

# EUROPEAN CONSERVATISM IN AMERICAN POLITICAL MAP

Didik Murwantono

## INTRODUCTION

A society is marked by a series of complex inter-relationships among individuals. This interaction absolutely exposes some phenomena in a society. First, there arise practices, beliefs, ideas or rules which to a large extent prescribe the permissible form of interaction among individuals and groups. A second phenomenon is noted that certain norms, values, beliefs, rules and standard of judgment come little by little over a period of time to be regarded as more or less established and to be accepted as a heritage from the past. Third, the heritage from the past, no matter how carefully guarded, reveals itself as subject to change and innovation. The change and innovation may be unintended but its existence is sometimes undeniable, a technological advance, for an example. It is noted that this change often denotes to a deliberate change. So there are those who reject or fight such changes and the others who seek and resist change. In relation to the term of conservatism based on the above condition, therefore some people claim that it has come to be the subject of controversy and confusion.

In general, conservatives wish to preserve present or past values rather than to create or adopt new ones. It also denotes to a political morality. It is political because it is a view about the political arrangement that make a society good, and it is moral because it takes it to be the justification of political arrangements that they foster good lives (Kekes, 1998:3). Definition of conservatism is seemingly based on the cultural traits and great experiences from the country where produces it. Therefore, every country has a distinctive characteristic of political behaviors which extends from Left to Right. In America, liberalism and conservatism are two political behaviors which give the deep impacts towards all dimensions in a society life.

According to survey from the 1980 ICPSR National Election Survey, American people have different things in mind when they say that

someone's political views are liberal or conservative. Their self-placement is not haphazard or random, nor is it simply a matter of amorphous but potent political symbolism. When people say that they are liberals or conservatives, it is likely to reflect their feelings on, at least, some issues such as general philosophy, economic responses, social issues, foreign policies, and miscellaneous. And sometimes they reflect their ideological self-placement which can serve as a potent, useful symbol to people. Much like party identification, it can serve as a short-hand symbol for a particular point of view (Sanders, 1986:125-133).

Moreover the period of European history also gave great contributions towards the greatest and most sudden change in the history of man upon the earth, mainly from the sixteenth century to the beginning of nineteenth century. First, Renaissance means rebirth in French. It is a cultural, social, or political rebirth, one that usually occurs after a war or some other major change in power structure in a society. Such changes, when accompanied by a reference to an idealized past, and the reconceptualization of older forms in the arts. The works of Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) were products of this period. A philosophy that developed during this period was called humanism which supported the idea of the central role and dignity of the individual. The Protestant religion also developed during this period. Led by the German Theologian and activist Martin Luther (1483-1546), this revolt against the centralized control of religious thinking and practice by the Roman Catholic Church (Kohl, 1992:16).

Second, romantic refers to a style of art and a way of thinking, and to the historical period during which the style developed in Europe, the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. It is characterized by an emphasis on inspiration, imagination, spontaneity, naturalness, originality, unconscious intuitiveness, passion and in some of its manifestations, sublimity, frenzy, and mystery. Many romantic ideas were derived from the works of the Swiss-born French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). He contrasted nature, which he believed to be pure, innocent, and virtuous, with society, which he felt encouraged deceit, hypocrisy, and the reign of self-interest needed to maintain an unequal distribution of wealth. Another prominent figure is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) who wrote about the struggle for freedom, the role of genius and inspiration, the nature of ego and self-awareness, and the transcendent reality that lies beneath the surface of impure nature (Kohl, 1992:16).

Those eras from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century brought Europe a significant change of philosophical perspective from the general and universal to the



particular and individual. From Rousseau to Hegel, European thinking traverses several peaks. Starting with Kant and Rousseau, the supremacy of reason established by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Cartesian classicism is strongly eroded. This type of thinking, structured on the universal, which is static, narrows during the following century. Rousseau changes the focus towards a certain dynamism which points up the role played by the particular individual. This freedom of individual triggered one of well-known revolution in Europe like French Revolution.

