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The Revolution – Conservative or Radical

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The Revolution – Conservative or Radical

by [Joe Escobar](#) – Friday, November 13, 2015, 10:50 PM

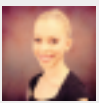
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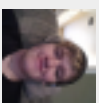
"If the shoe fits"!--Finding the Correct Definition for the Revolution

by [Amanda Power](#) – Monday, November 16, 2015, 11:21 AM

Was the American Revolution a more liberal or conservative movement? My conclusions from the readings lead me to side with author Gordon S. Wood, that in fact the revolution was not at all a conservative effort. While the American Revolution failed to possess the traditional revolutionary traits of “blood thirsty individuals driven by abstract theories (like Robespierre, Lenin, and Mao Zedong)”, it wasn’t any less unique, only different. One cannot argue that the revolutionaries were conservative in their “destroying of the monarchy and establishing of republics” because it simply does not align with the traditional definition of the word. The revolutionaries not only acted liberal through successfully abolishing a long standing way of being governed, but also through transforming the society in which they lived in. Social relationships and the way people were connected to each other changed drastically within a short period of time. Though these progressive changes did not occur overnight the revolution did succeed in radically changing previously “old world” customs with newly redefined ones; examples include the roles/positions of women, destroying aristocracy as it had been understood for two millennia, and so forth. It would seem (as Gordon Wood observes) that “Americans had become almost overnight, the most liberal, most democratic, the most commercially minded, and the most modern people in the world”, not more increasingly conservative.

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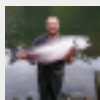
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The conservative revolution.

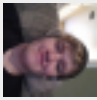
by [Jacob Leturno](#) – Monday, November 16, 2015, 5:32 PM

I believe that the american revolution was a conservative movement. Carl N. Degler makes many good arguements towards the revolution being conservative(holding to traditional attitudes and values and cautious about change or innovation, typically in relation to politics or religion) one of which that really stood out to me was that as the revolution was gearing up for the declaration of independence, many churches fell and others rose in their place.



Re: The conservative revolution.
by [Daniel Swisher](#) – Tuesday, November 17, 2015, 8:58 PM

A monarchy was destroyed and a republic was established. I don't quite understand how that holds to traditional values. I understand that some things about the American Revolution were done with traditional values in mind but the overall Revolution was not of a conservative nature by any means.



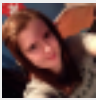
Re: The conservative revolution.
by [Jacob Leturno](#) – Tuesday, November 17, 2015, 9:11 PM

Google definition of conservative is, holding to traditional attitudes and values and cautious about change or innovation, typically in relation to politics or religion. As our country moved throught the revolution we abandoned several Anglican churches and joined the ones who had come and rose in their place. The founding fathers I believe were trying to create the country on the beliefs that great Brittain once had, not what they had come to be as the colonies grew further from the mother country. As we talked about in class last Thursday Daniel boorstin had said that the American Revolution was a conservative movement because our founding fathers took; freedom of speech, habeas corpus, and free assembly, from ancient Brittain.



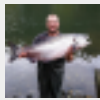
A Possible Connection
by [Amanda Power](#) – Thursday, November 19, 2015, 12:52 PM

The only possibility I can see as to how the early establishment of our country could be viewed as "conservative" was in the construction of the original government framework. If you recall one of the lecture slides from class this previous week you will remember that the American government was created and molded to a similar format as that in England. When our founding fathers drafted the plans for our government they were working off what they already knew. They did not create a revolutionary unique set of governing principles that had never been seen before. With this in mind you could potentially argue that the act of constructing the American government was conservative, as it was partially based off of traditional values.



American Revolution's Profound Impact
by [Aleethia Collins](#) – Monday, November 16, 2015, 6:08 PM

I tend to agree more with historian Gordon S. Wood that the American Revolution was not a conservative movement, but rather a radical event. The American Revolution profoundly altered the character of American society, bringing numerous significant changes. The revolution brought a change in the way people interacted. Also by destroying monarchy and establishing a republic both society and government was altered. The new kind of popular politics and democratic office holders that were established, was a very radical change. As well as the idea of having the goal of a society to benefit the interest of ordinary people. The American Revolution had drastically changed colonial life and its effects continued to have significant impact during later time periods.



