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- Domestic
- Government
- International
- Miscellany
- New Topics

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- Infrastructure
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- Political Theory
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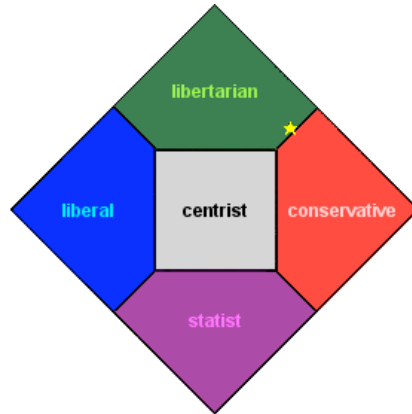
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# The Matrix of History

columnist: Seneca



Topic: The Revolution

## A Physiognomic Sketch of The Western Revolutionary Age

**"IMPERIUM FACILE IIS ARTIBUS RETINETUR, QUIBUS INITIO PARTUM EST." /Power is easily maintained by those same means by which it was attained in the first place/ (Sallustius)**

by Seneca (conservative libertarian) Saturday, August 23, 2008

"HOC EST REGNUM - NOLLE REGNARE CUM POSSIS." /The right kind of power is the one that does not want to rule although it could/ ( M. E. Seneca, De Beneficiis, III, 37, 3)

There is not a single event that one can use to pinpoint an important shift of epochal significance (the word "Epoch" is used here in the original English usage-sense as a turning-point watershed event and not in the loose sense of "period") such as the change that took place in the context of the Western Culture in the late 18th century (from feudalistic Baroque to a bourgeois-style period one can call "Romantic" or 'Nationalistic').

I will not dwell on what beautiful musical and architectural ornamentation the Age of Baroque produced but would rather use the term 'Baroque' to denote its attendant social and political attributes for the purposes of this writing.

*The turning point in Western History was the transition from the Age of Symbolism to the Age of Revolution which is known as the Age of Enlightenment. Historically speaking - it is but the key step from a life of settled form rooted in a racial blood-honored cultural existence to a life of Cosmic (not Scientific!) Nature in which immense cruelties have always reigned. Nature-as-History reclaims its territory.*

### The Backdrop of Nobility

I believe the often missed essence of what the French author Alexander Dumas described in his book "The Three Musketeers" is the noble ideal of the Age of the "Fronde" (as a term it is the aristocratic uprising against the Royal absolutism that marked the whole 17th century West Europe - although as a name it narrowly denotes the 17th century French Civil War) which despite the revolt of the nobility - still found enough noble blood to defend the State-ideal that the ruling dynasty livingly has been representing. That is why it is shocking to find out that in France a hundred or so years after the Fronde there were no individual musketeers who would make a pilgrimage to Paris to defend the honor of the royal house instead



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letting the massacre of aristocracy and the royal house take place with little resistance.

One must not forget as a component of the analysis of this turning-point period (felt in Paris in 1789 already as "que ce changerait" /things have shifted/) that there used to be such thing as the sanctity of the State as a collective Being that is in form for its historical tasks ... rooted in historic and Time-honored tradition, a sacred ideal that required no thought to convince one to defend it and even die for it - *the towering symbol of which was the royal dynasty at the top* (and, as John A. Lynn enunciated, for whose benefit the loyal aristocracy entering the military service of the State paid and died when called for). The best proof of this symbolic ideal's power is the fact that in the only country in which "the Fronde" won, England, where the aristocracy vanquished the king - it still could not do without at least an image of royalty at the top and so it created one for itself finally with the Hanoverian house (already finalized in 1688 following the so-called "Glorious revolution") a jejune and actually powerless but symbolically powerful dynasty, perfect for an environment in which aristocracy dictates power AS A CLASS over the (strictly-speaking, stateless) ship of class-oriented society from behind the parliamentary scene.

It was this nearly unique condition of government in which aristocracy rules as a class and with single class considerations (thereby forming a class-state) that gave birth to the (originally) British notion of "society."

**Freedom ... For Whom?**

Certainly, one must view the events in England as the backdrop for the French and American revolutions "in the name of society and its freedoms." Aristocratic society already won its freedom in England in the 17th century however. It was the turn for the nascent bourgeois class to try and win its freedoms for itself. This however, was unthinkable in England. Of the two revolutions that did take place, the former was by far the more radical because it joined hands with the dregs of the cities (first with the mobs of Paris) who were not even bourgeois and the fear that this eventually produced among the French bourgeoisie ensured the victory on Thermidor (known as a reactionary urge to a return to "status quo ante") and the choice of Napoleon as the protector of the recalcitrant urban middle class against the helter-skelter fickle nature of the proletarian mobs (who were used as tools in the revolution) but who continued to gather around the Jacobins and Girondists of Robespierre as the Praetorian Guard" of the Revolution. Rousseau certainly mis-translated David Hume's "society" into his "societe" when he assumed the natural condition of men is to be akin to that of a class-conscious entity. Liberalism was at this juncture already pointing at the dictatorship of a class for the sake of its freedom (which the propaganda brazenly imposed as a "freedom for all"). To win the freedoms of its urban-outlook - it needed a dictatorship to force the rest of the State (gathered around a national spirit-idea rooted in Medieval times) to worship and follow it.

