

Age of Revolutions: Progress and Backlash from 1600 to the Present

Zakaria, Fareed

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Introduction: A Multitude of Revolutions

Highlight (yellow) - Page 4

British prime minister Tony Blair presciently observed in 2006 that the twenty-first century was seeing the fading of “traditional left- right lines.” Instead, the great divide was becoming “open versus closed.” Those who celebrate markets, trade, immigration, diversity, and open and free- wheeling technology are on one side of this divide, while those who view all these forces with some suspicion and want to close, slow, or shut them down are on the other.

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Bannon is a revolutionary who wants to take down the establishment, attacking it from any side he can. He admires Lenin for his revolutionary tactics.

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we need to understand just how disruptive they have been, physically and psychologically, because this age of acceleration has provoked a variety of backlashes.

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These three forces— technology, economics, identity— together almost always generate backlash that produces a new politics. Human beings can absorb only so much change so fast. The old politics, inherited from a prior era, often cannot keep pace. Politicians scramble to adjust, modifying their views and finding new coalitions. The result is reform and modernization or crackdown and revolt, and often some combustible combination of both.

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the left- versus- right debate became an all- encompassing one, with the old monarchical and aristocratic order squaring off against the new, more democratic forces pressing for change. In the twentieth century, the divide was reinterpreted to be centrally about economics. It continued through the

world wars and the Cold War. But it has run its course, and today we are seeing a new set of divisions.

Part I: Revolutions Past

Highlight (yellow) - 1. The First Liberal Revolution The Netherlands > Page 25

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

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in its celebration of individual rights, its embrace of markets and trade, and its toleration of religious minorities, the Netherlands saw the earliest flourishing of classical liberalism anywhere in the West.

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the Dutch story has much to tell us. The story of their rise, Golden Age, and downfall shows the power of trade, openness, and free thinking— as well as the grave risks that arise when economic growth and ideological change leave many behind.

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by the early 1500s the Chinese destroyed their entire oceangoing fleet as part of their inward turn.

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the Dutch never fully developed a manorial system. Instead, in the words of historian Jan de Vries, there were “free peasants, enclosed fields, and private control over land.” Whereas its European neighbors featured vast agricultural lands ruled by a central capital city, the Netherlands was a collection of towns.

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In northern Europe, the trend toward a more individualistic faith drove the Dutch to seek their liberation. By the early sixteenth century, the inhabitants of the Netherlands were already chafing at increased taxation by the distant Habsburg monarchy in Spain. But when they reached a breaking point, it was over religion, not riches. Because the Netherlands was a haven for independent minds and religious dissenters, the Protestant Reformation spread quickly across the Dutch provinces, with much of their population converting to Calvinism, a strand of Protestantism named after the French theologian John Calvin. When the Habsburg rulers, staunch Catholics, tried

to stamp out this heresy, a group of Dutch nobles came together in 1566 to petition the Habsburg governor in protest against the persecution. Later that year, Calvinist mobs in the Low Countries erupted against the continuing presence of Catholic imagery they saw as idolatrous. They smashed stained glass, tore down saints' statues, and defaced religious paintings. In Antwerp, zealots stormed the Church of Our Lady, one of the city's most prominent Catholic churches, and sacked it so ferociously that one observer wrote the scene "looked like a hell." One shocked Catholic chronicler reported that rioters trampled the sacramental bread and "shed their stinking piss upon it... as though, if it were not Christ's own body." This outbreak of iconoclasm, which spread throughout what is now Belgium and the Netherlands, was known as the Beeldenstorm, the "attack on the images." (Today an iconoclast is someone who figuratively attacks cherished beliefs.) Ironically, this spasm of violence was part of an uprising that created the world's first liberal revolution.

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The Southern Netherlands submitted under this pressure. Always more faithful to Catholicism, the region remained within the Spanish empire (and would eventually become modern-day Belgium). But in the north, the Habsburgs' brutal campaign failed. Those provinces fought ferociously for their autonomy and Calvinist faith. Over the course of 1579 and 1580, they signed the Union of Utrecht, forming a confederation, the United Provinces of the Netherlands. Their independence struggle would drag on—it goes down in history as the Eighty Years' War, and the Dutch were ultimately victorious—but the creation of this union marks the moment when the Dutch effectively became independent from the Spanish crown.