In connection with European conservatism, the event of French Revolution and the ideas of Edmund Burke as a British statesman become cornerstones in understanding the early conservatism. For Burke, society represented a permanent contract. As a conservative, Burke feared too rapid change, specially revolution, which threatened to undermine the permanent contract of society. Change was necessary, of course, but its pace be gradual and it takes account the unwritten imperative that liked past, present, and future generations into an organic whole (Muccigrosso, 2001:6).

In America, conservatism has played a significant role in the development of its political behaviors. In the absence of crown and nobility, conservatism has centered around the Constitution and the institution of private property. Meanwhile Europe at the time was greatly influenced by monarch nuance. Hence model of conservatism ala America is different from European conservatism. Its main objectives in this paper are to find the ideology of American conservative and its impacts towards the conservatism movement in America

Furthermore, the changes of conservatism model based on situational and conditional in line with the changing of era make America face the social changes with its impacts. The social changes as a variation of way in living that has been accepted. are not only as a consequence of geographical condition, material culture, citizen composition, and ideology, but also because of diffusion and innovation . Conflict Theory by Karl Marx and Neo-Marxism after Marx towards conservatism and capitalism, are seemingly significant to discuss those changes in society. Karl Marx is concerned his theory in underlying the competition among classes. He believed that inequality between classes would create conflict between groups of people. Hence society must change in completing their needs. By Karl Marx theory that to rearrange the system is through a conflict perspective. With its inequality, people should do an action to change it into a better one.

## CONERSTONES OF AMERICAN CONSERVATISM

Some writers about American conservatism have often observed that the word itself has meant different things at different times and that there is no consistency in conservatives' beliefs about what should be conserved. American conservatism moreover, has often been reactive, responding to perceived political and intellectual challenges. If the challenges and threats changes, the nature of the conservative will response. It is not difficult to find some examples from the above statement. American history can give great contributions in illustrating the conservatives.

In the revolution era, arguments for the free market, for an example, seemed radical. But the arguments for the free market since 1917, when Soviet communism proposed a fully planned and centrally directed economy, have a strongly conservative flavor. In short, beliefs that once seemed radical later came to seem conservative. Even the concept of democracy itself, democracy seemed threatening to many property owners in the early republic. The Constitution had created a republic, but it did not mention democracy; to the privileged of that era, the spread of democracy could feel unsettling. By the late nineteenth century, to argue openly against democracy was becoming difficult. (Allitt, 2009:4).

In order to get better understanding about the term of American conservatism, it had better take account the roots of conservatism in America. The Gilded Age was a relevant era connected with the roots of American conservatism. This era ranged from the second-half of nineteenth century to the beginning of twentieth century which America changed spectacularly in all aspects of human beings. Big Business, industry, the American dream, an age of invention, immigration and social problems, and American economic crisis were often related with the age. The phrase 'gilded age' entered when Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner published a novel about 'The Golden Road to Fortune' in 1873, and the period from the 1870s through the 1902s had been identified with the name. The Gilded Age made its appearance in the United States in the midst of the financial crisis of 1873. In short, the Gilded Age was known for the opulence and conspicuous consumption of the wealthy and some sectors of the middle classes in the U.S., it was also a period of severe economic crisis and social upheaval.

"The Gilded Age ... is one of those works which, in essence a satire of the bitterest kind, is in reality a hardly overdrawn picture of the condition of society in some of the states that obey the laws of the Washington Congress. It is a bitter pill for Americans to swallow, but the medicine is, in



the judgment of its authors, a necessary one, ..." (French, 1965:23).

The interesting ones from the Gilded Age noted that there are some significant values that still hold by some Americans as their cultural behavior patterns in a society. Some of them are as follows: SELF-MADE MAN; THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST; AND LAISSEZ-FAIRE. Those values can be categorized as an ideology for American experiences in shaping its country into a super power country over the world. They refer to the aspects of culture and social, politics and defense, and economics. In order to get better understanding about them. Here is a brief description of the values.