Meanwhile, nobody dared notice that conceptual freedom and natural freedom are not only not the same but - totally unrelated. Only with the fading of the symbolic view of Life did revolutionary trends become a possible. Hence, symbolically, what these revolutions represented was the first instance of triumph of pure money-based city wealth over the blood-soaked historical glory-enshrined traditional country power but in the tumult of French events the revolution also produced more radical strains that sought total power as a perpetual condition ("The government in a revolution is the despotism of liberty against tyranny" as Robespierre said).

Philosophers like Locke, Shaftesbury, Samuel Clarke, Bentham, Locke formulated the intellectual ideas that provided the bedding for the French Revolution thanks to Rousseau, Voltaire and Bayle who carried them over into France. Rousseau's idea of society in opposition to the State at the cornerstone of Social Contract" was his way of interpreting the English condition which had no real State in the

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by Jake Towne, the  
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continental sense (ever since Cromwell's victory over Charles II) but it had society' instead. The moderate needs of the French bourgeoisie were served by diplomat Mirabeau but the proletarian element defended by the Jacobin Club of revolutionaries believed in the forceful logical conclusion of the ideas of the Anglo-French intellectual (sub)current postulated by "Egalite, Liberte, Fraternite" social war-cry slogan and which was then implemented with amateurish passion of political upstarts of the Jacobin cast led by "de" Robespierre. The ruling British circles did not believe in the social implementation of their liberals' intellectual conclusions and moreover found a great conservative intellectual defender in Sir Edmund Burke. Before Napoleon and after 1789 the British fight France on principle and after the 1797 anti-royalist coup that left Barrat in the hands of Napoleon marking the beginning of the latter's reign the British fight France for practical reasons.

### **Napoleonic Interlude**

The only possible outcome of Napoleon's drive to create an unassailable bourgeois world-empire would have been the English-style parliamentarism, business morality and journalism clothed in a French form and topped by his dynasty. In the style of the age English sensibility already crushed the French wit and the High Baroque of the Age of Louis XIV with its Watteau (painting style), Boule (French cabinetmaker style) and Sevres (porcelain) styles was losing to Hogarth (William Hogarth, painter, printmaker, cartoonist and pioneer of sequential art), Chippendale (Thomas Chippendale's style of furniture) and Wedgewood (Charles Wedgewood's pottery). In outward appearance of people the English costume and manners triumphed in this key 18th century over the continental style set by the courtly etiquette of Versailles.

Napoleon had a quite elaborate plan to replace the British World-Empire by a French one and his plans in the Carribean and the Mississippi basin (using the Louisiana possession as a springboard but failing time and again to secure the American alliance against Britain) and his anti-British negotiations with India's Maratha powers were frustrated time and again by minor incidents beyond his control (such as Linois' mistaken retreat from the French colony in India [Pondichery] back to Mauritius) or his expedition in the Mediterranean that made the Adriatic a French lake with a view towards the expansion East via the Iranian Shah with whom Talleyrand already negotiated against England (this enterprise failed thanks to the whims of Czar Alexander who vacillated about the anti-British India crusade of the proposed French deal even though it would have crushed all British presence in Asia).

It was only at the point when all these extra-European combinations failed that a frustrated Napoleon turned to his last grand card, the incorporation of his continental Europe backyard into his future plans but here something unforeseen confronted him namely the countries he now needed (the German zone, Spain, Poland) used to be his military punching bag that by now almost figured out his war-methods and the social message of the bourgeois revolution that made him possible in the first place. Hence, he now needed the support of those who were learning from old mistakes (and the examples of Clausewitz, Scharnhorst and Hardenberg at the War College who were meanwhile busy writing, analyzing and improving the Prussian military and administrative structure attest to that) or of those who were representing the power of yesterday (Baroque Austria) complete with a new realm to subdue (an Asiatic power with a European mask Russia).

As Dr. Oswald Spengler keenly noted, the old world of the West bade History its last grand political farewell at the 1815 Congress of Vienna.

### **The New Order (A Secular Religion Is Born)**

Socially, the new order in Europe was such that bourgeoisie finally attained a position of dominance (which would be modulated however in all the major states, England included, by an aristocracy which still clung to its old badges of power courtly diplomatic and officers' corps and in Germany and Austria also in the semi-feudalistic management of vast land estates filled with strong work-eager peasantry which was eroded in England with the Industrial Revolution (read: Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village") and the passage of the Corn Laws which uprooted the soil-beholden peasantry into the

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factory shantytowns of discontent.