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Union of Utrecht presaged two great trends of modernity. First, it emphasized decentralization over centralization, leaving local authorities with considerable power and ceding only a few select functions to the central government. That idea is an essential underpinning of today's European Union, with its principle of "subsidiarity," whereby national governments retain as much power as possible. (One can also hear the echoes of the Union of Utrecht in the system of decentralized federalism established by America's founders.) Second, the Union of Utrecht formally established the freedom of religion and religious thought, which marked a break from centuries of ideological monopoly exercised by Rome.

Highlight (yellow) - 1. The First Liberal Revolution The Netherlands > Page 38

Spain, the early trailblazer of globalization, did not turn out to be the most successful state in the early modern age.

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The Spanish model was based on top- down governance and a heavy dose of repression. It was focused on territorial expansion and wealth extraction more than trade. The victorious Dutch Revolution inaugurated an era when the old logic of power gave way to economic and technological sophistication. Those latter qualities flourished more in a society that distributed power beyond the court to the citizenry at large.

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the Netherlands gained fame not for its castles or cannons but for its banks and merchants. Compared to the vast imperial treasuries built on plunder, this little republic excelled at creating value out of ingenuity and hard work.

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THE FIRST MODERN REPUBLIC The Dutch were not just rich and innovative— their politics were exceptionally audacious.

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They believed in elite technocracy, which in practice meant rule by smart and well- read merchants like themselves. They advocated greater openness and embraced the dynamism of their modern country, harboring no nostalgia for the past.

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This geographic resentment, of impoverished smaller towns and villages against the major cities, was augmented by nostalgia. Once the war for independence was over, peace eroded the social cohesion

Highlight (yellow) - 1. The First Liberal Revolution The Netherlands > Page 49

The Dutch were republican, tolerant, and commercial. Louis hated them for all three qualities. He saw the Dutch as arrogant rebels and heretics, and their Republic as an open sore on the body politic of Europe.

Highlight (yellow) - 2. The Glorious Revolution England > Page 54

social disruption has long been the price of economic modernization. Through enclosures, England transformed a medieval, tight- knit village world of stability and security into a modern society that was wealthier but marked by insecurity, flux, and inequality. In the new capitalist world, money making was essential, not shameful.

Highlight (yellow) - 2. The Glorious Revolution England > Page 56

the English Reformation encouraged parishioners to question authority, which would work against the monarchy.

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feuding between Charles and Parliament ultimately erupted in bloodshed in 1642. The English Civil War, which involved one in eight English men and killed some 150,000 total, ended in victory for the parliamentary army. In 1649, Charles I was beheaded, the monarchy was abolished, and a republic was proclaimed (for the first and only time in British history).

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When William of Orange came to rule England, he at last ended the conflict. And he brought with him the revolutionary innovations of Dutch politics and commerce. Before the Glorious Revolution, the English had long resented Dutch economic success. Why should England have to ship all its wool to the Netherlands to be spun and woven? And why should the high- and- mighty Dutch Republic be the hub of global trade, especially after all the havoc it had wreaked across the world?

Highlight (yellow) - 2. The Glorious Revolution England > Page 64

The Glorious Revolution marked three crucial developments. First, it fused the Dutch and English empires' trade and naval interests, much like a modern- day corporate merger. Second, it moderated English politics to the point where both parties accepted a truce, rejecting royalist and republican extremes to forge a new consensus. Third, it led to adoption of liberal Dutch practices, especially in the economic realm, marking the definitive English embrace of Dutch commercial modernization over French absolutist centralization.

Highlight (yellow) - 2. The Glorious Revolution England > Page 65

By the mid- 1700s, it was obvious that the Dutch had lost their technological and economic edge to Britain. At that point, they fell into what would become a common trap. Militarily menaced by France, and hammered by foreign tariffs, the Dutch Republic instituted protectionist measures of its own. A country that had once been the greatest champion of free trade was now restricting the flow of Dutch technology and shielding its domestic manufacturing from competition. It was Venice all over again. Meanwhile, as the last vestiges of medieval guilds withered away across the North Sea, Dutch cities sought to strengthen their restrictive guild system and even set up new guilds. Incumbents, local elites, and special interests colluded to block the adoption of new industrial technology from outside the Netherlands that threatened their traditional livelihoods. None of this saved Dutch industries but instead merely handed the technological lead to Britain.