### (1). Self-Made Man

**Self-Made Man** is a prominent value in American life. In era of the Gilded Age, this value was a spirit to pursue American dream. It is similar to Individualism. Individualism in America has a meaning of responsibility by your own-self. Benjamin Franklin with his famous work of Autobiography gives American motivation bring about their goals and dream as reflected in his some maxims. Frederick Douglass is also an example of Black writer for struggling his freedom as seen his work '*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*'. In this work, instead of telling his life in a set of events, Frederick Douglass wrote in a form of an autobiography in which he could put forward his feelings—regret, fear, sadness, hope and enthusiasm, love, and despair personally. It shows how instead of sinking him to a weak and helpless condition, Douglass's feelings make him strong and firm to determine his path to gain freedom. That is the characteristic of American culture

Recently, the term of individualism is associated with some issues considered as representative of individualism itself in America. They are : **Individual freedom**. In America, each individual has freedom to take a part in his life. He is free to decide what to do now and in the future. American government or constitution guarantees its people without interference. They are free to speak, to get material wealth, and to profess a religion. **Self-Reliance**. It is a nineteenth-century term, popularized by Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous essay of that title '*Self-Reliance*'. Americans believe that individuals must learn to rely on themselves or risk losing freedom. Americans believe they must be self-reliant in order to keep their freedom. In order to be in the mainstream of American life—to have power and / or respect—individuals must be seen as self-reliant.

**Equality of Opportunity**. Everyone has the same chance to get a certain

status. It is important to understand what Americans mean when they say they believe in equality of opportunity. They do mean that each individual should have an equal chance for success. Americans see much of life as a race for success. For the equality means that everyone should have a chance to enter the race and win. In other words, equality of opportunity may be thought of as ethical rule. **Competition.** It may take the form of rivalry between individuals within a group, of competitive effort of social groups to gain their objectives, of racial rivalries, or of a contest of culture and institutions for pre-eminence. Competition is seen as an open and fair race where success goes to the swiftest person regardless of his or her social background. Competitive success is commonly seen as the American alternative to social rank, the more successful a person is the higher his social status is.

**Material Wealth.** Material wealth becomes a value to American people. The phrase "going from rags to riches" becomes a slogan for the great American dream. The main reason is that material wealth is the most widely accepted measure of social status in the United States. Because Americans reject the European system of hereditary aristocracy and titles of nobility, they have to find a substitute for judging social status. **Hard Work.** It is a price of material wealth. American people claim that material wealth can be obtained through hard work only. To get it, they try to expand from one place to another place. Hard work has been both necessary and rewarding for the most Americans throughout their history. Because of this, they have come to see material possessions as the natural reward for their hard work. Most Americans believe that if a person works hard, it is possible to have a good standard of living. It is possible to say that hard work is also an ethic in American life.

## (2). The Survival of the Fittest

The theory of social Darwinism, a philosophy popularized in America by British theorist Herbert Spencer, believed that the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin could be applied to humanity. Society evolved and inevitably improved through a process of competition. In Spencer's terms, competition resulted in 'survival of the fittest', ensuring the progress of the human race. In America, at the gilded age the term was used by John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie as captains of industry to justify laissez-faire capitalism. Moreover, social Darwinism demanded that government not interfere with business and allow it to compete in a natural way. And the accumulation of extreme wealth is part of the natural evolutionary process, which, in the end, benefits all of society (Greenwood, 2000:20-1).



Conservatives need Charles Darwin. They need him because a Darwinian science of human nature supports the conservative commitment to liberty as rooted in nature, custom, and reason. The intellectual vitality of conservatism in twenty-first century will depend upon the success of conservatives in appealing to advances in the biology of human nature as confirming conservative social thought.

### (3). *Laissez-Faire*

Economics in America is familiar with the concept of capitalism.

The evolution industry arising around 18th century was also in shaping American Capitalism system. America becomes a big nation from the South's plantation and the North's Industry. It means America begins with agriculture areas supported by industrial areas in the North. The consequences of this industrial revolution at that time would change irrevocably human labor, consumption, family structure, social structure, and even the very soul and thoughts of the individual. In 1750, the European economy was overwhelmingly an agricultural economy. The European economy, though, had become a global economy.

The growth of European economics also influenced Economic figure like Adam Smith who is well-known his "*Laissez-Faire*" theory. It means allowing industry to be free from state intervention, especially restrictions in the form of tariffs and government monopolies. it broadly implies "let it be", or "leave it alone." first used the metaphor of an "invisible hand" in his book The Theory of Moral Sentiments to describe the unintentional effects of economic self organization from economic self interest-Some have characterized this metaphor as one for *laissez-faire*.