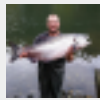
Re: American Revolution's Profound Impact
by [Daniel Swisher](#) – Tuesday, November 17, 2015, 8:49 PM

I completely agree with your point you make about The American Revolution being more of a radical event than a conservative movement. Just like we talked about in class; The American Revolution should definitely

have a different name. When a monarchy is destroyed and a nation is able to establish a republic, there is nothing conservative about it.

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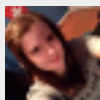
most modern people in the world

by [Daniel Swisher](#) – Monday, November 16, 2015, 6:19 PM

I completely agree with Gordon Wood when he says the American Revolution was not a conservative movement. He says that the American Revolution did more than legally create the United States; it transformed American Society. Almost overnight, America became the most liberal, democratic, modern people in the world. Many people would argue that America would have made this transformation regardless of the Revolution taking place when it did. I don't believe it would've happened had it not been for the Revolution.

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Re: most modern people in the world

by [Aleethia Collins](#) – Saturday, November 21, 2015, 4:40 PM

We have similar reasons for agreeing with Gordon Wood's argument. As you stated American Revolution drastically changed society from what it previously was. The government's politics changed and the overall goal of society. It brought together the separate colonies and reconstructed the meaning of state power. Without the American Revolution, just like you said, I don't believe all these drastic and important changes would have taken place.

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The unpredictable radical revolution.

by [Jonathan Davis](#) – Monday, November 16, 2015, 9:40 PM

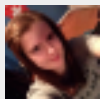
If we are to understand the topic we must first find a common ground for the main topic and that is was the American Revolution a conservative Movement? Keeping that in mind I feel that it was entirely the opposite, in fact it was a radical movement during a time when radical this were looked upon as bad

“If we measure the radicalism of revolutions by the degree of social misery or economic deprivation suffered, or by the number of people killed or manor houses burned, then this conventional emphasis on the conservatism of the American Revolution becomes true enough. But if we measure the radicalism by the amount of social change that actually took place–by transformations in the relationships that bound people to each other–then the American Revolution was not conservative at all; on the contrary: it was radical and as revolutionary as any in history. “(131)

When using the measurement we see that the revolution had a greater impact on the world then was predicted by the revolutionary people of the eighteen century. The first impact that points out that the movement was far from conservative is the known facts that America was no longer based on hierarchy of rank but a society separate from government were society melded together. Second fact is the government was creating a new form of government called democracy. When looking at these two facts its clear to me that the revolution is far from a conservative movement.

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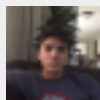
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Re: The unpredictable radical revolution.

by [Aleethia Collins](#) – Wednesday, November 18, 2015, 9:53 PM

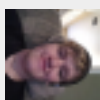
The facts you pointed out make it clear to me as well that the American Revolution was far from a conservative movement. Significant change occurred when the monarchy was destroyed and a republic was established. It extremely changed the character of American society from the previous colonial life. All these changes seem to presume that the American Revolution was a radical movement rather than a conservative one.



The Conservative Revolution

by [Oliver Valdivia](#) – Monday, November 16, 2015, 10:29 PM

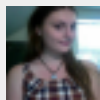
The arguments by both Carl N. Degler and Gordon S. Wood were very strong. My definition of a revolution correlates with the definition that the *strict constructionists* believed would “produce significant and deep societal change.” This definition and Degler’s argument have persuaded me to believe that the revolution was a conservative movement. One of Degler’s most convincing arguments came towards the conclusion after arriving at a point that a lot of the important social institutions were left untouched by the Revolution. Degler then goes on to say, “This lack of profound and widespread social and economic change is not surprising. These Americans for all their talk, had been contented and prosperous people under the British Crown ... who wanted nothing more than to be undisturbed in their accustomed ways.” Degler supports this claim well by recognizing that a lot of the leaders either remained or advanced their position held prior to the revolution. In my opinion the Patriots simply wanted to return to the freedom they had experienced prior to King George’s and Great Britain’s reinterest in the colonies.



