

A Cultural War: The Progressive Crusade for Americanization

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John R. Commons used the term “Progressive” in the 1890s as an idea foreshadowing a new social and political orientation that was challenging laissez-faire individualism, but he was not explicit about what the term meant. By 1897 Albion Small noticed a new reformist impulse in the U.S. and a rising “social movement,” but was not sure if a few initial stirrings of reform would lead towards a programmatic platform that could create widespread social change.¹

Daniel T. Rodgers has written that the word “progressive” was used by Woodrow Wilson in 1911, who prefaced its political meaning during the 1910 electoral campaigns by saying it was still a “new term.” The rhetorical identification of a Progressive “movement” seemed to have arisen by around 1912 along with its ideological counterpart, “progressivism,” which was used as a political orientation in opposition to the democratic, republican, and socialist parties. The prominence of these terms were due to the third-way “Progressive” Party in the presidential campaign of 1912, but these terms did not become associated with a widespread reformist identification until later in the decade.²

Benjamin Parke DeWitt published a polemic called *The Progressive Movement: A Non-partisan Comprehensive Discussion of Current Tendencies in American Politics* by 1915. He tried to explain the Progressive ideology and political platform in terms of a struggle between the

¹ John, R. Commons, “Progressive Individualism,” *American Magazine of Civics*, 6 (June 1895), 561-74. Albion Small, “The Meaning of the Social Movement,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 3 (Nov. 1897), 340-54.

² Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10 (Dec 1982), 113-132. Rodgers’ discussion of the origins of the term can be found in footnote 1.

oppressed “people” and the sinister political and economic “interests.” By the time the so-called “Progressive movement” had largely come to an end after World War I, there was still no agreement on what exactly “Progressive” meant or what the movement was about. In 1924 *Nation* journalist William Hard held a contest to see if his readers could define “Progressivism.” No consensus emerged.³ During that same year, long time self-identified Progressive, Robert “Fighting Bob” La Follette, initiated a “new Progressive Party” (incorporating labor and socialists) and was able to win 16% of the vote (the second largest third-party percentage of the 20th century, next only to the first Progressive Party of Roosevelt, which garnered over 4 million popular votes and 88 electoral votes). The year 1932 brought out an obituary for Progressivism in John Chamberlain’s *Farewell to Reform: The Rise, Life and Decay of the Progressive Mind in America*.

The diverse and often contradictory Progressive reform movement has come to characterize an era of “social politics” in U.S. history.⁴ At the turn of the 20th century there were many reformist groups with various political and ideological programs (Populists, Progressives, Socialists, anarchists, labor unions, reactionary populists, nativists, and more). Progressivism was the most influential reform ideology of the 20th century because it offered a conservative liberal-capitalist framework for tempering the more radical demands of socialists and labor activists.⁵ Not only were there many reformist groups with many different initiatives, but the

³ John D. Buenker, “Rejoinders,” in *Progressivism* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc, 1977), 113.

⁴ Daniel T. Rodgers, “An Age of Social Politics,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 250-73.

⁵ Michael Kazin argued, “On the national level, it would be hard to disentangle the history of the Left from the history of American reform.” He also quoted Will Herberg who wrote, “It would not be too much to say that socialist agitation and propaganda have constituted the single most influential factor in the advance of American social reform. Untiring socialist criticism of existing conditions have invariably served as the main force in opening the way for reform legislation.” Michael Kazin, “The Agony and Romance of the American Left,” *The American Historical Review*, 100 (Dec 1995): 1510; Will Herberg, “American Marxist Political Theory,” *Socialism and American Life*, 1, Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons, eds. (Princeton, N.J., 1952): 521.

highly diverse group called the Progressives also took “man paths” of reform.⁶ As a relatively culturally homogeneous and economically secure, yet uneasy, social class, what would be later termed the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) middle-class, Progressive reformers had the ability, education, and socio-economic resources to create many diverse voluntary organizations, which they used to further various social, economic, political, and cultural causes. Progressives were animated on the whole by a Republican-Populist-Protestant infused ideological orientation that often blended capitalist, scientific, and professional methods, all under a politicized and racialized banner of WASP “Americanism.”