The tactics of fighting also were changing. As John A. Lynn elucidated in his seminal work "Battle: A History of Combat and Culture" from "Linear Warfare" (as he calls it) the Baroque centuries were an age imbued with the courtly "battle culture of forbearance", which gave way to the self-sacrificing Romanticism of the citizen-soldier whose debut on the stage of Western history J.W. von Goethe witnessed at Valmy in 1792 (and he alone read it right as to its world-historic significance). At Valmy, the French commander Kellerman rallied his troops with a cry "Vive la nation!" {here the rationalistic idea of nation ['la nation des citoyens'] is not the same as the nationality-idea of the waning period which was a State-home for a spiritual nationality-idea organized in strict form into a cluster of primordial classes ("estates" in a grand sense) whose loyalty is to the idea of the State embodied by the ruling dynasty (which gathered periodically and in emergencies together in France as "Estates-General"), for at this point, there is the rationalistic nation of individual citizen-bodies whose very togetherness as a formless crowd of destitute but mystified "Third Estate" city-dwellers (citizens' in a crude sense) represents a rationalistic nation of the Romantic period beholden not to the unstated idea but to the hoary rhetoric of the ablest demagogue and his rational ideas}.

Instead of the Court and Estates General they have the Jacobin Club and the National Convention. Instead of the Church there is the Cult of Reason (a type of secular religion) with Marat as its first martyr. Instead of the polite discussions between the elect of life France got noisy conventions and assemblies where primitive passions and clever backroom machinations by political upstarts make their rounds to the sound of the guillotine disposing (or equalizing) the losers outside.

### **The History-proper As the Last Obstacle**

History, in the professional, biographical Western sense of the term, matured in the 19th/20th century (its intellectual birth was destined as a consequence of the Lutheran-Protestant Revolution and its grim motto "every man his own priest") was not conceived before in the higher History of humanities, not even in the two that had been metaphysically standing the closest to the Western-European type, namely, the Ancient Egyptian and the Han Chinese.

Which is not to state that deep thought was not devoted to things historic. Even the Culture-humanity for which Time did not figure AT ALL (one evidence for this is the fact that Classical Mathematics [geometry and arithmetic] did not have a symbol for time in ANY formulas), the much-vaunted Classical one, had something important to say about things of historic importance:

"Historia est testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis." /History is the witness of Time, the light of Truth, the life of remembrances, the teacher of Life, the messenger of Yore/ (Cicero, De Oratore, II, 9, 36)

I believe that the disdain for History-proper and its learning that is pervasive today finds its root in the above-sketched epochal change, which inaugurated a materialistic World-view (which was never stated better than by Adam Smith in his so-called "Wealth of Nations") for which History-proper (History as a science unto itself - or "Historicism") could never be made to fit into the purposes of "human progress" which the revolutions swore to defend against those opponents (or proponents of History-values) who became persons devoid of "democratic virtue." It was another manifestation of urban intellectual arrogance that kills life with a theory of life. Such wisdom' was called in English circles "common sense," in French salons esprit' and in German milieu "Pure Reason" (Kant). What prevented Clausewitz from becoming another Kant in the military studies sphere was the fact that he did not need to cling to theory for lack of experience.

The bourgeois idea - namely that merit alone allows one to advance (in the military sphere as well) was applied on the battlefield first by Napoleon allowing commoners to trample on the aristocratic prerogatives. As the experience of the American plantation-aristocracy proves, aristocracy can be formed out of noteworthy prowess of commoners even - because for a living history to form itself out of a human being-stream - certain traditions and certain consciousness has to be formed through success which then seeks continuity or self-perpetuation through Time. In England a mastery of adoption of bourgeois social crops into the ways of the aristocratic traditions enabled the kind of training to take place which brought fresh generations of bourgeois or peasant youngblood into the aristocratic circles to ensure the vigorous state of social life to continue in its proper historic form guided from the top AND NOT FROM BELOW.

The reason why revolutionary ideas find support has to do with the shallow optimism of the cultural

philistine of the big cities who, living apart from Nature and in defiance thereof, ceases to fear the elemental historical facts (which have their deep root in the Nature of Cosmos) and begins to despise them, which is where we are at today and which is why the so-called 'War on Terror' is only a phrase to cover a multitude of private interests benefiting from it. That is why no political creativity can be attributed to the leaderships of America since the formation of NATO sixty years ago, revealing a tendency to hide behind ossified institutions for a lack of living leadership skills.

The complete erosion of the ruling bourgeois life that we are witnessing across the West (chiefly, USA and Europe) today is a sign of the passing of the revolutionary age. What will replace it is as necessary as it is terrifying.

The old English cry "My country right or wrong!" finds no understanding and no appreciation in the advanced stages of revolutionary chaos today but it still retains value for those who can make a proper use of it.



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