Highlight (yellow) - 2. The Glorious Revolution England > Page 67

economist Daniel Defoe noted it in 1726: The working manufacturing people of England eat the fat, and drink the sweet, live better, and fare better, than the working poor of any other nation in Europe; they make better wages of

their work, and spend more of the money upon their backs and bellies, than in any other country.

Highlight (yellow) - 3. The Failed Revolution France > Page 73

the French Revolution shows the danger of revolution imposed by political leaders, rather than growing naturally out of broad social, economic, and technological changes. French leaders tried to impose modernity and enlightenment by top- down decree on a country that was largely unready

Highlight (yellow) - 3. The Failed Revolution France > Page 75

The Dutch Revolution and its English sequel were relatively peaceful and incremental transformations.

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Napoleon put an end to the chaos and instituted many reforms, some of them genuinely modernizing: emancipating Europe's Jews from second- class status, rationalizing the administration, establishing a meritocracy in the army and bureaucracy, and giving France a uniform, secular book of laws, the Napoleonic Code.

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“dirigisme,” the principle that the state should control and direct economic life.

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Britain was not magically blessed with more inventors than other countries. The Glorious Revolution had cemented two key pillars of English exceptionalism: parliamentary rule and market capitalism.

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making textiles was “a major activity (indeed, the major activity) for probably around 40% of the population in most premodern societies— not merely almost all adult women, but girls too.”

Highlight (yellow) - 4. The Mother of All Revolutions Industrial Britain > Page 117

Rural farming, near the level of subsistence— that is to say, the constant threat of starvation— was the norm for almost all of history up until the twentieth century. Disease, drudgery, and insecurity defined “the world until yesterday,” to borrow a term from the anthropologist Jared Diamond.

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LAISSEZ- FAIRE LEFT, ANTI- MARKET RIGHT The most important political consequence of the Industrial Revolution was its scrambling of Britain's traditional left- right divide, leading the two sides to switch policies. When industrialization dawned, the Tories stood as the party of aristocratic privilege,

rural protectionism, and benevolent welfare. They were skeptical of the heedless growth of modern capitalism and sought to preserve the world of village life against the disruptions of the market. The Whigs, for their part, began as the party of modernity, supporting free trade, merchants, and industrialization. When it came to welfare, they, like the modern free-market right, opposed handouts and thought the poor should be put to work.

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The two parties' differing treatment of the poor was indicative of the broader political divide in the early nineteenth century, with the Whigs championing industrialization and the Tories chafing at it.

Highlight (yellow) - 4. The Mother of All Revolutions Industrial Britain > Page 132

Rather than sneering at the new-money elites produced by the Industrial Revolution, the Right came to view factory bosses and financiers as allies against social upheaval and strikes by the lower orders.

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African territories that had been impossible to conquer before the advent of machine guns (to quickly crush non-European armies) and modern medicine (to protect against malaria and other tropical diseases).

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the massive increase in incomes set in motion by the Industrial Revolution did not necessarily depend on the exploitation of non-European peoples. Eighteenth-century Russia snapped up vast new territories in central Asia and Siberia, while Qing dynasty China absorbed what is now Xinjiang and Tibet—without experiencing any noticeable improvement in their economic growth. Conquest and industrialization do not always go hand in hand.

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the United States' distinctive egalitarian culture (at least for free, white men) was nothing new.

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In 1774, the American colonies had greater income equality than their mother country, even when enslaved people are included in the calculations. Most crucially, at least in the North, there was no European-style manorial system of great estates and aristocratic privilege that had to be dismantled. America did not need a great social revolution to overcome feudalism; it simply never imported these relics of the Old World in the first place. This is what Tocqueville meant when he said that Americans “arrived at a state of

democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution,” and were “born equal, instead of becoming so.”

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According to Bailyn, the American revolutionaries sought not to eradicate social or economic inequities but to “purify a corrupt constitution and fight off the apparent growth of prerogative power.”

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In the 2020s, with two centuries of hindsight, we can now say definitively: the Industrial Revolution changed American society more than the American Revolution did.

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Lincoln’s investment in infrastructure— paired with rich natural resources from newly settled territories in the West and abundant labor from a wave of mass immigration— allowed the United States to modernize rapidly and become a global industrial leader. (In many ways, the Civil War, like other wars, accelerated technological development.)