Progressives sought many types of social change and aligned themselves with various other ideological groups to achieve reform coalitions on specific issues and initiatives, but they were primarily concerned with devising a clear and efficient *order* to harness modernity and industrialization under the tri-partite *control* of 1) a regulatory State integrated with 2) WASP civic associations and business corporations, and directed by 3) a technocratic elite. The idea of “Americanization” could be described as the fundamental yet myriad conceptualization for this controlling order: “America” as a distinct people with a uniform culture and a clear sense of national identity would be the *new order* the Progressives sought and they were very confident, as Gary Gerstle pointed out, “that their use of government and science would turn immigrants into Americans” and, thereby, mold newcomers into the new constructed Progressive American *nation*.⁷

But there is also a disturbing relationship between Progressive reformers and “reactionary populism” that should be addressed. Reactionary populists like Ku Klux Klan members were not the stereotypical backwoods yokel. The Klan was as an organized movement

⁶ Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, Ibid., 141.

composed of white, evangelical Protestant, mostly petit-bourgeois (but included working class laborers and middle class professionals) who felt threatened by the developments of modernity. The rise of divorce, feminism, black radicalism, white racial liberalism, labor unionization and strikes, monopoly capitalism, and increased immigration are just some of the major issues initiating their conservative reaction.⁸ Klan members were going through what Richard Hofstadter once called (in a different context) a “status revolution.” Klansmen were economically better off than most blacks and many whites and often upwardly mobile, but they still felt “vulnerable,” “unstable” and insecure in their relatively privileged social position.⁹

Klansmen were conservative, populist, Jacksonian democrats with an explicitly racialized and Protestant conception of White Anglo-Saxon citizenship consecrating white supremacy. They reacted to modernity and industrialization (to the extent that industrialization touched the South) in systematically similar ways to the Progressive programs: both groups formed organized associations; they rhetorically denounced “threats” to their idealized social order; they formulated an ideology to defend an embattled cultural identity; they took action to “reform” or remedy what they considered to be negative socio-political and cultural developments; and they used coercion when rhetorical appeals were not effective. The two main differences between Progressives and reactionary populists were that the Klansmen had an intense distrust of

⁷ Gary Gerstle, “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans,” *The Journal of American History* 84:2 (Sept 1997): 530.

⁸ Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 79, 33. MacLean argued that one “common core goal” of the Klan was “securing the power of the white petite bourgeoisie in the face of challenges stemming from modern industrial capitalism. The Klan sought to deny political rights to those whom it perceived as threats to that power” (141). MacLean also made it very clear that “extreme conditions” can very easily lead to a “reactionary politics:” “Under conditions of economic uncertainty, sharply contested social relations, and political impasse, assumptions about class, race, gender, and state power so ordinary as to appear ‘common sense’ to most WASP Americans could be refashioned and harnessed to the building of a virulent reactionary politics able to mobilize millions” (186).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-11, 52-74. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform, From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

centralized government and statist regulatory authority, and they had a willingness to use violent force¹⁰ as a standard socio-political tactic.

Another similarity between Progressives and Klansmen was a hierarchical, Social Darwinist belief in the racial and cultural superiority of “white” “civilization,” which was often equated with Americanism.¹¹ C. Vann Woodward pointed out in 1954 that many Americans, including Progressive reformers (living in all areas of the nation, the North, West and South) shared many of the Klansmen’s beliefs about a “White” America: “a republic is possible only to men of homogenous race;” the United States of America was “a white man’s nation” based on a “white man’s religion;” “to stand as impregnable as a tower against every encroachment upon the white man’s liberty, the white man’s institutions, the white man’s ideals, in the white man’s country, under the white man’s flag.”¹² It is no accident of historical fortune that the “Progressive Era” was also the “great age of segregation” in the United States.¹³ The Progressives for the most part harbored deep suspicions and prejudices against many groups and social classes that seemed alien to their WASP middle class way of life. Progressive reformers set up hierarchically ordered binary oppositions of identity based on class, race, gender, religion

