

# Is Everything Old Bad?

*National Review* recently ran a [piece](#) headlined “Everything Old is Bad, a Continuing Series at Vox.”

In that piece, author Charles C. W. Cooke took the left-leaning website to task for claiming that the requirement that a President of the United States be 35 or older is nothing more than a “weird” historical hangover “handed down to us from the 18th century.”

The purpose of this Vox article was, of course, to pave the way for 29-year-old Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who hasn’t even collected her first Congressional paycheck yet, to run for president in 2020.

There’s no chance of that happening. Even Ocasio-Cortez herself [brushed off the suggestion](#) that she should be allowed to run with a “How about... no.” Cooke’s article did, however, get me thinking about the larger question involved. Is everything old bad?

Ask anyone on the cultural left and, even if they don’t come right out and say it, their answer will usually be a resounding “yes.” Theirs is a worldview that reduces everything to power relations. To them, all of human history is one long saga of oppression along lines of class, race, gender, sexuality, and national origin. The moderates among them still believe in gradual reform, but the radicals insist that advocating for reform is a mark of privilege. Borrowing from such noble humanitarians as Robespierre (the architect of the French Revolution’s Reign of Terror) and Pol Pot (the Communist dictator who killed a quarter of Cambodia’s population in just four years), they demand a complete overthrow of the status quo to liberate us from the chains of history.

This is not hyperbole. Angela Davis, a former member of both

the Communist Party USA and the Black Panthers, wrote an essay in 1971 calling for (as an approving commentator put it just five years ago) “the total epistemological and ontological undoing of the forms of knowledge and subjectivity that were produced by the racial state.” In other words, our entire civilization is irredeemably racist, and since we are nothing more than products of that civilization, society must be destroyed and we must be reprogrammed, re-educated. Davis wants us all thrown in the gulag. She, of course, went on to have a long and successful career in academia.

Others are not so violent. [One episode](#) of Aaron Sorkin’s political drama *The West Wing* features President Bartlet agonizing over whether to allow an execution to take place. He points out that brilliant philosophers like Augustine, Aquinas, and Immanuel Kant all believed in the death penalty, but his advisor tosses those arguments aside without a second thought solely because “those writings are from other centuries.” Maybe our ancestors weren’t evil, Sorkin’s character seems to claim, but at the very least they were stupid. C.S. Lewis would call this [chronological snobbery](#).

Obviously certain practices, such as race-based chattel slavery, deserve to be left on the ash heap of history, but how are we to discern between what we should keep and what we should throw away?

G.K. Chesterton, the famous English Catholic writer, offers a solution that requires both patience and wisdom. In what has become known as “Chesterton’s Fence,” Chesterton imagines two reformers debating what to do about a fence built across a road:

*“The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, ‘I don’t see the use of this; let us clear it away.’ To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: ‘If you don’t see the use of it, I certainly won’t let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can*

*come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.'"*

A conservative, to paraphrase Sir Roger Scruton's definition, is someone who believes that there is value in the civilization he has inherited, who is willing to consider that his ancestors may have built the fence (or set the age requirement at 35) for a reason. A true conservative will seek to "conserve" the good parts of society and reform the bad, but must always stand in opposition to those who demand that we burn it all down.

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