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The South, meanwhile, was still recovering from the Civil War. The new wave of immigrants generally steered clear of the old Confederate states, with their sluggish economic growth and low wages (in part due to Jim Crow laws). Foreign- born people in 1870 were more than three times as numerous per capita in the North compared to the South. The South was also technologically backward, with field agriculture almost entirely unmechanized, performed by back- breaking manual labor. During the Gilded Age, a yawning gap emerged between the cities and rural areas, between North and South, between the coasts and the heartland, and between rich and poor within cities. And all these differences produced a new politics in the country.

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why did the most industrialized country never produce a strong socialist contingent? For starters, America always lacked a feudal class structure. Its tradition of liberal individualism— supercharged by the heady economic boom of the industrial era— obscured the strict lines of class conflict that fed socialism. And while the plantation aristocracy in the South resembled a feudal elite, the peasants in this story were enslaved Black people, violently oppressed and excluded from wider American society. Even after slavery was outlawed, Black Americans were denied political rights, and ethnic and racial identities continued to shape political and social affiliations. These factors

made lower- class unity difficult. In addition, white elites often took pains to sow divisions between Black and white members of the working class,

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political transformation that the Industrial Revolution set in motion in America would take place slowly, over the course of forty years.

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THE 1896 REALIGNMENT By the time Bryan secured the Democratic nomination for the 1896 presidential election, the chief debate in American politics was about economic policy.

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The Democrats, who had once vehemently opposed centralized state power, now began to realize that government intervention was the surest way to support those left behind by technological progress. This impulse to use the government to alleviate market inequalities would become central to the modern Democratic Party.

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Lobbied by these magnates, Republicans argued that government intervention hindered technological progress and economic growth. The GOP had once favored centralized government authority, but now it embraced an anti- statist posture with laissez- faire economics at its core.

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THE LAST PROGRESSIVE REPUBLICAN There was one important exception to the stark division between Left and Right: McKinley's Republican successor, Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt was no radical, but he broke decisively with the laissez- faire ideology of his party. Much like Conservatives in Britain before that country's political realignment, he sought to curb the excesses of capitalism. His "Square Deal" program of consumer protection, union support, and antitrust measures battled robber barons and their monopolization of industries.

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came to a head in 1909 over the issue of tariffs. Progressives within the GOP thought that import duties had gotten far too high, raising prices for ordinary consumers while serving the interests of big business— a similar argument to the one the Anti- Corn Law League had made in Britain. Conservative Republicans, however, proceeded to pass the Payne– Aldrich Tariff Act, which raised tariffs on certain goods even further. Though a supporter of free

trade, Taft signed the bill, and progressive Republicans revolted. They contended that the bill prioritized business over the common man.

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Supporters of government intervention in the economy are no longer found exclusively on the left. In fact, certain voices on the right are now the greatest champions of protectionist tariffs and the most ardent skeptics of large corporations. For them, “closed” economics has joined forces with “closed” politics— cultural chauvinism, fear of immigrants, and suspicion of modernity itself.

Part II: Revolutions Present

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This is not just the story of Donald Trump in 2016; it is also the story of William Jennings Bryan, whom we’ve already met, in 1896. During the Gilded Age, populists like Bryan surged to prominence. They challenged the laissez-faire orthodoxy and appealed to America’s working class, a segment of society that was reeling from seismic shocks produced by the Industrial Revolution and a fast- globalizing American economy.

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in the few decades from 1870 to 1914, “one in fourteen humans— one hundred million people— changed their continent of residence.”

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This return to the logic of zero- sum mercantilism, colonial expansion, and shifting balances of power caused crisis after crisis— and then, in the summer of 1914, plunged Europe into all- out war.

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The Bretton Woods System, as it came to be known, enabled one of the swiftest and most profound economic expansions in history.

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Only with the hyper- globalization of the 1990s could a low- wage worker in rural America purchase the latest Nike sneakers, designed in Oregon and manufactured in China.

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Because the developing world did not have the time to slowly develop its institutions, democratization in the 1980s and ’90s was swift and shallow. Countries emphasized market reforms over political and social transformations. Elections were easy to put in place— the rule of law and the protection of individual rights, less so. Developing countries adopted and adapted new systems from the West, from freely elected representative assemblies to supreme courts to financial regulatory bodies, but oftentimes

with little or only a cursory understanding of how they should work in practice. Countries failed to embed the protections and freedoms promised by liberalism.