¹⁰ Ibid., 149-73. MacLean wrote: “Vigilante Violence was the concentrated expression of that culture, of the brutal determination to maintain inherited hierarchies of race, class, and gender that Klansmen sought to conceal with a mask of chivalry” (173).

¹¹ Ibid., 125-48, 166-67; David Roediger, “Whiteness and Ethnicity in the History of ‘White Ethnics’ in the United States,” in *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London: Verso, 1994), 189. See also Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877 – 1919* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987): Ch 12.

¹² C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 90-93; Anonymous Klansmen quoted in MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 132-34, 161; Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 178; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (1955; reprint, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998) 170-71, 173, 175-77; Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877 – 1919*, Ibid; McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 182-218; Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 105-38, 254-94; McCormick, “Public Life in Industrial America,” 124-26; Brinkley, “Prosperity, Depression, and War,” 139-40.

¹³ C. Vann Woodward noted in 1954 the related platforms of “Negrophobia and progressivism” in the South: “The omission of the South from the annals of the progressive movement has been one of the glaring oversights of American historians...The blind spot in the Southern progressive record – as, for that matter, in the national movement – was the Negro, for the whole movement in the South coincided paradoxically with the crest of the wave

and age. The “fundamental paradox of progressive politics,” wrote McGerr, was that Progressives spoke the language of democracy, but in thought and deed they were “not very democratic at all.” the “progressives’ condescension toward other groups” created “a narrow definition of ‘the people,’” dictated antiparticipatory reforms,” “supported disfranchisement,” and projected a version of Americanism that was “for whites only.”¹⁴ David R. Roediger argued, “The Progressive project of imperialist expansion and the Progressive nonproject of Jim Crow segregation ensured that race thinking would retain and increase its potency.”¹⁵ Eric Foner pointed out that Progressives “bore the marks of their nineteenth-century origins” and thus “the idea of ‘race’ as a permanent, defining characteristic of individuals and social groups retained a powerful hold on their thinking. Consciously or not, it circumscribed the ‘imagined community’ of Progressive America.”¹⁶

As Robert Wiebe argued, the challenge of white Americans during the late 18th and 19th century was not to reform so much as to “create a social order” and that social order was a program of Americanization, which included the expansion of a corporate-capitalist State, the dissemination of a WASP nationalism (Americanism), and the trained loyalty of the American public through the public schools and an coordinated civic society. By the early 20th century, this State would come to infuse, unite, and control the parameters of foreign and domestic policy under a neo-liberal rhetoric of welfare capitalism, consumer affluence, and technocratic

of racism...the typical progressive reformer rode to power in the South on a disfranchising or white-supremacy movement.” *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, Ibid., 90-91.

¹⁴ McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 216-17.

¹⁵ David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 70.

¹⁶ Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 185. Foner pointed out many criticisms of the “underside of the Progressives’ outlook,” like how “their talk of reconstructing society masked a set of managerial attitudes in which democratic values were ‘subordinated to technique.’” He also pointed out that because of Progressive’s homogenized cultural and racial assumptions, they were “ill-prepared to develop a coherent defense of minority rights against majority or governmental tyranny” (176, 78).

professionalism.¹⁷ However, the large-scale initiative of Americanization would not be uncontested nor would it be rhetorically or programmatically uniform. As a consensus identity emerged and was inculcated within the public school system, the margins of American society were infused by minority populations who struggled for their own human dignity and opportunity within the American system. The Progressive project of Americanization would be the ideological center of heated debate over American nationalism, citizenship, and the common good. The notion of cultural homogeneous, racialized, and class-based democratic citizenship would be challenged as many minority populations. The early 20th century debate focused on, “Who gets to be an American?” and “What *ought* America to be?”

