What is Tradition?

tradition (n) Bing Dictionary
[ trə dɪsh'n ]

- custom or belief: a long-established action or pattern of behavior in a community or group of people, often one that has been handed down from generation to generation

- body of customs: a body of long-established customs and beliefs viewed as a set of precedents

- handing down of customs: the handing down of patterns of behavior, practices, and beliefs that are valued by a culture

A tradition is a ritual, belief or object passed down within a society, still maintained in the present, with origins in the past. Common examples include holidays or impractical but socially meaningful clothes (like lawyer wigs or military officer spurs), but the idea has also been applied to social norms such as greetings. Traditions can persist and evolve for thousands of years—the word "tradition" itself derives from the Latin tradere or tradere literally meaning to transmit, to hand over, to give for safekeeping—and new traditions continue to appear today. While it is commonly assumed that traditions have ancient history, many traditions have been invented on purpose, whether that be political or cultural, over short periods of time. Certain scholarly fields, such as anthropology and biology, have adapted the term "tradition," defining it more carefully than its conventional use in order to facilitate scholarly discourse.

The concept of tradition, as the notion of holding on to a previous time, is also found in political and philosophical discourse. For example, the political concept of traditionalism is based around it, as are strands of many world religions including traditional Catholicism. In artistic contexts, tradition is used to decide the correct display of an art form. For example, in the performance of traditional genres (such as traditional dance), adherence to guidelines dictating how an art form should be composed are given greater importance than the performer's own preferences. A number of factors can exacerbate the loss of tradition, including industrialization, globalization, and the assimilation or marginalization of specific cultural groups. In response to this, tradition-preservation attempts have now been started in many countries around the world, focusing on aspects such as traditional languages. Tradition is usually contrasted with the goal of modernity and should be differentiated from customs, conventions, laws, norms, routines, rules and similar concepts.
### What is Progressivism?

**SOURCE:** [www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com)

**progressivism**

1. Also called *progressionism*, *progressism*. the principles and practices of those advocating progress, change, or reform, especially in political matters.
2. (cap.) the doctrines and beliefs of the Progressive party in America. — progressivist, n.

SOURCE: “What is Progressivism
By R.J. Pestritto, Hillsdale College

Many on the left today call themselves “progressive,” and they do so not just because it’s a nicer way of saying “liberal,” but also because they very much intend to revive the political principles of America’s original Progressives, from the Progressive Era of the 1880s through World War I. Why would leftist politicians, like Mrs. Clinton, purposely identify themselves with this Progressive movement?

The reason is that America’s original Progressives were also its original, big-government liberals. Most people point to the New Deal era as the source of big government and the welfare state that we have today. While this is perfectly accurate, it is important to understand that the principles of the New Deal did not originate in the New Deal; rather, they came from the Progressives, who had dominated American politics and intellectual cultural a generation prior to the New Deal.

We have no less an authority on this connection than Franklin Roosevelt himself. When FDR campaigned in 1932, he pointed to the Progressives – and in particular to Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson – as the source of his ideas about government.

Progressives wanted a thorough transformation in America’s principles of government, from a government permanently dedicated to securing individual liberty to one whose ends and scope would change to take on any and all social and economic ills.

1) What did Progressives think about the American founding, and why did they want to eradicate its principles?

America’s Progressives aimed for a thorough transformation in America’s principles of government. While our founders understood that our national government must have the capacity to be strong and vigorous (this is why the Articles of Confederation were failing), they also were very clear that this strength must always be confined to very limited ends or areas of responsibility; government, in other words, while not weak or tiny, was to be strictly limited.

The Progressive conception of government, on the other hand, was quite the opposite; Progressives had an “evolving” or a “living” notion of government (yes, we get the term “living constitution” from the Progressives), and thus wanted government to take on whatever role and scope the times demanded. The Progressives reasoned that people of the founding era may have wanted a limited government, given their particular experience with George III, but they argued that people of their own time wanted a much more activist government, and that we should adjust accordingly.

Quite simply, the Progressives detested the bedrock principles of American government. They detested the Declaration of Independence, which enshrines the protection of individual natural rights (like property) as the unchangeable purpose of government; and they detested the Constitution, which places permanent limits on the scope of government and is structured in a way that makes the extension of national power beyond its original purpose very difficult. “Progressivism” was, for them, all about progressing, or moving beyond, the principles of our founders.
2) How did we get today’s excessively powerful presidency from the Progressives?

Progressives wanted to disregard the Constitution in order to enlarge vastly the scope of government. As a practical matter, how was this to be done? It happened in a variety of ways, but principal among them was a fundamental change in the American presidency.