Era of the Enlightenment contributed the value of individualism in American capitalism. The Enlightenment is the name given to an intellectual and philosophical movement that developed in eighteenth-century Europe and is characterized by its belief that reason, not superstition or the authority of unexamined tradition, can solve all of the problems of humanity. It is used interchangeably with the phrase Age of Reason. Progress through reason and science is a central theme of Enlightenment thinking. Enlightenment thinkers rejected the idea that religion can be source of truth, and believed instead that the application of reason to the evidence of the senses is the sole of the truth (Kohl, 60).

Still by borrowing the writing of Khol (61), God's will can be seen at work in nature without the need of supernatural intervention. This attitude toward God and Religion, characteristic of much Enlightenment thought, is called deism, In conjunction with their deist beliefs, Enlightenment thinkers

replaced ideas and divine authority and the rights of kingship with ideas of universal human rights and the natural rights of all individuals. Many Enlightenment ideas are still central to ideas of democracy and human rights as well as capitalism.

## AMERICAN CONSERVATISM AFTER THE COLD WAR

Two years after the Berlin wall fell, Germany was reunited and the Soviet Union dissolved. The Cold War, a central fact of world politics for nearly half a century, had ended without the long-dreaded exchange of nuclear weapons. With the demise of communism, was the world becoming safer or more dangerous, more united or more divided? Ever since the 1960s the idea of the global village had been a shorthand way of referring to the proximity of the world's different peoples and the speed of communication between them. Hence the term of globalization and free trade were to be trademark since the Reagan presidency.

From the late 1970's to the early twenty-first century, American conservatism was constantly in the news. Some cases dealt with the American experiences denote to two prominent political spectrums both liberalism and conservatism. Powerful conservative think tanks and media outlets served up a steady stream of policy and began to approach the news from an openly conservative vantage point. Conservatism supports for the moral majority, the traditional family and religion along with opposition to gay rights, abortion, welfare, and affirmative action. Under in era of Reagan presidency and two Bushes presidencies had changed the character of conservatism which tended to neo-conservatism.

In Foreign policy, conservatives theorized the exhaustion of the Soviet Union and looked ahead to new geopolitical challenges. In line the changing of era, at the beginning of the twenty-first century American conservatives had a dream to make 'Pax-Americana' which the power over the world has been dominated by one super power. Therefore some conservatives wanted a vast defense establishment able to nullify all threats, to take on opponents anywhere in the world, and to spread the gospel of democratic capitalism worldwide. In American domestic, some conservatives favored a drastic reduction of the federal government.

America's first post-Cold War foreign policy crisis could be itself be interpreted either way. It was also the conservative movement's first test of post-Cold War durability. One well-known event was the case of Saddam Hussein who invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990. President George H.



W. Bush responded by building a United Nations Alliance against Hussein, which moved troops to the area and ordered Hussein to withdraw. President Bush's decision to intervene was supported by the Right which tended to the conservative mainstream.

In contrast to Bill Clinton administration (1993-2001), he was a moderate Democrat who sought to mute the liberal image of his party. In his Foreign Affairs, Clinton operated a prudent Wilsonian, involving the nation in peace keeping missions but always seeking to minimize the potential loss of American lives in such ventures. Bill Clinton's presidency will likely be remembered as much for the scandals culminating in Clinton's impeachment as for its significant substantive accomplishments. In contrast to the former Presidents, Reagan and Bush, Clinton believed that government had a positive role to play in protecting people's rights, running programs intended to improve people's lives and providing services that no other element of society could provide (Crothers and Lind, 2002:188).

During the post 9/11, the war against terrorism became a main agenda of George W. Bush in line with the establishment of MIC (Military Industrial Complex) which was like a necessity. During his administration, he issued USA Patriot Act and Homeland Security Act as an outline of domestic policies in fighting terrorism. The uniqueness of his administration was some controversial policies, mainly, his foreign policy toward Iraq and Afghanistan as the basis of terrorists. His policy is like a cowboy policy. Even, there was no the fact that Iraq had nuclear weapons.