Many white Americans supported a white supremacist view of American nationalism. After the conquest of the Philippines president McKinley wrapped U.S. foreign policy in this doctrine of “the white man’s burden.” He stated that the Filipinos could not be left to themselves because “they were unfit for self-government” and, thus, the Americans had a duty “to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them.” Indiana Senator Albert J. Beveridge believed that the “American Republic” was destined, through the will of God and the dictates of the “highest law” of “race,” to be “the most masterful race in history.” Nell Irvin Painter explained: “Imperialism was elemental, racial, predestined, for God had prepared the English-speaking people, master organizers, for governing what Beveridge called ‘save and senile people.’” Even anti-imperialists, who argued against the trappings of empire for many reasons, often framed their critiques of foreign intervention with the same racist assumptions, and focused more on the implications of empire for poor whites in America. Many Southerners actually felt vindicated by

¹⁷ Robert Wiebe, “Framing U.S. History: Democracy, Nationalism, and Socialism,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 236-49.

Imperial policies, although skeptical about ruling over more non-white people. Benjamin Tillman argued to his fellows in Congress that “We of the South” had already “borne this white man’s burden of a colored race in our midst.” In 1883 the Supreme Court had already invalidated the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and by the 1890s there was widespread acceptance of Jim Crow segregation and disenfranchisement laws. The color line became an increasingly important national preoccupation by the early 20th century as the U.S. became defined more and more as a white man’s nation. Thus self-proclaimed “progressives” never touched the white supremacy of the South and *de facto* “racial hierarchy” of the country as a whole.¹⁸

The conservative Progressive Teddy Roosevelt saw the United States as standing on the threshold of “Armageddon” with the evils of plutocratic industrial power on one side and the evils of the violent mob on the other. Under the banners of the “New Nationalism” and the “New Freedom,” Roosevelt called for the regulation of society and the economy by an empowered and enlightened federal government which would act as a disinterested arbitrator between conflicting political factions, like labor and capital (of course more radical voices pointed out the impossibility of a disinterested federal government as federal policy was often in the hands of industrial capitalists and their appointed voices in the Congress). Teddy Roosevelt succinctly summarized the ideals of these Progressive reformers: “the object of the government is the welfare of the people. The material progress and prosperity of a nation are desirable chiefly so far as they lead to the moral and material welfare of all good citizens.”¹⁹ But as Gary Gerstle has pointed out, Roosevelt’s nationalism was based on a racist platform: 1) “political and social equality for all, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or nationality, and a regulated economy that

¹⁸ Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877 – 1919*, Ibid., Ch 5 & 7. See also: George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

¹⁹ Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877 – 1919*, Ibid., xxviii, 8, 136, 258, 268.

would place economic opportunity and security within the reach of everyone;” 2) the maximizing of “opportunity” for racially superior Americans while also limiting opportunity for racially inferior Americans and immigrants; 3) dealing out “harsh discipline” by means of “marginalization” and “punishment” and/or “Americanization” to “immigrants, political radicals, and others who were thought to imperil the nation’s welfare.” Rooseveltian nationalism pivoted around a conception of “controlled hybridity” by which both “racial hybridity and purity” and “racial inclusion and exclusion” combined into a more expansive Americanism, but one still marked by racial prejudice, intolerance, and WASP superiority. Roosevelt embraced many of the new European immigrants, both Catholic and Jewish, but he continued to exclude Afro-Americans and Asians from the “crucible” of America. Roosevelt adopted Herbert Croly’s conception of “New Nationalism” and used it as a Progressive platform to extend full citizenship only to the new European immigrants on the condition that they left behind their old cultural affiliations to become “100% percent American.”²⁰