Under the system of our founders, government was to have sufficient strength and energy to accomplish its ends, but those ends were strictly limited by the Constitution. The principal way in which the Constitution keeps the government within its boundaries is through the separation of powers. As readers of The Federalist and of Thomas Jefferson know, the point of separation of powers is to keep any one set of hands from wielding all of the power in national government.

The Progressives, especially Woodrow Wilson, hated the separation of powers for precisely this reason: it made government inefficient, and made it difficult, if not impossible, to expand the power of government so that it could take on all of the new tasks that Progressives had in mind. So they looked to the presidency as a way of getting around this obstacle.

3) What was the connection between Progressivism and Socialism? Were the Progressives actually Socialists?

The progressive conception of government closely coincided with the socialist conception. Both progressivism and socialism champion the prerogatives of the state over the prerogatives of the individual. Wilson himself made this connection very plain in a revealing essay he wrote in 1887 called “Socialism and Democracy.” Wilson’s begins this essay by defining socialism, explaining that it stands for unfettered state power, which trumps any notion of individual rights. It “proposes that all idea of a limitation of public authority by individual rights be put out of view,” Wilson wrote, and “that no line can be drawn between private and pu

blic affairs which the State may not cross at will.” After laying out this definition of socialism, Wilson explains that he finds nothing wrong with it in principle, since it was merely the logical extension of genuine democratic theory. It gives all power to the people, in their collective capacity, to carry out their will through the exercise of governmental power, unlimited by any undemocratic idea like individual rights. He elaborated:

“In fundamental theory socialism and democracy are almost if not quite one and the same. They both rest at bottom upon the absolute right of the community to determine its own destiny and that of its members. Limits of wisdom and convenience to the public control there may be: limits of principle there are, upon strict analysis, none.”

Roosevelt, too, argued for a new conception of government, where individual natural rights would no longer serve as a principled boundary that the state was prohibited from crossing. He called in his New Nationalism program for the state to take an active role in effecting economic equality by way of superintending the use of private property. Private property rights, which had been serving as a brake on the more aggressive progressive policy proposals, were to be respected, Roosevelt argued, only insofar as the government approved of the property’s social usefulness.

4) What are some of the critical connections between Progressivism and what’s going on in our country today?

The first connection is at a general level, and concerns our abandonment of the Constitution. The present crisis did not appear out of nowhere, and didn’t simply begin with the election of Barack Obama. Politicians of both parties spent the better part of the 20th century disregarding the Constitution, as they looked to have government step up to solve every conceivable human problem. Thus it ought to be no surprise that the Constitution’s limits on government aren’t even part of the conversation today as our politicians debate the new interventions in our economy and society that seem to come daily.
The second connection between the original Progressive Era and our situation today has to do with policy. The progressives knew that our original system of government was not capable of handling all of the new tasks that they had in mind for it. So they envisioned creating a vast set of bureaucratic agencies. They argued that Congress should enact very broad and vague laws for supervising more and more facets of the American economy and society, and then delegate to the bureaucratic agencies the power and discretion to enact specific policies. Both Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt conceived of government in this way.

The New Deal certainly went a long way toward implementing this progressive vision, and what we have seen in our own situation with TARP and the various other interventions is simply greater steps toward the progressive plan. Our Congress has simply said to the Treasury agencies: here’s a trillion dollars, here’s all the legal authority you need, now go out, determine what is in the public interest, and spend and regulate accordingly. That is the progressive vision of government, in a nutshell.


Progressivism or “chronological snobbery” confuses words like “new” with “true.” It also confuses facts with values, by using a factual, chronological term to carry a value meaning. Hence, something, "modern," "contemporary," [progressive] or “current” is "truer," "better,” or “more reliable.”

The fallacy of Progressivism is peculiarly modern. It has also been called “the Whig theory of history,” The Idea of Automatic Progress,” “Americanism,” and Presentism. The term “chronological snobbery” comes from C.S. Lewis

You must find out why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood. From seeing this, one passes to the realization that our own age is also "a period," and certainly has, like all periods, its own characteristic illusions. They are likeliest to lurk in those widespread assumptions which are so ingrained in the age that no one dares to attack or feels it necessary to defend them.

Thus, chronological snobbery is the identification, or confusion, of “change” with “progress.” “Progress” is a value laden term: it means not just change but change in a certain direction, change for the better.

But there very notion of a "better" assumes a "best," a standard, a goal. And that standard has to be unchanging; for if the goal line itself changes, it is impossible to make progress toward it.