Highlight (yellow) - 6. Globalization in Overdrive Economics > Page 194

By the 1990s, the production of many basic consumer goods— from clothing to toys to bicycles— had entered the saturation or decline stages. As a result, many manufacturing communities in heartland America had already begun to hollow out before the China shock.

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much of the backlash from globalization would come from perceived humiliation and stagnation from those who felt left behind.

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Americans have advanced significantly from where they were in, say, the 1960s and '70s. The size of the average American home has grown by nearly 1,000 square feet, from 1,525 in 1973 to 2,467 in 2015— and while most houses back then lacked air conditioning, nowadays almost all homes are equipped with it. In 1960, 22 percent of American households did not have a car; today, only 8 percent remain without access to a car, and over 50 percent of households have two or more. Air travel has become much more accessible for American families, with domestic flights costing about half of what they did in 1979. Food has also become much cheaper, consuming about half as much of the average household's income as it did in 1960. The cost of clothing has plummeted even more. In 1960, the average American household spent 10 percent of its budget on clothes, compared to a little over 3 percent today.

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Like many right- wing populist parties we know from history, today's antiestablishment movements espouse an exclusionary vision of "the people," leaving out many groups they deem as foreign or corrupted.

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While the policy prescriptions on the left and the right differ in important ways, many on both sides share a desire to put the brakes on globalization and prioritize national interests once again.

Highlight (yellow) - 7. Information Unbound Technology > Page 206

What we now call the internet began not with private firms but with a Pentagon project, ARPANET, a network designed to link researchers at West Coast universities with their colleagues around the country.

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his simplistic policy prescriptions— solve illegal immigration by building a wall (and making Mexico pay for it), restore American manufacturing by imposing tariffs (that other countries would supposedly pay for)— promised a kind of

instant gratification at no cost, something people have come to expect in the internet era.

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The number of American men who say they have more than ten close friends has fallen from 40 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2021. Alarming, the number who said they had no close friends rose from 3 to 15 percent.

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their version of events, the hollowing out of their towns and the decline in steady careers were not the result of generation- long shifts in economic and technological structures but rather the outcome of reversible decisions by sinister global elites.

Highlight (yellow) - 7. Information Unbound Technology > Page 215

class of “Anywheres.” Anywheres, writes Goodhart, define themselves not by their place of birth but by their education or profession. Those acquired characteristics shape their lives.

Highlight (yellow) - 7. Information Unbound Technology > Page 215

But not everyone wants to be a free- floating “Anywhere.” Many people derive their sense of identity and life satisfaction from their roots, from being grounded in a specific geography—“ Somewhere.”

Highlight (yellow) - 7. Information Unbound Technology > Page 230

the world has become so complex that the average person doesn't understand how things work, feels helpless, and comes to resent experts. And with endless information just a click away, people think they can find out the truth for themselves and dispense with the experts. Never mind that it might take a true expert to successfully “navigate through a blizzard of useless or misleading garbage” that proliferates on the internet.

Highlight (yellow) - 7. Information Unbound Technology > Page 230

GMOs can help farmers grow more food with fewer resources, allow crops to withstand a changing climate, and even make the crops more nutritious.

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No country is even close to universal abundance delivered by automation. But technological revolutions have already created greater productivity and wealth, which has slowly turned political battles away from economics as the defining battleground. The old left- right divide focused on big- versus- small government has given way to considerations of dignity, status, and respect.

Highlight (yellow) - 8. Revenge of the Tribes Identity > Page 237

a different kind of revolution can originate from a state of abundance— and that is the case of the identity revolution. As the political scientist Ronald Inglehart put it, societal needs, much like individual ones, follow Abraham Maslow's “hierarchy of needs.” At the bottom of the pyramid are food,

security, and housing. For most of human history, these have been the ends to which all societal activity is directed. But once these material needs are satisfied, people shift their focus to higher- order demands: abstract values of personal freedom and self- expression. Put another way, when revolutions in economics and technology generate improvements in living standards— along with dislocation and disorientation— they tend to produce revolutions in identity as well. Once detached from their traditional roles in the economy and society, people respond with either hope or fear. Formerly marginalized groups perceive the change as liberating and reach for newfound dignity; those at the top fear losing the status they already have.