In relation to the American presidents' policies, both George W.H. Bush and George W. Bush as a Republican Party stress on using military and political approach in grabbing the world. In short, America must be strong. It denotes to Darwinism's The Survival of the Fittest ala conservatism. Neo-conservatism is closed to the presidency of George W. Bush supported MIC, media, organization, and advisers, mainly from neo-conservatism.

Furthermore, after George W. Bush presidency, There was a big event well-known as 'the Economic Turndown of 2008-2009' in the Barrack Obama's first administration. America itself had three economics crisis, they were the Panic of 1893; the Great Depression of 1920s; and the Economic Turndown of 2008-2009. Those events absolutely triggered people's responses, mainly from conservatives. Some of them were the Populist party and The Revolt: A New American Tea Party in 2009. The conservative movement of A New American Tea Party is to protest reckless government spending in the pork-laden stimulus package, the earmark-clogged budget bill, the massive mortgage entitlement program, taxpayer-funded corporate

rescues, the environmentally fraudulent cap and trade monstrosity, and the debt-exploding government health care takeover (O'hara: 2010:XXI)

## CONCLUSION

Burke's conservatives ala European had no more success in America. One reason is not far to seek. It is that the social institutions to whose continuity European conservatives attached most importance had been discontinued in America: hereditary monarchy, landed aristocracy, and established church. In America, conservative is also related on how to conserve the cultural traits and beliefs. American system of belief is shaped by experience holism. American strive to accommodate new experiences while maximizing two factors: overall simplicity of the new system and conservation of old beliefs.

American Revolution, unlike the French Revolution was not based on perfectionist ideology. It was a defense of the status quo and the authentic American tradition. The American Founding Fathers were aware of the sinfulness of man and the need for political humility. They wanted to preserve some relative decency and justice in society against the tyranny and injustice into which society may fall. For an example, the Federalists of the 1780s and 1790s did not describe themselves as conservatives, but they certainly hoped, with the help of the Constitution, to conserve a traditional social order. As they saw it as the threat of disorder from below and radicalism from abroad. Afraid that the chaos of the French Revolution might spread to America, they tried to preserve the old social hierarchy and to act as much like British gentlemen in the new republic. In short, their views of the American revolution was conservative.

Some European scholars such as Edmund Burke, Adam Smith, Charles Darwin, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Martin Luther, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Frederick von Hayek gave great contributions in shaping the political thought of American Founding Fathers and politician theorists in relation to conservatism. The cornerstone of American conservative can be traced from the era of the Gilded Age. Those values are Self-Made Man, The Survival of the Fittest, and Laissez-Faire. American experiences dealing with conservatism are always in connection with them. Conservatism is a product of culture which is learned, shared, adapted, and dynamic. An important aspect of culture is that it is dynamic and continually adapts to serve the needs of the group.



## REFERENCES

- Allitt, Patrick. *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History*. USA: Yale University Press. 2009.
- Crothers, Lane and Nancy S. Lind. *Presidents From Reagan Through Clinton 1981 – 2001*. London: Greenwood Press. 2002.
- French, Bryant Morey. *Mark Twain and The Gilded Age*. Texas : Southern Methodist University Printing Department. 1965.
- Greenwood, Janette Thomas. *The Gilded Age: A History in Documents*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2000.
- Kekes, John. *A Case of Conservatism. The Good Society*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1998). USA: Penn State University Press. <<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>>
- Kohl, Herbert. *From Archetype to Zeitgeist: Powerful Ideas for Powerful Thinking*. New York: Little, Brown and Company. 1992.
- Muccigrosso, Robert. *Basic History of American Conservatism*. Florida: Krieger Publishing Company. 2001.
- O'hara. *A New American Tea Party: The Counterrevolution Against Bailouts, Handouts, Reckless Spending, and More Taxes*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2010
- Sanders, Arthur. *The meaning of Liberalism and Conservatism. Polity*. Vol. 19, No. 1 (Autumn, 1986). USA: Palgrave Macmillan Journals. <<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>>