an imaginary one of wish fulfillment that conceals a vacuum. When, as in the exceptional case of America, that concrete historical base includes eighteenth-century Lockean-liberalism and includes New Deal social reforms, then the real American conserver assimilates into conservatism everything lasting and good in liberalism and in the New Deal. He does not repudiate that liberal heritage, even though he transfigures its frequent narrowness with the insights of the great tormented conservative novelists and psychologists (Melville, Dostoyevsky, some of Hawthorne). In contrast, those who refuse to conserve our deep-rooted Lockean heritage and our New Deal social heritage and who disdain to conserve anything except some aristocratic-agrarian heritage that no longer exists, may be reminded of the words of their own conservative hero, Cardinal Newman, about the need for conservatives to “inherit and make the best of” liberalism in certain contexts:

If I might presume to contrast Lacordaire and myself, I should say, that we had been both of us inconsistent;—he, a Catholic, in calling himself a Liberal;

I, a Protestant, in being an Anti-liberal; and moreover, that the cause of this inconsistency had been in both cases one and the same. That is, we were both of us such good conservatives, as to take up with what we happened to find established in our respective countries, at the time when we came into active life. Toryism was the creed of Oxford; he inherited, and made the best of, the French Revolution.¹

Consequently, it is imprecise to call conservative those counter-revolutionary ideologues of the right who defy the conservative principle of continuity with the past by trying to wrench American life out of its liberal and New Deal past. Such a violent wrench, such a combination of utopianism and coercion, based on abstract a-priori blueprints rather than on concrete historical experience, is what caused the French Revolution to degenerate from wholesome reform into murderous despotism. That is why *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals*, defined Old Guard Republicans and their intellectual apologists as “Jacobins endimanchés,” a term objected to by several reviewers, including Elmer Davis. They objected because Old Guard Republicans are supposedly conservative and Jacobins radical. What I meant and mean is: the abstract doctrinaire leaders of Republicanism and of a capitalist Adam Smith a-priorism in the north—and analogously the more doctrinaire aristocratic southerners—are applying the same violent wrench, the same discontinuity with the past, the same combination of utopian blueprints with coercive conformity which characterized the French Revolution and which, in Burke’s analysis, doomed it to inevitable disaster.

America’s current Jacobinism of the right is doomed for the same reasons to inevitable disaster, even though milder, more presentable, and dressed up in its Sunday best.

The need for new conservatives to maintain continuity with America’s liberal past does not mean conservatism is basically the same as liberalism and New Dealism. George Washington and Madison surely are not the same as radicals like Paine and liberals like Jefferson. John Adams is not the same as Andrew Jackson. Irving Babbitt (about whom Russell Kirk, when writing *nonpolitically*, has wise things to say) is not the same as the editorialists of our liberal weeklies. Charles Evans Hughes is not the same as LaFollette or even as Woodrow Wilson.

¹From the Appendix inserted by Cardinal Newman at the end of the second edition of his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, London, 1892.

Instead, conservative continuity with our liberal past simply means that you cannot escape from history; and history, in the exceptional case of America, has provided both conservatives and liberals with a common Lockean-1688 base. That base is not entirely liberal or unconservative (*cf.* the author's stress elsewhere on the conservation of 1776); nevertheless, that base is more than half liberal, and it is more democratic, unfeudal, unmedieval, unhierarchical, and boisterously egalitarian than is the base of any other country in the entire world.

All this is but another way of saying that conservatism may be ultimately defined as the organic relationship of concrete to concrete in history, rather than abstraction piled on abstraction (whether of Adam Smith, Rousseau, Paine, or Marx). So the first duty of new conservatism is to stop becoming what they accuse liberals and eighteenth-century rationalists of being: rootless doctrinaires.

In contrast with reactionaries and romantics, the new conservative does not parody traditionalism by accepting *all* traditions as good. Instead, the conservative stress on continuity with the past means overcoming what is bad in the past. You overcome the social injustices of traditionalism by assimilating the past, as Disraeli did, into a larger and juster framework. The reactionary accepts the past indiscriminately; one kind of liberal pretends the past does not exist or can be removed by abstract decree; the evolutionary conservative assimilates the past discriminately, purifies it, and moves on. But if you ignore the past or try to decree it away, then the more benevolent the utopias you decree (whether of liberal progress or of Marxism or of Old Guard commercialism), the more thought-control and terror you need in order to enforce your decreed utopia upon a reluctant past and upon a refractory human nature.

Parallel: in the same way that many conservatives underestimate how deep-rooted is America's major tradition of Lockean-liberalism, many liberals underestimate how deep-rooted is America's minor tradition of the Burkean and Federalist conservatism of Washington, John Adams, Madison, and Calhoun (the Calhoun of the doctrine of minority rights and concurrent majorities, not the Calhoun who abused those sound conservative doctrines into rationalizations of the moral evil of slavery). Both liberals and conservatives, each minimizing the roots of the other, narrow down the creative richness of the American past to make it fit their particular preference.