Highlight (yellow) - 8. Revenge of the Tribes Identity > Page 238

As a new consensus formed in the 1980s and 1990s around economics, culture began to replace it as the main political battle line. In the United States, people began to focus more on their personal identities— race, religion, gender— than on their class, sowing the seeds of a culture war that continues today. The process took longer in Europe, but it, too, succumbed to polarization and identity politics, mostly driven by immigration.

Highlight (yellow) - 8. Revenge of the Tribes Identity > Page 239

Today's political divide between leftist yuppies and conservative blue- collar workers would strike any nineteenth- century observer of Western politics as strange.

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“postmaterialist generation,” preoccupied with personal self- realization rather than material possessions or safety.

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1968 had changed the basic rules of US politics. America experienced a backlash to the 1960s that was bigger and longer- lasting than anything in Europe. Why? Because it touched on the most sensitive area of American politics and social relations: race.

Highlight (yellow) - 8. Revenge of the Tribes Identity > Page 247

another movie from 1976 hinted at the rising tide of white backlash. Rocky features the Italian- American working- class hero Rocky Balboa, who challenges and defeats the ostentatiously wealthy Black heavyweight champion Apollo Creed. It was the highest- grossing movie of the year.

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The historical left- right divide was being replaced by a new cleavage between open and closed politics on issues like trade or immigration. Just as the star of protectionism rose in the age of globalization, and neo- Luddism emerged in a time of profound technological change, populist nationalism drew strength from the identity revolution by capitalizing on a new sense of unease. As this populism seeped into the political mainstream, traditional class alignments broke down.

Highlight (yellow) - 8. Revenge of the Tribes Identity > Page 260

Europe's right-wing populists focused on immigration as their key wedge issue. In fact, populists from France's Marine Le Pen to the Netherlands' Geert Wilders took left-wing positions on some social issues, framing their beliefs as part of a broader opposition to Muslim immigration. "The freedom that gay people should have—to kiss each other, to marry, to have children—is exactly what Islam is fighting against," Wilders told Dutch voters in 2016. Instead of assailing gay marriage and abortion rights, and risking alienating the socially liberal mainstream, European populists drew from an even deeper well of cultural anxiety.

Highlight (yellow) - 8. Revenge of the Tribes Identity > Page 262

When George W. Bush came into office, his "compassionate conservatism" was a conscious departure from the radicalism and nastiness of the Gingrich era.

Highlight (yellow) - 8. Revenge of the Tribes Identity > Page 265

Politics is now about supporting your team and affirming your tribal identity, come what may.

Highlight (yellow) - 8. Revenge of the Tribes Identity > Page 269

The tragic asymmetry of contemporary American life is this: the Right often punches above its weight in politics but yearns for cultural power. The Left owns the culture but constantly pines for political power. It chafes at what it perceives to be built-in advantages for Republicans: the rural tilt of the Senate and Electoral College, gerrymandering in the House, a conservative-dominated Supreme Court, and other anti-majoritarian features of the American constitutional system. It tries to use its cultural power to shape politics—a dangerous and often illiberal quest. The Right, meanwhile, looks at the Left's built-in advantages in the media, universities, Hollywood, even large corporations, seeing them all as founts of a new and radical progressive ideology.

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The cultural dominance of the left makes Republicans feel that they are under attack and have to fight back.

Highlight (yellow) - 9. The Dual Revolutions Geopolitics > Page 274

third great geopolitical shift of the modern age—the waning of the Pax Americana. This shift is not so much the decline of the West as the rise of the rest, the economic ascent and growing self-confidence of many non-Western countries.

Highlight (yellow) - 9. The Dual Revolutions Geopolitics > Page 275

the Long Peace, the longest period in modern history without great-power war—almost eighty years and counting. Since 1945, the annexation of territory by force, once a common occurrence, has become vanishingly rare—which is why Russia's invasion of Ukraine stood out as a sharp anomaly.

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the future of the world. One plausible path would be a reversion to realpolitik, but that would mean the collapse of globalization and a return to nationalism and competing blocs. We have seen this kind of backsliding before. Or we could see the forces of interdependence push nations to pursue peace, build stronger economic ties, and cooperate more closely on issues of mutual concern like climate change.