Gerstle traces coercive Americanization programs to Theodore Roosevelt’s conception of racial nationalism. Roosevelt’s conception of “controlled hybridity” allowed for the assimilation of certain ethnic minorities in American only if they completely Americanized by which he meant leaving behind European identity, tradition, and loyalty and taking up American identity, tradition, and loyalty: The immigrant “must not bring in his Old-World religious[,] race[,] and national antipathies, but must merge them into love for our common country, and must take pride in the things which we can all take pride in. He must revere our flag; not only must it come first, but no other flag should ever come second. He must learn to celebrate Washington’s birthday rather than that of the Queen or Kaiser, and the Fourth of July instead of St. Patrick’s

²⁰ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 4-9, 43, 46-51, 71.

Day...Above all, the immigrant must learn to talk and think and be United States.” Roosevelt believed that the duty of the American public school should be to turn immigrants [“hyphenated Americans”] into “Americans pure and simple” because it was “an immense benefit to the European immigrant to change him into an American citizen.” He also supported private voluntary associations in their work of Americanizing the immigrant both outside and inside the school.²¹

John Higham traced the origins of early 20th century Americanization efforts to the widespread xenophobia and nativism of the 1890s and earlier. Early forms of nativism congealed into a rampant and rabid nationalist crusade of “America for Americans” and “100 per cent Americanism” during World War I. Fear of the foreigner gave way to a more ambiguous fear of “disloyalty,” “the gravest sin in the morality of nationalism,” which was any thought that might question the “Absolute and Unqualified Loyalty to Our Country.” This search for disloyalty focused uncomfortably on “hyphenated Americans” (German-Americans in particular) and their ability to support not only the war effort, but the greater cause of American nationalism. Infusing the search for disloyalty was a “positive and prescriptive” rhetorical abstraction that did not rise “to the dignity of a systematic doctrine:” “100 per cent Americanism.” While there was no specific dogmatic or programmatic ritual to prove one’s “Americanism,” there were several assumptions underlying this phrase. One was a “belligerent” demand for “universal conformity” to the “spirit of nationalism” and total national loyalty” to the State, which was regulated through “the pressure of collective judgment.” However, “passive assent to the national purpose was not enough; it must be grasped and carried forward with evangelical fervor” through the “inculcation of a spirit of duty:” “Patriotism therefore was interpreted as service.” Theodore Roosevelt forcefully supported this sentiment: “We must

²¹ Ibid., 53-59, 72, 93-94.

sternly insist that all our people practice the patriotism of service...for patriotism means service to the Nation...We cannot render such service if our loyalty is in even the smallest degree divided.” It was at this time in 1917 that “The American’s Creed” (“I pledge allegiance to the flag...”) was introduced as a classroom ritual in public schools to remind children of the object of their loyalty, but more so to rhetorically instill the virtue of “right-thinking, i.e. the enthusiastic cultivation of obedience and conformity.”²²

100 per cent Americanism, as Higham argued, was primarily a rhetorical affair of “propaganda” and “exhortation,” but with the onset of the war nationalists supported the expansion of state powers and “the punitive and coercive powers” of the state to support if not mandate loyalty and conformity. There were many grass roots level initiatives to suppress German language newspapers, eliminate German from the public school curricula, boycott German opera, and rename German foods (sauerkraut became “liberty cabbage”). There were even many “secret societies” of paralegal militias looking for spies and disloyal subjects. One reported organization was the Anti-Yellow Dog League (supposedly with a thousand affiliated branches), which was made up of adolescent boys over 10 who searched for disloyal Americans. Perhaps the most famous paralegal organization was the American Protective League, which boasted 250,000 members and 1,200 dispersed units. The APL was the Justice Department’s “semiofficial” loyalty and conformity watchdog (they even had official badges) composed mostly of middle class professionals and subsidized by corporations. The state and federal governments acted in turn, partly in response to the vitriolic sentiment of the American public. Congress passed an act which repealed the charter of the German-American Alliance and many state governments banned the teaching of German. The Alien Enemies Act of 1798 was