The typically modern mind is 1) skeptical of absolute, unchanging standards and 2) in love with the idea of progress. But this is a logical impossibility, a self-contradiction. Without an unchanging standard, there can be no progress, only change.
The opposite of Progressivism is traditionalism. A conservative, by definition, is a happy person, one who is happy with what is. It is only for that reason that he wants to conserve it. A progressivist, on the other hand, is by definition an unhappy person, one who is unhappy with what is. It is only for that reason that he wants to change it.

"New" used to be a word of suspicion and "old" a word of affection. Now it is exactly the opposite. Modern children use the word "old" as an insult. But the ancients used it as a compliment. Things used to sold by pretending they were older than they are. Now, thinkgs are sold by pretending they are newer than they are. "New" sells. This is especially true of ideas.

If, as Chesterton said, Tradition is the democracy of the dead, then Progressivism is the elitism of the living—and within that, of a certain educated, well-off subset. Progressivism stifles the voices of the past and amplifies the sound of our own speech, the better to help us pretend we have heard all points of view, then do exactly as we wish.

Progressivism also cuts us off from what tradition gives us: a pile of precious intellectual and cultural gifts from our ancestors. And when we receive the gifts and use them, we are not grateful for them, for Progressivism forbids us the virtue of humility, which is necessary for the acceptance of gifts; and from gratitude without which there is simply no wisdom of happiness.

We must think vertically, about timeless truths, before we can think horizontally, about timely, changing things. For without an appeal to some knowledge, however implicit, of a higher, unchanging reality, we cannot judge or improve anything real in this changing world. We must overcome our fear of eternal things.

To judge any change as progressive or regressive, we must eventually ask ourselves the Big Question: what is our final end, goal, purpose, *summum bonum* or greatest good. We must ask nothing less than the question of "the meaning of life," however unfashionable that question has become. If we don't have a clear vision of the ultimate finish line, we can't even know whether we are running toward it or away from it.

**SOURCE:** Why the Left Hates the Old  
By Dennis Prager  
Tuesday, October 08, 2013  
http://www.dennisprager.com/columns.aspx?g=0a6f3cc0-0f70-4933-a230-782e6c3b19f7&url=why-the-left-hates-the-old-n1719132

The latest left-wing tactic to discredit conservative views is to dismiss the age and race of conservatives. "Old white males" and "old white people" are the left's latest favored negative epithets for those holding conservative views.

Chris Matthews of MSNBC, Thomas Friedman and Paul Krugman of the New York Times, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid ("angry old white men") are among the many on the left who have used this epithet.
Last week, on her nightly MSNBC show, Rachel Maddow showed a picture of an ad for Washington, D.C. talk radio station WRC that featured the station's talk show hosts. You will notice, she said, that they are all "old white Republican males." It was brought to my attention because I am one of those talk show hosts (and, it should be noted, nearly all of my colleagues and I are younger than her colleague, Chris Matthews, an old white Democratic male.)

What is going on here?

The answer is: quite a bit. The left's dismissal of old people is much more than another left-wing ad hominem attack. Therefore, to understand it is to understand much of what animates leftism.

As a rule, the left rejects the old.

The left's attack on teaching the works of "Dead White European Males" was one such example. It infuriated the left that Shakespeare was studied so much more than, let us say, living Guatemalan playwrights. As a result, one can now obtain a college degree in English -- let alone every other liberal arts department -- without having taken a course in Shakespeare.

So, too, in art and music, the new is almost always favored over the old. New composers and artists -- no matter how untalented -- are studied as much as or more than the great masters of old. And the old standards of excellence are neglected in favor of the latest avant-garde experimentation.

Rejection of the old is a reason the left has contempt for the Bible. To progressives, the idea of having 2,000 and 3,000-year-old texts guide a person's behavior today is ludicrous.

Low regard for the old is also a major factor in the left's dismissal of the Founders and of the original intent of the Constitution. Talk about "old white males," the Founders are white males who are now over 200-years-old. What could they possibly have known or understood that a progressive living today does not know more about or understand better?

What, then, is at the core of the left's contempt for the old, and its celebration of the new and of change?

There are two primary answers.

One is the yearning for utopia. Since Marx, the left has sought utopia in this world. And that means constantly transforming every aspect of society. As then-Senator Barack Obama said prior to the 2008 election: "We are five days away from fundamentally transforming the United States of America."

By definition, those who seek to transform consider the old essentially worthless.