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United Kingdom, which was infused with a Protestant sense of mission. It began to see itself as pursuing not just its naked self-interest but also its values and ideals. To be fair, it often did pursue naked self-interest and act viciously, but there were flashes of benevolence in its approach. British power provided global public goods like “freedom of the seas,” a concept first developed by Grotius. In practice, this meant that the Royal Navy suppressed piracy, which protected peaceful vessels conducting trade, no matter which flag they flew.

Highlight (yellow) - 9. The Dual Revolutions Geopolitics > Page 285

Trump, of course now people everywhere ask me about him— not because he is a symbol of America’s wealth but because he is a symbol of the country’s dysfunction.

Highlight (yellow) - 9. The Dual Revolutions Geopolitics > Page 286

Even before Trump’s tenure, many people worldwide had stopped regarding the American political system as worth admiring or emulating. America’s present reality combines towering strengths— technological innovation, world-leading universities, strong demographics— with glaring weaknesses, from gun violence to drug overdoses to persistent inequality.

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Putin’s war in Ukraine, beginning in 2014 and then kicking into high gear in 2022, is the most brazen action he has taken. After the Soviet Union’s demise, Russia never fully accepted the independence of Ukraine, which represented the most painful reminder of its lost empire.

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a fifteen-year-old Russian boy today has the same life expectancy as a fifteen-year-old boy in Haiti.

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it is worth recalling that in the 1990s, the countries of Eastern and Central Europe were all traumatized, still recovering from a half century of domination by Moscow. They were desperately seeking an anchor, and to have left them entirely unmoored would have created a zone of instability in the heart of Europe. Even without NATO expansion, Russia may have invaded Ukraine (many in the region think it might have done so even sooner).

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the high priests of realpolitik, who would usually argue that clashes between great powers are the inevitable result of competing national ambitions, still blame American actions— in one case for being too tough, in the other case too weak. At the end of the day, changes in domestic leadership and the global balance of power were arguably more crucial in stirring Moscow and Beijing into action. After bouncing back from its '90s- era weakness, a revived Russia was likely to seek vengeance for losing the Cold War. For its part, China was never going to meekly accept a modest status after surging to become the world's second- largest economy.

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“Four D's” crippling Chinese growth: demand, debt, demographics, and decoupling. In other words, insufficient consumer demand, overreliance on government borrowing, a labor force that is too small to support an aging and shrinking population, and decoupling from Western economies— together, these trends make for a substantially gloomier economic outlook than seemed likely even a few years ago, when China was riding high. (The climate of fear around the “China threat” often overlooks these trends. Washington can and should compete with Beijing— but it does not need to imagine that China is ten feet tall.)

Conclusion: The Infinite Abyss

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People were left without the faith, tradition, and community that had long been their anchors. As he wrote, “By the dissolution of their ancestral ways, men have been deprived of the sense of certainty as to why they were born, why they must work, whom they must love, what they must honor, where they may turn in sorrow and defeat.”

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custom and order had been replaced by chaos. There could be no new canon of beliefs, no new authority that replaced what had been displaced because, Lippmann argued, “the acids of modernity are so powerful that they do not tolerate a crystallization of ideas which will serve as a new orthodoxy into which men can retreat.” Or as Marx and Engels wrote in the quote that serves as epigraph for this book, “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned.”

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freedom can be unnerving. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said, “Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.”

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“escape from freedom.” A distinguished psychologist who studied the rise of fascism, Fromm argued that once human beings live through the chaos of freedom, they get scared. “The frightened individual seeks for somebody or

something to tie his self to; he cannot bear to be his own individual self any longer, and he tries frantically to get rid of it and to feel security again by the elimination of this burden: the self.” In explaining his own illiberal ideology, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán has argued that liberalism is too focused on the individual and his ego.

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Singapore’s leaders try hard to have their citizens stay rooted in their communities and cultures so they don’t turn into deracinated yuppies.

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Extremism may feel satisfying, but gradual reform more often produces enduring change. If liberals can understand that time is on their side, and that their opponents are not always evil or stupid, they might find that they are able to gain broader acceptance and that progress will be made— steadily, albeit slowly. Those who seek to restrain these disruptions, for their part, should recall how resisting any change at all can simply bottle up frustration until it erupts in revolution. Rather than preserve every aspect of the status quo, better to follow the lead of the British conservatives who, after 1832, made their peace with the Great Reform Act’s gradual democratization, according to the credo, “Reform, that you may preserve.”