Re: The Conservative Revolution

by [Jacob Leturno](#) – Wednesday, November 18, 2015, 10:35 AM

I completely agree with you, at the end when you said that the founding fathers where trying to go back to the way things used to be before king George, I believe that this truly was what they had in mind. we had even formed our country in the model of ancient Britttian. With that it then ties to the google definition of conservative. which is (holding to traditional attitudes and values and cautious about change or innovation, typically in relation to politics or religion) during the revolution our county did go through a large social shift but it wasnt to all new views.



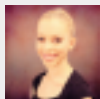
Gordon S. Wood Contradicts Himself

by [Paul Young](#) – Monday, November 16, 2015, 11:10 PM

It seemed to me that in some places Gordon S. Wood was defeating his own argument. At one point he mentions sawmill owner Moses Cooper of Glovester, Rhode Island, highlighting that "Cooper knew only too well the precariousness of his wealth and position and naturally feared what Britain's mercantile restrictions might mean for his lumber sales to the West Indies." (Pg 135) But is this not evidence towards the conservative argument? As we can see, Cooper simply wished to preserve the freedoms that were always available to him. His fears of British mercantilism aren't a good example of radicalization because they simple show that he wanted to preserve his regular way of life. Now, if Cooper had suggested mass wealth distribution, THAT would be a radical proposition.

Another aspect of Wood's argument that I took issue with, was when he said that "The Revolution became a full-scale assault on dependency." He goes on to say that this assault "Became for Americans an ideological imperative." (pg 137) But doesn't this quote contradict his initial goals for the essay? In the beginning, he sets out to distinguish the American revolution from what historians have "often considered to be essentially an intellectual event" (pg 131) But if the revolution was motivated by an ideological imperative, as Wood suggests, then it certainly was an intellectual movement. Sure, perhaps the nature of this intellectual movement was radical, but no piece of evidence offered seems convincing enough to say without a doubt that their motives weren't conservative. Nothing specifically makes this movement radical, and could very well be a product of Americans trying to figure out how to best preserve their way of life.

All in all, I'm not fully convinced that the American revolution was a radical movement. I was much more persuaded by Carl N. Degler, because his arguments were less based in speculation. On one hand we have Gordon S. Wood, who drew all his conclusions by speculating about the necessary social prerequisites that would have had to of occurred along side the revolution. On the hand we have Degler, who simply offers statistical data regarding who was in power before and after the revolution to show that not so much changed in the process. When in doubt, I've always sided with deductive reasoning over inductive, which is why I've choosing to side with Degler.



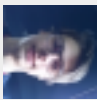
Define "Radical"

by Amanda Power – Thursday, November 19, 2015, 8:07 PM

I think that you make valid points regarding your argument against Gordon Wood’s writing, but I still have to disagree. With the word radical in mind, it is important to note the Wood early on in his argument addressed to the reader that the personal interpretation of the word “radical” can alter our view point.

If we define and measure radicalism by the amount of social changes that took place, and by transformations in the relationships that bound people to each other, then the American Revolution was not conservative at all. The evidence of this, he stated, did “*not occur over night*”, saying that “*indeed the revolution made possible the anti-slavery and women’s rights movements of the nineteenth century and in fact all our current egalitarian thinking* (p. 133)”.

As opposed to the initial "traditional values" of the colonies these changes appear to be quite drastic and progressive, even liberal. If the revolution were conservative don’t you think the government would have opposed newly evolving social norms, taking measures to prevent them? Just something to consider!

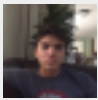


Re: Define "Radical"

by Drew Chappel – Saturday, November 21, 2015, 2:56 PM

I’m glad that you brought up that it is important how we define and measure radicalism. I think this is a good example of when two sides can look at one thing, and what they take away from it is completely opposite. I also like the question that you wrap up with, because I think the answer is yes. Gordon S. Wood supports this in his article when he says “By the early years years of the nineteenth century the Revolution had created a society fundamentally different from the colonial society of the eighteenth century. It was in fact a new society unlike any that had ever existed anywhere in the world.” This doesn’t sound to me like the revolutionaries were trying to stick to traditional values. They were breaking away from the monarchy and establishing republics, which yielded not only changes to the government, but also great changes in society.

