

Age of Revolutions

Progress and backlash from 1600 to the present

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Fareed Zakaria needs no introduction, he hosts the popular GPS on CNN, he is also the author of 6 best sellers. He is originally from Mumbai and his father was a member of Parliament and a Maharashtra minister.

In recent centuries, politics has taken on a particular ideological shape that would have been alien to those living in the ancient or medieval world.

Donald trump in 2016 is an example, he has disregard for democratic norms, has a bizarre personality.

Trump focus in speeches to voters was simple:

**The Chinese are taking away your *factories*,
The Mexicans are taking away your *jobs*, the
Muslims are trying to *kill you* and I will beat
all of them up and Make America Great
again.**

British prime minister Tony Blair said in 2006 that politics was not about left vs right but it was about open vs closed.

Revolution by its original definition is the movement of a body around a fixed axis.

Wherever we look we see dramatic , radical change.

For decades we have seen a world in overdrive – dramatic technological and economic change, fluctuating conceptions of identity.

Classical liberalism is the enlightenment that came out of opposition to monarchy and religious authority.

The rising tide of growth has resulted in what I call the rise of the rest – like India, China, Brazil, Turkey and the return of Russia.

Three forces – Technology, Economics, Identity together almost always generate a backlash that produces a new politics.

Change and anxiety lead to an identity revolution, with people searching for new meaning and community.

The Dutch invented modern politics and economics. They were the wealthiest nation by the 17 th century.

Politically the Dutch system stood for rejecting absolute monarchy, which was the standard in Europe then and embracing republican forms of representation.

The story of the Dutch rise and fall shows the power of trade, openness and free thinking, and the dangers when economic growth and ideological change leave many behind.

Venice preceded the Dutch and tried to be a model state, but failed. In 1297, Venice declared itself hereditary rather than elective and the down fall started.

Portugal led the globalization of the seas.

In the Dutch revolution, land was not seen as belonging to any Earl or Duke but to the people who has reclaimed it from the sea.

Power was shared and people had a say in their rule.

Those who enter a new era with size and strength rarely make it, those who adapt best to the new age thrive.

Dutch invented the fluyt vessel which turbocharged global trade. A fluyt could carry 12 tons per sailor, while the English ships carried 5 tons per sailor.

The fluyt was always protected by the Dutch naval force whose sole job was protection. So trade prospered under the protective eye of the state.

The Dutch East India company of 1602 was the first in history to sell shares. The Dutch invented the profit seeking business as we know it now.

The Dutch were republican, tolerant and commercial, Louis of France hated them for it. In 1672, a massive French army went into the Dutch republic, the Dutch survived by breaking their dikes to ward off the French army.

It is possible that liberalism died there under the boots of Louis's men.

The English nobles/leaders were torn between the French religious approach and the Dutch liberalism. They invited William of Orange to come and be King of England.

William of Orange brought with him the revolutionary innovations of Dutch politics and commerce.

England led the tech revolution, the royal navy had more ships in the mid nineteenth century than all countries combined.

The failure of the French revolution shows the danger of revolution imposed by political leaders rather than growing out of broad based social, economic and technological changes.

Whenever anyone is labeled a patriot or traitor, heads will roll.

The French monarchy was profligate, the chamber pots at Versailles were made of silver. The real back breaking expenses were military. Between 1643 and 1715, the French army consumed 50 pc of royal revenue and in war times, 80 pc.

In order to avoid bread shortages, the French government had the power to tell the French bakers when they were allowed to take vacation – this rule lasted till 2015.

The endless power grabs and instability in France gave rise to a charismatic leader – Napoleon Bonaparte.

Through history we see that conservative elites always underestimate a populist strongman.

Without reform there is stagnation, radical change without conservation of key elements of the past risks disintegration of society.

The ideas that underpin the modern world – meritocracy, equality before the law, property rights, religious toleration, secular education, sound finances etc. all came from Napoleon

Napoleons biggest flaw was micromanaging, micromanaging a war is fine, but micromanaging how much grain, olive oil etc. was being loaded on ships was a disaster.

Productivity began with the industrial revolution, what many regard as the most important event in world history.

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The energy revolution was the core of the industrial revolution, and without it, most of the material advances of the modern world would be impossible

In 1623, the English parliament passed a ground breaking law on patent protection, it rewarded the first and true inventor.

The first passenger train in 1825 ran from Liverpool to Manchester. It took one hour 45 minutes when a coach journey then took 4 hours.

William Gladstone, future PM of England introduced an act which made the railways run one train every weekday for a ticket price of a penny a mile. This democratized train travel. This was called the parliamentary train.

Vastly expanded train travel demanded precise timekeeping. Having a watch in your pocket enhanced your productivity by deciding on how much time was spent on various tasks and was the smartphone of that time.

To avoid confusion over times, a self regulatory body, the Railway clearing house inaugurated Greenwich Mean Time in 1847. This helped keep Britain in sync with its own empire.

Thomas Cook a Victorian businessman was the first to offer railway packages to the people, it started as weekend trips.

**Oliver goldsmith said of the industrial era “
wealth accumulates and men decay”**

For 135 years from the American Revolution to the First world war, US GDP grew at 3.9 % CAGR, a feat unmatched even by China and India.

Roosevelt drew a distinction between genuine aristocracy and vulgar imitators.

He believed in capitalism but saw the government as a policeman of the free market.

The second industrial revolution saw petroleum replace coal, cars replace the train. The US started leading the world now.

Tech progress and global trade fuel economic growth and raise incomes. This creates winners and losers and unsettles societies, leading to a backlash. Politicians channelize this backlash and discomfort into anger and sometimes solutions.

The word international was coined by Jeremy Bentham in 1780, and it became a buzzword.

World war 2 was at base a clash between liberal democracy and fascist autocracy.

In the years after WW 2, western governments invested in welfare programs. Welfare programs in western governments rose from 27 % of GDP in 1950 to 43 % in 1973.

In 1958 PANAM started flying the 707 Jet and world tourism took off.

China's growth as an industrial powerhouse coincided with the decline of American manufacturing

Despite all the challenges stated of the digital age, the average consumer is far better off today than ever before.

**Even as wealth has become more
unequally divided, one of the sources of
power and wealth has become
democratized – Information.**

**American power has not declined,
American influence has.**

The future question is –Does China want to destroy the economic system or benefit from it?

If China is the challenger, then Russia is the spoiler.

Across the world, we see a loss of faith in god, religion, experts, politicians and institutions.

The truth is with progress, we are all leaving some of our culture behind.