The other answer is self-esteem. The left began the self-esteem movement in large measure because of its own high self-esteem. Those on the left are certain that they are smarter, kinder, more moral and more compassionate than -- in every way superior to -- their opponents.
That is a major reason for the left’s problem with the old: If the old is great, then they and their new ideas are probably not that great.

Just about everyone who is not on the cultural left knows that all the great masters were incomparably superior to Jackson Pollock and other 20th-centuries artists who produced meaningless and talentless art. And because there are so few artists at any time who measure up to the old standards (standards that are synonymous with standards of excellence), the old standards have simply been abandoned.

This applies equally to morality. The left doesn't want to be bound or answerable to a higher moral authority. Rather, one's heart and reason are the best moral guides. Here, too, the old codes, especially as embodied in traditional religion, must be overthrown.

Prior to the ascendance of the left, it was assumed that the old had more wisdom than the young. Indeed, even every leftist I have asked, "Are you wiser today than 20 years ago?" has answered in the affirmative.

Nevertheless the left has transformed "old" -- a title that commanded respect in every civilization prior to the pre-1960s West -- into a pejorative.

As a result we live in the age of new music, new art, new families, new morality, new education, and now new marriage. If you think all these are good, then "old white males," like almost everything else old, do indeed constitute a threat. If you think the left's belief in "new" and "change" hurts society, "old" sounds good.

What Is Progressivism?
by Kim Petersen / January 29th, 2013
http://dissidentvoice.org/2013/01/what-is-progressivism/

Progressivism is a term that encompasses a wide spectrum of social movements that include environmentalism, labor, agrarianism, anti-poverty, peace, anti-racism, civil rights, women's rights, animal rights, social justice and political ideologies such as anarchism, communism, socialism, social democracy, and liberalism.

Since many social and political groupings fit under the progressivist umbrella, there are bound to be some disagreements on some of the tenets of progressivism, but on core tenets progressivists find common ground to solidarize.

Right-wingers promote policies that prioritize “freeing up” the economy for carrying out business. Since such policies cater to the interests of the owners of the means of production, there is a collusion of interests among capitalists and other elements of the Right.
Political opponents use the leftist label to tarnish non-leftists. Thus, in the minds of Tea Partyers, one can simply defame president Barack Obama by calling him a “socialist.” No evidence is necessary to adduce Obama as a socialist (an extremely challenging prospect in the face of his steadfast toting of the neoliberalism line), and neither is any evidence or coherent argumentation produced as to why socialism should be so fear-evoking. In the presidential campaign of 2004, Democratic Party candidate John Kerry abjured the “dangerous” labeling of being a “liberal.” The importance of labeling is manifest. In a world where many people maintain that perception is reality, labeling has importance.

After all, who wants to be known as a Red, a Commie, or adhere to a socialism that failed in the Soviet Union, or a bleeding-heart liberal supporter of lazy, good-for-nothing welfare bums (as the monopoly media depicts things)? Anarchists? Aren’t those the black-hooded hooligans who run around throwing rocks through store windows? What person in their right mind would call himself an anarchist? Yes, but being a progressive ... isn’t everyone for progress?

*Dictionary.com* defines *progressivism* as: “the political orientation of those who favor progress toward better conditions in government and society.” This is a term that carries very positive connotations and would be difficult to defame.

Progressivism is not rooted in politics but in principles. The well being of all the people is primary and at the heart of progressivism. People are not at the whim of markets guided by preternatural forces to bring theorized widespread prosperity somewhere in the retreating future. A progressivist society prioritizes meeting the needs of all the people first. There will no underclass and no people falling between the cracks. Under progressivism, there is no acceptable unemployment rate; workers will not be made to suffer because of economists’s hypotheses pinned to a target inflation rate or other recurrent crises within capitalism; the target will be no poverty; there will be no accumulation of material wealth confined to a societal few. Every person who wants a job will have a job that respects the dignity of labor.

The needs of humanity are primary and not the needs of businesses. Humans are living, breathing, sentient creatures endowed with feelings. Businesses are human constructs. They do not breathe. They do not think. They do not have emotions.

The classist theory of money trickling down to the masses of people is morally unacceptable.

Egalitarianism is central to progressivism. Consequently, the people alive today have an equal right to the enjoyment of life as do the future generations.
Under progressivism, many of the enmities arising from the law of the jungle that plagues capitalist society — such as classism, clashes over immigration, open versus closed borders, racial targeting, religious scapegoating, and conflict over preferential hiring practices — should cease to exist or diminish to negligibility. A progressive society is about acceptance and inclusion. Since all people and peoples are equal in principle and practice there is no reason to clash over matters that can be settled through cooperation and sharing.