²² John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (1955; reprint, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998): 196, 200, 204-05.

revitalized (this statute gave the President “arbitrary” authority over aliens in the U.S. in terms of arresting, restraining, and deporting individuals at will) and the Espionage Act in 1917 was passed (this statute penalized citizens for obstructing the war effort or aiding the enemy via “false statements”). The Sedition Act was passed in 1918, which made any disloyal opinion illegal (whether against the nation, the flag, the government, or the Constitution) and punishable by twenty years in prison. This Act was used extensively against radicals in the U.S. as “any radical critic of the way was customarily designated a ‘pro-German agitator.’” As Higham noted, “the new creed of total loyalty outlawed so many kinds of dissent.”²³

As far as the immigrant population in America was concerned there seemed to be a “paradox of American nationalism,” which combined both “fraternity” and “hatred.” The demands for unity and conformity turned coercive and aggressive mostly towards Germans and radicals, which thereby allowed many immigrant individuals and communities to at least outwardly conform to nationalist purpose and even join the military. As Higham argued, “To a remarkable degree the psychic climate of war gave the average alien not only protection but also a sense of participation and belonging,” albeit within an atmosphere of “force of fear and compulsion.” This charged atmosphere of 100 per cent Americanism survived and thrived after the war as self-proclaimed Americans still searched out disloyalty. This placed immigrants in a precarious position. The American Legion formed in 1919 in order “To foster and perpetuate a one-hundred-percent Americanism” and ferret out radical agitation. Other “Loyal Legions” and vigilante groups (the second Ku Klux Klan re-emerged in 1915 and grew to several million followers in the 1920s) began to conflate dissolute, radical agitation, and the foreign-born as related problems. The Big Red Scare of 1919 ignited a fever pitch of nationalist hysteria whereby anti-radical nativism began to indiscriminately target immigrant populations, which in

²³ Ibid., 206-23.

turn began to effect industrial labor relations. The Red Scare also pushed zealots like Attorney General Palmer to push for a general sedition law, which would allow for the prosecution of American citizens as well as the foreign born for dissenting opinion. The New York legislature threw out five elected members solely because of their Socialist affiliation. But when Palmer's apocalyptic foretelling of revolution did not materialize on May Day 1920 the country began to realize that there was no widespread internal threat and by the mid-1920s the crest of 100 per cent Americanism began to flow into more peaceful expressions of national fervor.²⁴

Political liberals of the time did not often disagree with conservative nationalist ideology, except for the more rabid forms of white supremacy and xenophobia. Some liberals did, however, disagree over tactics. By the end of the 19th century liberalism displayed a reformist edge and it organized, as Gary Gerstle has documented, "rational interventions in society and culture," often by turning "to the state as an institutional medium capable of reconstructing society and of educating citizens." Classical liberalism revolved around free markets, limited statism, and bourgeois morality, which often defended corporate capitalism, segregation and disenfranchisement. Progressivism was a three pronged liberal reaction to (a) socialism and labor radicalism, (b) the "extraordinary concentration of power and wealth," and (c) a diverse influx of immigrating ethnic groups. Progressives wanted to find ways to promote and protect "freedom of trade and individual liberty" by way of state regulation and welfare, and by way of "guild socialism." They also wanted to engage in "cultural reconstruction" because liberals believed in the importance of individual moral character as the foundation of civic virtue. When dealing with foreigners this "reconstruction" took the form of "Americanization" in order to "culturally and morally transform...aliens into citizens." But Progressives were a diverse bunch ("left-leaning Progressives" ranging from socialists to left leaning pluralists, and "rightward-

²⁴ Ibid., 215-16, 222-33.

leaning Progressives” from Americanizers to hard core nationalists preaching “100 percent Americanism”) and because of these conflicts of purposes and methods they “had difficulty fashioning a cultural politics to which they could all adhere,” which eventually led to a loss of “coherence as a political movement.”²⁵ The Americanization movement, however, was an important liberal focus point for first decade of the 20th century. Americanizers ranged from the more conservative and exclusivist “new nationalists” led by Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Croly, and Frances Kellor, to the more liberal and egalitarian “cosmopolitan pluralists” led by John Dewey, Randolph Bourne, and Jane Addams.

