

Lecture 27

Alternative Futures & The Big Lessons of the Course

December 13, 2006

I. History is Filled with Surprises!

1905-1920: World War I and the Russian Revolution

1920-1935: From the roaring 20s economic boom with an unshakable large Republican majority to the Stock Market crash, the Great Depression, the New Deal

1935-1950: World War II and the atomic bomb to the cold war.

1950-1965: the civil rights movement, the end of segregation in the South, the beginnings of the student movement and hippies of the 1960s, the assassination of Kennedy

1965-1980: The first defeat of the US in a war, the mass anti-War movement, the impeachment of Nixon, the sharp move of National politics to the Right in the US and UK

1980-1995: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of communism and the cold war

1995-2010: 9/11; the triumph of the most extreme ideologically right-wing political coalition in modern US history controlling both the congress and the executive branch

2010-2025: ???????

II. Possible Futures:

1. *Extending Democracy*

- Increased democratic control over patterns of investment and savings
- Dramatic expansion in the public role in scientific research and technological development, especially with respect to issues of the environment and energy
- A dramatic expansion of the public role in health care
- New forms of regulation to neutralize negative market externalities
- Life-long skill formation and education programs to upgrade labor force
- Job creation programs to rebuild infrastructure and create public goods
- Government support of social programs that support families and encourage gender equality
- Taxation and redistribution policies that enhance the stability of communities

II. Possible Futures:

2. *Deepening Democracy*

- Striving for true political equality of citizens
- Political equality requires significant equalization of resources (for example, Universal Basic Income)
- Public financing of democratic processes, especially elections
- Institutional reforms of the rules of the electoral game (for example proportional representation, instant runoffs, etc.)
- Democratic innovation to create meaningful political participation: innovative forms of empowered participatory governance

III. TWELVE BIG IDEAS TO REMEMBER

1. **The US is a Hyper-capitalist Society:** The U.S. is extreme on most dimensions of capitalism
2. **The market:** Markets are not automatically efficient; they have inherent irrationalities
3. **The Market and Freedom:** markets both enhance and restrict freedom
4. **The Prisoners Dilemma and free riders:** these are pervasive issues in contemporary society
5. **The Market & Prisoner's dilemmas:** unregulated markets intensify prisoners dilemmas
6. **Inequality, oppression, poverty:** these are a modern tragedy because they constitute avoidable suffering and perpetuate social cleavages and conflict
7. **The incomplete revolutions of Race and Gender:** Massive transformations towards equality are combined with continuing forms of discrimination
8. **Democracy:** American Democracy is real, but crippled by demand and resource constraints and rules-of-the-game which erode “rule by the people.” The attack on the affirmative state has further eroded American democracy.
9. **Militarism:** Militarism is an institution not just a “policy”. The United States systematically uses military force to pursue its foreign policy objectives and does so more frequently than any other country in the world.
10. **Taxation:** “Taxes” are the way of dividing up the total social production between public purposes and private uses.
11. **Social Institutions can be Otherwise:** We must reject TINA
12. **Alternative futures:** There are many possible futures. Human flourishing will be enhanced by extending and deepening democracy in egalitarian ways.