While egalitarianism is fundamental, just as fundamental is the right to live. Progressives, therefore, are staunchly opposed to wars of aggression or the use of violence to solve disputes. Interminable warfare wreaks havoc on people living in war-ravaged zones and destroys the economic infrastructure and environment required to build and sustain a prosperous future.  

War is the bane of humanity, spurred by ignoble attributes, such as hate, greed, and ignorance. It is unique to humans.

Man is the only animal that deals in that atrocity of atrocities, War. He is the only one which gathers his brethren and goes forth in cold blood and with calm pleasure to exterminate his own kind.
– Mark Twain

War is futile and demeaning of people. It has no place in a progressive cosmos. Under progressivism, there will be no need for the profession of trained killers.

Many citizens consider it their patriotic duty to fight for the state in times of war. But what is the state? Is it really worth killing and dying for? When one’s country is being attacked, resistance is understandable. War that is not in self-defense, however, is usually brought upon the citizenry by the political leadership.

A common refrain that objects to progressivism is that human lust for power and wealth is a part of human nature. This assertion ipso facto denies or diminishes redeeming qualities as a part of the human character. It frustrates morality and guiding principles. This view is deterministic and denies choice. The fact is that some humans decide to pursue selfish motives while others practice altruism. Progressivism is a rejection of humans as solely ego-driven beings. It appeals to the logic of the masses seeking a better life together in harmony with nature.

It is about social justice for the masses. But the focus of justice is not fixated on just punishing criminals rather it is about freeing the masses, sharing resources, and fostering the conditions for universal equality in life and living standards. It is the revolution for a just society in which peace will prevail.
Through solidarity and the building of mass social movements, people gain the power to begin to revolutionize societies and the world. The answer is simple, but it will require great sacrifice. Attaining a world based on progressivist principles, however, will be a most worthy outcome.

SOURCE: “The Paradox of Liberalism”  

Nineteenth-century liberalism focused on political and economic freedom. Today’s liberals focus on using the power of the state to limit, control, and direct free markets. Although the earlier version seems very different from the later, statist form of liberalism, there’s an important continuity between the two. We need to keep that continuity in mind when thinking about contemporary cultural liberalism and its implications for the future. Nearly two hundred years ago in England, the Manchester School argued that free enterprise was the key to social progress. (The Economist was later founded as part of this movement.) Everyone would benefit from the great economic engine and its output. Liberal intellectual leaders Richard Cobden and John Bright criticized economic regulations and political traditions designed to support the status quo by limiting free enterprise. The Corn Laws became the prime liberal target. Passed in 1815 to protect domestic agriculture in England against foreign competition, its strict limits on imported grain were strongly supported by the aristocracy, whose wealth and power were closely tied to inherited estates and agricultural profits. As England industrialized, however, strong interests emerged that wanted cheaper food for the urban laboring classes. In 1838 the Anti-Corn Law League was formed, and in 1846 the laws were repealed.

It was a decisive legislative victory for the free-market liberalism of the nineteenth century and a milestone in the evolution of English political culture. However, it soon became evident that capitalism does not usher in the Kingdom of God. In the new industrial economy, some flourished, while many stumbled, and some fell and were crushed. Even those who managed to get along often felt disenfranchised. Moreover, like a rambunctious adolescent, the economy envisioned by the Manchester School tended toward cyclical booms and busts that both heightened expectations when times were good and deepened grievances when they were bad.

There thus emerged in England and elsewhere, including America, a system of philanthropic-and then government-intervention to ameliorate the downsides of a free-market economy. Over time, the modern system we know evolved. A social safety net catches those who don’t do well in the marketplace, various schemes for redistribution seek to preserve a sense of social solidarity, and all sorts of economic strategies are employed to dampen the regular busts. The upshot is the paradox of twentieth-century liberalism (in Europe it goes by the name "social democracy"): managed economic freedom.

Today’s liberalism explodes gender roles, marriage, and the family in order to create a free marketplace of "identity." Liberals work for a future in which individuals will be able to craft bespoke lives for themselves, and thus maximize happiness by maximizing the satisfaction of desires. Given this vision of the common good, same-sex marriage is to lifestyle
liberalism what the repeal of the Corn Laws was to economic liberalism: a decisive victory that signals political and cultural ascendancy.

Once again, however, freedom understood simply as expanded scope for personal choices without regard to ends doesn't bring universal happiness. As was the case with the nineteenth-century laissez-faire economy, today's laissez-faire culture is very tough on many, especially the weak and vulnerable. Marriage falters in the middle class and collapses for those at the bottom. Obesity, which is very strongly correlated with class, is on the rise. The decriminalization of marijuana, violent video games, pervasive pornography: We're creating a toxic moral environment.