An Americanization movement “emerged” from within the Progressive movement in order to offer “moderate civic nationalist alternatives” to the coercive racial ideology of white supremacists, exclusionists, and nativists that wanted immigration restrictions and limited freedom for immigrants. Noah Pickus defined the Americanization movement in a positive light as “a wide range of legal, political, medical, civic, and cultural efforts to help immigrants adjust to their new surroundings and to encourage Americans to accept them.” The Bureau of Naturalization in “An Outline Course in Citizenship” (1916) defined Americanization as the transformation of “uninformed foreigners, not comprehending our language, customs, or governmental institutions, to intelligent, loyal, and productive members of society.” The Americanization movement was reacting against the sense of social fragmentation and conflict caused industrial, economic, social and institutional changes and it was made dramatically urgent by the massive influx of immigrants and by the strange newness of a “nationally oriented

²⁵ Gary Gerstle, “The Protean Character of American Liberalism,” *The American Historical Review* 99:4 (Oct 1994): 1043-1073.

American society.” Progressive reformers felt an urgent need to reorder society and give to all citizens a new “common identity” – a national identity as Americans.²⁶

The Americanization movement was concerned with “national unity,” but different factions approached this central issue differently. Pickus broke the Americanization movement into two camps: “right-leaning Progressives” like Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Croly, and Frances Kellor, and “left-leaning Progressives” like John Dewey, Randolph Bourne, and Jane Addams. Both wings offered liberal alternatives to immigrant restriction, but the left wing wanted a pluralist and cosmopolitan “international nation,” while the right wing believed in a narrower nationalism that welcomed immigrants only if they “relinquished cultural and political habits thought to be at odds with a robust American identity,” and the right wing was willing to use compulsion and force in order to create and preserve the bonds of national unity.²⁷

The Americanization movement has been known primarily because of the actions of the more powerful, “mainstream,” and influential right-leaning Progressives, and Pickus focused more on this group in his book. Under the banner of “New Nationalism,” right-leaning Progressives sought to “eradicate” the ethnic identity of white European immigrants, while disavowing (through silence and segregation) any place for non-white Americans, in order to establish a “uniform national identity” and a fervent sense of patriotism based on WASP principles and culture. Theodore Roosevelt proudly proclaimed in 1906, “We are making a new

²⁶ Noah Pickus, *True Faith and Allegiance: Immigration and American Civic Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 64-65, 71-74; Edward George Hartmann, *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant* (1948; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1967); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (1955; reprint, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Robert A. Carlson, “Americanization as an Early Twentieth-Century Adult Education Movement,” *History of Education Quarterly* 10:4 (Winter 1970): 440-64.

²⁷ Noah Pickus, *True Faith and Allegiance: Immigration and American Civic Nationalism*, *Ibid*, 64-65, 73-84 (left-leaning Progressives), 85- 123 (right-leaning Progressives); Jonathan Hansen, “True Americanism: Progressive Era Intellectuals and the Problem of Liberal Nationalism,” In *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*, Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 73-89.

race” and he later added “The only man who is a good American is an American and nothing else...There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americans.” Roosevelt admonished, “The immigrant must learn to talk and think and *be* United States.” Nationally the Americanization movement was administrated by the newly formed (1905) Bureau of Naturalization (under the leadership of Commissioner Richard Campbell and his deputy Raymond Crist) and the Bureau of Education (under the leadership of commissioner Philander P. Claxton, Fred Butler, direct of the Americanization Division, and more importantly, Frances Kellor, director of the Division for Immigrant Education, a division completely supported financially by a non-governmental organization, the National Americanization Committee, also lead by Kellor).