The revolution was different from other revolutions in the fact that it lacked internal violence, class conflict, and social deprivation. I think that one of the biggest changes was that the American Revolution brought forth was it set the stage for peaceful transitions of power. For example the whole country has switched political stance to and from Republicanism, and there were no neighbors killing each other over it, no riots in the street. Yes there were people who were unhappy with the direction of the country, but it really was unlike other transitions of power in the past. Looking at all the changes that have happened on a personal level in society, then the American Revolution was not conservative.



Re: Define "Radical"

by Oliver Valdivia – Saturday, November 21, 2015, 4:38 PM

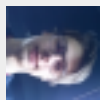
I agree that sometimes our personal definition of words can alter how view arguments. In this case however I think both historians believe revolution is defined by the change the society experiences. I also believe that the measure of radicalism is doesn't come in to play between these two historians. Changes are there it's pretty plain to see, but where the two break is whether the changes were started before the Revolution and whether the Revolution itself impacted the mentality of the colonists.

Degler also believes that most of the revolutionaries WERE trying to stick to traditional values. It hard for me to picture these rich colonists who were very happy not too long before the Revolution suddenly changing their ideals during the Revolution. Even in one of Wood's examples we can see a colonist that simply wanted to see a return to previous conditions, "Yet at the same time Cooper knew only too well the precariousness of his wealth and position and naturally feared what Britain's mercantile restrictions might mean." I believe they would've thought the only ones being radicals were the British that were trying to change the way these colonists had lived for so long.

Can you further explain why you believe the American Revolution set the stage for peaceful transitions of power? I don't really see how neighbor fighting neighbor over who they pledge their loyalties to could set the stage for peaceful transitions.

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Wealth in the hands of power

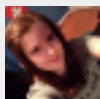
by [Drew Chappel](#) – Monday, November 16, 2015, 11:50 PM

I think that both authors offer arguments with valid points over the discussion on “Was the American Revolution a Conservative Movement?” Although I think I would have to side with Gordon Wood. I believe that the American Revolution was not a conservative movement, and that it was a radical event that changed society and social relationships through a vast number of people.

Although Carl Degler makes a valid point “The men who engineered the revolt were largely members of the colonial ruling class.” He then list examples of important people who had some kind of power in the colonial period, like Washington as the “richest man in America.” I find it interesting how Degler uses wealth in the hands of people with power as a reason to support his point. Wealthy people are likely to have gone to college, or be able to pay for their children to go to college, so it makes sense that wealthy families dominated political positions. I do not think these people has conservative motives in the revolution though. As Wood says “The revolutionary leaders did not expect poor, humble men themselves to gain political office,” but for their sons to go to college and learn to be a gentlemen who can run for political office. They were building the country on the idea that everyone was equal, and had the same amount of opportunity to pursue happiness.

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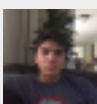
Re: Wealth in the hands of power

by [Aleethia Collins](#) – Friday, November 20, 2015, 7:57 PM

The point you are making on Carl Degler's argument is a valid one. It is peculiar that he would use the fact that the majority of the people leading the American Revolution stemmed from the wealthy ruling class as a point in his argument. The fact that the leaders of the revolt were largely wealthy does not make the American Revolution a conservative movement. The revolution brought forth the idea that all men were created equal, which was a very drastic change. Stating the revolt did not bring forth much change due to the fact that the large majority of the people leading the revolt were part of the wealthy class is a weak argument. The American Revolution provided so much change for all its citizens that its could hardly be even considered as conservative.

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Ideas before the Revolution

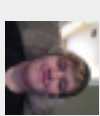
by [Oliver Valdivia](#) – Friday, November 20, 2015, 8:59 PM

Interesting point about wealthy leaders. I do agree that it does not necessarily mean that the American Revolution was a conservative movement. However, I don't agree that the Revolution brought forth the idea that all men were created equal. Degler and many others believe that, "this sentence was actually the distillation of a cherished popular sentiment... which stemmed from its prior acceptance...Indeed, we have already seen its lineaments during the colonial period." Degler believes that this and many other ideas weren't formed during the Revolution. These ideas were present before, they didn't appear during the Revolution. Degler doesn't deny that change happened, instead he says, "It is true that social and political changes accompanied the Revolution... but these had been implicit in the pre-Revolutionary society.