These problems are not surprising, because in many ways they recapitulate the consequences of the triumph of nineteenth-century economic liberalism. Today, traditional wisdom about how to live—a wisdom that includes sexual morality, norms of marriage, an ethic of honor and shame, and so forth—must be demolished in order to create lifestyle freedom. This freedom parallels an earlier phase in economic life—with the same uneven allocation of benefits. The strong thrive, the majority stumble, and the weak are crushed. And so the paradox of liberalism—managed freedom—emerges once again, now in culture. We're seeing calls for government intervention to address the problems of people who don't flourish in a free marketplace of identity. Michael Bloomberg does not support traditional moral constraints. Instead, he wants to improve people's lives by regulating them, as his efforts to limit sugary drinks illustrate. Harvard Law professor Cass Sunstein proposes a less invasive strategy, one that seeks to avoid Bloomberg's command-and-control approach to culture by using incentives to "nudge" people in healthy, productive directions.

Whether it comes by way of government regulations or choice-friendly nudges, I'm quite sure we're heading toward managed lifestyle freedom. Economic history suggests that's the logic of liberalism and its unworkable vision of freedom as unconstrained choice. Nineteenth-century economic liberalism promoted economic freedom. As it came to recognize the destructive effects of this freedom, the regulatory, redistributive state emerged that limited the economic freedom of the rich more severely than the poor (which was inevitable, because that's where the money is).

Twenty-first-century cultural liberalism undermines traditional moral authorities that stand in the way of lifestyle freedom. But lifestyle freedom has destructive effects as well—hence the need for a regulatory state to intervene in personal life. Unlike economic regulation, however, the burdens fall on the weak, not the strong. It's the freedom of the dysfunctional people who make bad choices that needs to be limited, not the freedom of the powerful or well-to-do. To a greater and greater degree, the bottom will be subject to the therapeutic condescension and regulatory benevolence of those at the top.
Patriotism has always been the most abstract of American virtues--which may be why we fight so ferociously over the symbols that help us define it. Too often those symbols--flags, anthems, slogans--are meant to unite us, end up dividing us.

To many people, the meaning of patriotism is simple: love of country. But love of a country that is dedicated to a proposition, not a king or a religion--a nation that is based on ideas, not blood--has always created a different kind of citizen. American patriotism expresses itself most truly in actions, not words. Our patriotism shapes our responsibilities as citizens, how we navigate in the world and, ultimately, what it means to be an American.

There is nothing more important than those ideals, and we are in the midst of a historic presidential race that will help redefine them for the 21st century. There have always been twin strains of patriotism in our history, two different definitions of American exceptionalism: a sense that our greatness is based on our provenance and what we have achieved, and a belief that our greatness lies in our promise and how we attempt to live up to our ideals.

Conservatives and liberals have been arguing about these two strains for years, and that debate has become the pivot of our politics. Republicans have contended that they are the true legatees of the nation's heritage and attack Democrats for being ashamed of America. Democrats in turn depict Republicans as chest-thumping nationalists who prevent America from living up to its ideals. Both of these are caricatures.

On the surface, defining patriotism is simple. It is love and devotion to country. The questions are why we love it and how we express our devotion. That's where the arguments begin.

The conservative answer is implicit in the title of John McCain's 1999 book, Faith of My Fathers. Why should we love America? In part, at least, because our forefathers did. Think about the lyrics to America ("My Country, 'Tis of Thee"): "Land where my fathers died,/ Land of the Pilgrims' pride." Most liberals don't consider those the best lines of the song. What about the Americans whose fathers died somewhere else? What about all the nasty stuff the Pilgrims did? But conservatives generally want to conserve, and that requires a reverence for the past. What McCain's title implies is that patriotism isn't a choice; it's an inheritance. Being born into a nation is like being born into a religion or a family. You may be called on to reaffirm the commitment as you reach adulthood--as McCain did by joining the military--but it is impressed upon you early on, by those who have come before.

SAMPLE: Liberal Patriotism
"America’s image in the rest of the world" By: Ruthie Kelly, State of Mind Editor for THE DAILY AZTEC (Posted: 9/10/08)

We thought everyone in the world wanted to come here, work hard and live like we do. That's the main reason why the attacks came as such a shock. We could not imagine why anyone would want to attack us, the first front of freedom, democracy and justice. The attackers, we were certain, must hate freedom and democracy and must be evil, pathetic and small. We could defeat them easily and be completely justified in our actions.
In the series of events that have taken place since then, that illusion has been quietly unraveling. America has been invading countries and killing civilians with motives that look suspiciously similar to oil company interests.

