

Boy, am I getting tired of the word "conservative" used as a pejorative term. Why would THAT be a negative?

At its core, the word "conservative" means to conserve. That means that I consider myself as a steward of a great legacy for future generations. I save. I think generations ahead when I make major decisions that affect others. I read my history and my philosophy to better understand my legacy.

On a more prosaic front, I'll give consideration before I cut down a tree. I recycle. If I can use something again I will. I have tools, and materials and a bit of knowledge how to use them. I can often make what I need. I am as "green" as many and greener than most.

But I'm most conservative about our political legacy. A couple hundred years ago, a rag-tag army marched through a winter, some of them without SHOES. They took on the world's most powerful army and BEAT it to a standstill.

Many of the Continental Army were serfs, but all of them were informed by their leaders, who had ingested the distilled language, art, culture, philosophical thought and history of the preceding two thousand years. They could quote the sources I have studied.

Thus the Founders were atypical men - better men than I am and probably better than you. They were informed by the greatest minds of any age and they put in place a system of government that had never been seen before. It's NOT a democracy. It is a democratic republic and the distinction is both clear and significant. It means that the governing document, the Constitution both means what it says and must be interpreted clearly.

The US Constitution is not to be tampered with by lesser men. That means me, and it probably means you. If you have conventional American education it almost certainly means you're not qualified to adjudicate on the Constitution. If you have a law degree but no history or philosophy then you're STILL NOT QUALIFIED to adjudicate it.

American education at its best is career-path training. At its least it teaches you how to stand in line quietly. Civics is NO LONGER TAUGHT in the majority of schools. So Johnny can't reason and Johnny doesn't know much about his country. He has no cultural framework to guide his decisions. Neither do his elected representatives. They JUST DON'T KNOW their history, or they KNOW history but seek to subvert the culture that raised them (which is infinitely worse).

That is where we get an entitlement society. We figure, "It's a democracy. We can vote for whatever we like." NOT SO. If this is your conclusion then you don't understand the distinction between a constitutional republic and a democracy.

A truly educated person has a wider perspective. He or she can view the world in

terms of its history and cultural evolution. He or she thinks with a two thousand year perspective. I hope to attain something like that in my life. It's a journey.

Fortunately the source materials are available at any public library, and the most important political act you could perform this year is to READ and THINK about these works:

"Republic", by Plato

"The Federalist Papers", by James Madison and Alexander Hamilton

"The Declaration of Independence"

"The Constitution of the United States of America"

These are the bare minimum necessary to encompass the soul of the greatest nation on earth. They are NOT easy to read. They represent WORK. They will strengthen your mind. You will gain an understanding of our political culture.

If you find yourself interested, then read about the American Revolution. That will raise your curiosity, and you will find yourself reading about the Civil War. You may continue into WW1 and WW2.

I'm tired of avoiding the point: Most of history is military history. THAT is how you learn about the collision of cultures and values. A fascination with cultures will lead you to learn about mathematics, science, music and art. You'll grow.

Our democratic republic could NOT have been created in the old world. The Old World was (and is) heir to centuries of feudalism, class structure, religious statism, disease and grinding poverty. If you were born poor or disadvantaged you were going to stay that way.

America has always stood for a new beginning. Here you are FREE to shape your life as you wish. This is UNHEARD of in much of the rest of the world. This fabulous experiment could not have begun in the old world. It just wouldn't have worked. That's how I came to be. I stand in two cultures but consider myself AMERICAN first. Don't like being an American? Well, here you're free to go. That option isn't available to many citizens of other countries.

What we have is incredibly precious. It's also ephemeral UNLESS citizens learn their history and philosophy so they can understand just how good they have it.

Don't like US primacy in the world? Well you can denigrate it all you like, or you can vote with your feet and move to Canada or Australia (which will suit me just fine). Both countries have strong treaties with (guess who) the US which vows to protect them.

Do you think Southeast Asia would have been better off under the "Greater Asia

Co-Prosperity Sphere"? If you know what that is, then I salute you. You're on the right track.

I'm often called a conservative. I would rather be considered a "centrist". That is, I support each and every paragraph in the US Constitution and am a strict "constructionist". It means just what it says. It's not a "living document" subject to "inferred interpretation". The authors knew their English far better than most of us, were informed by centuries of political thought and intended every word.

Once we can agree on the Constitution, then we can discuss everything else - from universal health care to Quantitative Easing - in good humor and with some cheer. I vastly prefer dialectic to diatribe. If you can define those words, then again I salute you. I'm willing to entertain a civil discussion with anyone on just about anything.

But be advised that when I get "lost" in our discussion I have source materials to reference and I will get back to you after I have refreshed myself.

If we DON'T agree on the Constitution, then let's have that discussion too. But please don't foist your "heartfelt opinions" on the discussion. Your feelings are nice but they don't count against the panoply of the hundreds of thousands of years of this planet's story. Cite your references and allow me to verify them.

That was the "stick". Here comes the carrot.

You are precious. You're the descendant of the roughest, toughest species on earth. Of that species you are the direct descendent of the hardest, smartest, meanest, most ambushing, midnight-attacking ruthless warriors ever known on the planet. That is the ONLY reason you're here in the first place. You also have the capacity to learn and hope for something better. As you have evolved you're created societies in which people can live together and grow greater things.

You have a duty to honor that inheritance. A duty to survive and prevail. You're a human being with all the vast resources of the world at your disposal. AND you're an American, with a political heritage not seen anywhere else in the history of our planet. You are the most truly free citizen the world has ever seen. Absolutely unique, and wealthy in culture and possibility. Go be the best person you can.

So, read, write and THINK for yourself. Share what you learn with your fellows. I won't tell you how to exercise your franchise. That's YOUR sacred duty and your unbelievable right - to directly affect your own governance.

I won't tell you how to vote. But vote with an understanding of your history, your culture and the issues of the day in mind.

Go be a citizen.