Up till the early 1910s the primary method of Americanization had been teaching immigrants how to be “sufficiently American,” as Fred Butler asserted, “so that they will not be a danger to us.” However, Noah Pickus has noted that Americanizers turned to more “aggressive” methods by the fall of 1915, symbolically demonstrated through the National Americanization Committee’s change of slogan from “Many People, But One Nation” to “America First.” Frances Kellor and the NAC were very concerned about people not speaking “the same language,” not “follow[ing] the same flag,” and engaging in “anti-American” activities like “class consciousness and race hatred.” Americanization efforts sought to not only make citizens of immigrants, but to make *all* Americans “loyal” with a “respect for authority” because the “security and prosperity” of the nation depended on it. NAC organized and promoted social and industrial programs, military preparedness, coercive educational programs, and recruitment of ethnic leaders, especially members of the ethnic presses. Frances Kellor had wanted to keep Americanization efforts from “alien baiting” and “repressive measures,” and she argued that

Americanization should also accompany increased economic opportunities for immigrants, but Pickus argued that she was “pushed aside by forces that were committed to an ideologically pure Americans and had no interest in programs that directly aided newcomers.” In 1919 the government banned NGO support of government agencies and, thus, NAC support for the Division for Immigrant Education came to an end, and Frances Kellor was removed as national coordinator for Americanization efforts. In 1918 the Bureau of Naturalization had begun to use naturalization fees to publish Americanization textbooks and distribute them as well as establishing the Division of Citizenship Training led by Deputy Commissioner Raymond Crist. Crist believed that “nearly all can be transformed through attendance at the public schools into desirable citizenship material.” He helped coordinate support for Americanization programs in public schools across the nation and by 1922 more than 750 U.S. cities and towns had some type of Americanization program, however, these programs suffered from high drop out rates, dry fact-based textbooks, and reliance on rote memorization and recitation. In 1922 the secretary of labor, James J. Davis, wanted to set up a registration system to force aliens to register for a fee upon entrance to America, and he also wanted mandatory Americanization programs. Davis felt strongly that the U.S. had been “making citizenship entirely too cheap” and he wanted to protect Americans from “contact with the mental, moral and physical delinquents of all the world.” He defended his insistence of coercion in the face of critics by arguing, “If we compel the alien to know America, I have no fear that there will come that change of heart necessary to produce an American citizen.” The push for more coercive Americanization programs linked Americanization efforts to the simultaneous push by more nativist and reactionary elements for exclusionary immigration policies. However, even these coercive efforts crumbled by the early 1920s as federal, state, and local politicians “proved unwilling to support Americanization

programs if doing so required them to provide funding.” But Americanization efforts did not die out, instead they expanded and folded into the very fabric of American life and public schooling.²⁸

Noah Pickus has argued that left-leaning Progressives did not have a strong enough political “vision” to battle right-wing nationalism and, thus, their “vagueness and confusion” could not put forth a “clear, coherent, [or] compelling moderate alternative position.” Thus Americanization devolved into a “zero-sum calculation” that forced immigrants to become “100% American.” However, Pickus argued that Americanization was not a “coercive and exclusionary project from its inception.” He argued that it was the “fear and insecurity of the war” that helped “legitimate otherwise objectionable policies,” and he further argued that part of the reason Americanization efforts collapsed was that “many of its proponents were simply not willing to pursue compulsory assimilatory measures to their logical extremes.” Pickus claimed that the “achievements” of the Americanization movement were “remarkable,” and he listed four: legislation to protect immigrants, “large-scale practical assistance” to immigrants, outreach programs (including the development of adult education), and improvements to the naturalization system.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., 90-123, 220 (footnote 59).

²⁹ Ibid., 120-23.