Our government has been spying on citizens, impeding freedom of the press while flouting the Constitution, federal law and our own sense of morality. We've blatantly ignored the health care of our veterans and rescue workers. Our government and business leaders have been lying and exploiting the public for their own self-serving interests. Our soldiers have been sexually abusing and torturing prisoners of war on a level that surpasses that of our most despised enemies.

Where is the America we sing about in anthems and learn about in school, the noble, hard-working people who are just trying to fulfill the American dream? You cannot find any traces of it in recent history. It's hard to find that version of the U.S. in any part of our history, actually.

The America we learn and sing about is an ideal; a bar of excellence that we have never really met. Our mission statement and our values are noble, unique and inspiring for a good reason.

America represents hope, freedom and justice, and is the first unlikely "experiment" in letting citizens rule, not monarchs or dictators. Unquestionably, America has fought for just causes in the past. The problem is, we haven't truly lived up to our own expectations. We haven't fulfilled the promise that our country represents. The country we sing about is an amazing, wonderful thing to aspire to be a part of, but it's not the country we neither are, nor ever really have been. We've come close, on occasion, but we've never been able to overcome the taint of American-style business and politics, which breeds corruption, greed and apathy.

The rest of the world watched and hoped. Surely the richest nation in the world, with the freest citizens, the most privileged workforce and the most access to information would be able to maintain a power structure that goes against human nature. Not only has the world been disappointed, but it has been frequently confronted with our refusal to acknowledge this failure. We've fallen short, but we act like we've surpassed every goal with flying colors. Americans have notoriously short memories. It's infuriating to be constantly condescended to, especially when the country in question is so far from perfect.

That's why conservatives tend to believe that loving America today requires loving its past. Conservatives often fret about "politically correct" education, which forces America's students to dwell on its past sins. They're forever writing books like America: The Last Best Hope (by William J. Bennett) and America: A Patriotic Primer (by Lynne Cheney), which teach children that historically the U.S. was a pretty nifty place. These books are based on the belief that our national forefathers are a bit like our actual mothers and fathers: if we dishonor them, we dishonor ourselves. That's why conservatives got so upset when Michelle Obama said that "for the first time in my adult lifetime, I am really proud of my country" (a comment she says was misinterpreted). In the eyes of conservatives, those comments suggested a lack of gratitude toward the nation that--as they saw it--has given her and the rest of us so much.

Conservatives know America isn't perfect, of course. But they grade on a curve. Partly that's because they generally take a dimmer view of human nature than do their counterparts on the left. When evaluating America, they're more likely to remember that for most of human history, tyranny has been the norm. By that standard, America looks pretty good. Conservatives worry that if Americans don't appreciate--and celebrate--their nation's past accomplishments, they'll assume the country can be easily and dramatically improved. And they'll end up making things worse. But if conservatives believe that America is, comparatively, a great country, they also believe that comparing America with other countries is beside the point. It's like your family: it doesn't matter whether it's objectively better than someone else's. You love it because it is yours.

Hoping for a Braver Future

If conservatives tend to see patriotism as an inheritance from a glorious past, liberals often see it as the promise of a future that redeems the past. It wasn't great in the past? It's not great as it is? The liberal answer is, Not great enough. For liberals, America is less a common culture than a set of ideals about democracy, equality and the rule of law. American history is a chronicle of the distance between those ideals and reality. And American patriotism is the struggle to narrow the gap. Thus, patriotism isn't about honoring and replicating the past; it's about surpassing it.
Liberals more often lionize people who display patriotism by calling America on the carpet for violating its highest ideals. For liberals more than for conservatives, there is something quintessentially patriotic about Frederick Douglass's famous 1852 oration, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?," in which the great African-American abolitionist refused to celebrate the anniversary of America's founding, telling a Rochester, N.Y., crowd that "above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are today rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them."

How to Be a Patriot

On inspection, the liberal and conservative brands of patriotism both have defects. In a country where today's nativists are yesterday's immigrants and where change is practically a national religion, conservative patriotism can seem anachronistic. To be Spanish or Russian or Japanese is to imagine that you share a common ancestry and common traditions that trace back into the mists of time. But in America, where most people hail from somewhere else, that kind of blood-and-soil patriotism makes no sense. There is something vaguely farcical about conservative panic over Mexican flags in Los Angeles when Irish flags have long festooned Boston's streets on St. Patrick's Day. Linking patriotism too closely to a reverence for inherited tradition contradicts one of America's most powerful traditions: that our future shouldn't be dictated by our past.

