

America's True Conservatives

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MADISON - Look up the word conservative. Webster's says the word [means](#) "tending or disposed to maintain existing views, conditions, or institutions."

On today's American political landscape, the people who best fit that definition are those who describe themselves as progressives or liberals. For quite a few decades now, the ones wearing those largely interchangeable labels have been principally devoted to maintaining the status quo. They've focused on keeping the 81-year-old Social Security program and 50-year-old Medicare system safe and sound. They've tried (quite unsuccessfully) to protect the worker rights established by the 80-year-old [National Labor Relations Act](#) and the 77-year-old [Fair Labor Standards Act](#)

. They resisted changes to the 1933

[Glass-Steagall Act](#)

regulating banking, only to see the law gutted in 1999, which

[they believe caused](#)

the collapse of the U.S. economy in 2007 and the ensuing

[Great Recession](#)

. Their calls to restore Glass-Steagall's protective wall between commercial and investment banking have been ignored ever since.

Contemporary progressive or liberal thinking is firmly rooted in the 20th Century. Over the past several decades, the list of new ideas or policy innovations for the 21st Century coming from the left is a terribly short one. Even the signature Democratic policy reform in recent memory – the Affordable Care Act – was borrowed from the right-wing Heritage Foundation and was known as Romneycare in Massachusetts before it became Obamacare nationally.

This is not to say that self-proclaimed conservatives and progressives have swapped places, with conservative forces becoming the engine of innovation for the 21st Century. If today's progressives seem stuck in the 20th Century, conservatives of this day and age seem bound and determined to return us to the 19th. They not only are intent on rolling back the New Deal reforms enacted on the heels of the Great Depression, but also are working in places like Wisconsin to demolish century-old laws ranging from civil service protections against cronyism and political patronage to prohibitions against corporate political spending that were inspired by

the trauma of the economic depression in the 1890s brought on by the excesses of the [Gilded Age](#) .

A big problem in American politics today is the absence of true progressive impulses. We have conservatives who call themselves progressives, and retrogressives who call themselves conservatives. The right is determined to turn the clock all the way back to the 1800s in so many ways, and the onslaught-weary left is willing to settle for keeping us in the 1900s. Missing is a forward-looking vision for what America can and should become in the 21st Century and the drive to get us there.

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