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Re: Ideas before the Revolution

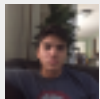


by [Jacob Leturno](#) – Saturday, November 21, 2015, 5:42 PM

With holding on to the previous ideas like these that Degler and you had brought up, doesn't that prove it was a conservative movement? The Google definition of conservative is (holding to traditional attitudes and values and cautious about change or innovation, typically in relation to politics or religion) we are holding on to previous beliefs and ways of life that where around before the revolution. We also have our laws around how your are treated when under arrest, where laws in ancient Brittain. We have always formed our society, based on the powerful society's before us where the people where still happy.

Sum of ratings: [1 \(1\)](#)

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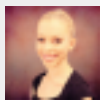
Ideas before the Revolution

by [Oliver Valdivia](#) – Saturday, November 21, 2015, 6:22 PM

I would think so. Perhaps I wasn't too clear about my point of view, sorry. I was saying that their point about the wealthy leaders didn't mean that the Revolution was conservative. I believe it was conservative because of the things you elaborated. Sorry if it was confusing.

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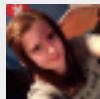
A Modern Day Similarity?

by [Amanda Power](#) – Saturday, November 21, 2015, 3:31 PM

I also have to chime in response to your point in bringing up the impact of social classes, as I feel it is applicable to politics today. Many of the members (though not all) in our government system come from elitist backgrounds. They have college educations, wealth, established reputations, and influential connections, all which gives them a “foot in the door” to the political arena. This makes sense of your point from Delger's argument that it only makes sense as to why certain families dominated political positions. It is far easier to make your way (or eventual progression) in politics and to have your voice heard if you have established clout, and a reputable background.

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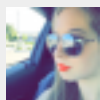
The Radical Revolution

by [Aleethia Collins](#) – Saturday, November 21, 2015, 10:28 PM

The American Revolution produced radical changes that fundamentally changed their society. Much of what America is today, comes from ideas infused by the revolution. It developed new politics and new legislatures. The previous colonial life was profoundly changed by the Revolution. The effects of the revolution, made America the most liberal, democratic and modern country in the world. To me there is no doubt that the American Revolution was a radical movement.

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The American Revolution

by [Kaitlyn DiMercurio](#) – Saturday, November 21, 2015, 11:33 PM

I agree with the article by Degler most as I feel it directly relates to the previous forum. What I agree with most in Degler's article is that the revolution brought about more then the colonists were necessarily expecting. In the last forum we talked about the discontent within the colonies about the continual British influence in the forms of taxes, etc. It was this fight with oppression that spurred the Great Awakening into motion. The American Revolution was a continuation of this rebellious nature. The colonists wanted independence, a freedom to make their own choices and their own mistakes, but the revolution brought about much more. Most notably I find was, as Degler mentioned, the disestablishing of the Anglican church, and the declaration of religious freedom.

Today, this is still true in many ways, and although I think that America has strayed far from being considered a particularly "religious" country, religious freedom is still something that we as a country are very well known for, something that is still taught with pride in grade school. There were many things that came out of the American Revolution that shaped the way that we are as a country today, but the idea of religious freedom has been one that has carried us from the revolution and in to today.

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Why I agree with Carl N. Degler A New Kind of Revolutionn

by [Madelyn Howell](#) – Saturday, November 21, 2015, 11:36 PM

I agree with Carl N. Degler and his article about conservative can be innovators. One example of this is in 1786 Virginia disestablished the Anglican church and instead of putting another church in its place passed a law guaranteeing religious freedom. This law set up the ultimate triumph of the American doctrine of separation of Church and State. Also in 1781 the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts declared slavery at an end in the state because it was inconsistent with their own conduct and constitution. Even though someone added together the new constitution, the enlightened religious innovations, and the stimulus to equality, It was very obvious that the social consequences of the Revolution were indeed inadequate. No new social class came to power through the door of the American Revolution. Many smart and wealthy men ended up leaving the colonies in the exodus of the loyalist.

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