By defining Americanism too narrowly and backwardly, conservative patriotism risks becoming clubby. And by celebrating America too unabashedly--without sufficient regard for America's sins--it risks degenerating from patriotism into nationalism, a self-righteous, chest-thumping ideology that celebrates America at the expense of the rest of the world.

But if conservative patriotism can be too exclusionary, liberal patriotism risks not being exclusionary enough. If liberals love America purely because it embodies ideals like liberty, justice and equality, why shouldn't they love Canada--which from a liberal perspective of ten goes further toward realizing those principles--even more? And what do liberals do when those universal ideals collide with America's self-interest? Giving away the federal budget to Africa would probably increase the net sum of justice and equality on the planet, after all. But it would harm Americans and thus be unpatriotic.

SAMPLE: CONSERVATIVE PATRIOTISM
The Speech We'd Like to Hear from An Academy Award Winner by Dennis Prager, World Net Daily, March 7, 2006

Here's a speech we would like to hear from an Academy Award winner:

First, I want to thank my country, the United States of America. Every one of us here has this country to thank for enabling us to live lives of unprecedented freedom and unimaginable affluence. Too many of us forget that no other country in history has offered such opportunities to people in our profession or in any other profession, for that matter.

Second, I want to thank the men and women of the armed forces of the United States. While we bask in freedom and spend a good part of our lives going from party to party and award show to award show, tens of thousands of my fellow Americans are confronting a menace to our world as great as that fought by previous generations fighting Nazism and communism.

At the same time, I also want to apologize to these troops for my profession not having made even one motion picture about any of the heroic American fighters in Afghanistan and Iraq. This country is fighting a war, Hollywood. You may think this war is unwise, waged under mistaken, or even false, pretenses. And as an actor in Hollywood, you are overwhelmingly likely to hate this commander in chief. But even the men and women of Hollywood must recognize that America is fighting the worst people of our time, people who hurt every group Hollywood claims to care about -- minorities, women, gays -- people who engage in the sins Hollywood most professes to oppose -- intolerance and violence -- far more than anyone else on the planet.

We in Hollywood walk around thinking we are very important. That is why this year's nominated films for best picture are largely pictures with messages, pictures that relatively few people actually see. But although Hollywood was always concerned with politics, we have let ourselves be taken over by those for whom their
message is more significant than the primary purposes of film—to illuminate life and to entertain. Yes, entertain.

Eminent thinkers, from Tolstoy to contemporary philosophers like Martha Nussbaum and George Kateb, have denounced patriotism on exactly those grounds: that it's wrong to prefer one's countrymen and women to people in other lands. Patriotism, in Kateb's words, is illiberal; it "is an attack on the Enlightenment." There's a lot of truth in that. Liberals may love America in part because it aspires to certain ideals, but if they love it only because it aspires to those ideals, then what they really love is the ideals, not America. Conservatives are right. To some degree, patriotism must mean loving your country for the same reason you love your family: simply because it is yours.

When it comes to patriotism, conservatives and liberals need each other, because love of country requires both affirmation and criticism. It's a good thing that Americans fly the flag on July 4. In a country as diverse as ours, patriotic symbols are a powerful balm. And if people stopped flying the flag every time the government did something they didn't like, it would become an emblem not of national unity but of political division. On the other hand, waving a flag, like holding a Bible, is supposed to be a spur to action. When it becomes an end in itself, America needs people willing to follow in the footsteps of the prophets and remind us that complacent ritual can be the enemy of true devotion.

Patriotism should be proud but not blind, critical yet loving. And liberals and conservatives should agree that if patriotism entails no sacrifice, if it is all faith and no works, then something has gone wrong. The American who volunteers to fight in Iraq and the American who protests the war both express a truer patriotism than the American who treats it as a distant spectacle with no claim on his talents or conscience.

So is wearing the flag pin good or bad? It is both; it all depends on where and why. If you're going to a Young Americans for Freedom meeting, where people think patriotism means "my country right or wrong," leave it at home and tell them about Frederick Douglass, who wouldn't celebrate the Fourth of July while his fellow Americans were in bondage. And if you're going to a meeting of the cultural-studies department at Left-Wing U., where patriotism often means "my country wrong and wronger," slap it on, and tell them about Mike Christian, who lay half-dead in a North Vietnamese jail, stitching an American flag.

And if anyone gives you a hard time, tell him he doesn't know what true patriotism is.