

Essay

Welcome to the Dark Ages
Joan Roelofs¹

[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2008 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

Many are disappointed, perhaps surprised, that Democratic Party electoral success has not reversed the United States war policy. This expectation may have been based on the assumption that the US has a full-fledged modern democratic system. In theory (and sometimes in practice) political parties of democratic nations are supposed to receive mandates—to enact their promises or programs—when they win electoral majorities. That is how elections may translate into government by the people.

The US is only partially a modern democracy. Most notably, we have universal suffrage (except for the incarcerated, some former prisoners, immigrants, the institutionalized, migrant workers, homeless, and the many alienated—usually the poorest citizens—who do not vote). On the other hand, vigorous remnants of other political models mar our democratic pretensions.

The Constitution, although well-drafted considering its speedy production, has serious ambiguities and silences. Whether the president was to be “one who presides” or an elected king divided the drafters, and the wording that emerged does not resolve the issue. The trappings, retainers, yachts, first spouse status, royal audiences, and entertainments were neither specified nor prohibited. This arena has evolved into grandiosity quite unlike modern democratic chief executives elsewhere, and rather more like some constitutional monarchs (except for the constitutional part). The puffery is not just a taxpayer expenditure; it can

¹ **Joan Roelofs** is a professor emerita of political science in Keene, NH. She is the translator of Victor Considerant’s *Principles of Socialism: Manifesto of 19th Century Democracy* (Maisonneuve Press, 2006). She is also the author of *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* (SUNY Press, 2003) and *Greening Cities* (Bootstrap Press, 1996). Address correspondence to: Joan Roelofs, e-mail: joan.roelofs@verizon.net.