The “Progressive” Era in the U.S. Re-Examined:

What was Progressivism?

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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

[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.

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 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*.

During the 1950s and 60s the term "Progressivism" stood as the catch all concept of historians and political philosophers, which was used to define a broad age of liberal reform following agrarian uprisings ("Populism") and prefacing the New Deal. By the 1970's U.S. historians found the early 20th century social movement(s) ambiguous, inconsistent, paradoxical,

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

contradictory, complex, and beyond the limited capacity of the term “Progressive.”[4] Some called for the dismissal and burial of the term. But the idea survived and by 2003 Oxford University Press published yet another volume on the “Progressive Movement.” We will look at selective portraits over the last 50 years within the historiography on the “Progressive Movement” to see how “Progressivism” has been defined in order to evaluate its usefulness as a concept for understanding U.S. reformist programs during the first decades of 20th century.

Richard Hofstadter was one of the first major historians of the “Progressive” period in U.S. history and also an early conceptualizer of “progressivism.” He won the Pulitzer Prize in history for his treatment of the subject, *The Age of Reform* (1955). In this work he sought a “broader” definition of the term “progressive” and located its essence within the “impulse toward criticism and change” which was emblematic of middle-class programs for social and economic reform around the turn of the 20the century. He was careful to point out that both the larger term “Progressive” and the more specific “Progressive Movement” were “rather vague and not altogether cohesive or consistent” conceptions. He focused on the “ideas” of this vague and inconsistent movement, which was based on the notion of “self-reformation.”[5]

Hofstadter described the United States economic, legal, and political system of the 19th century as “reliably conservative.” He also noted that reactions against this conservative system of government during the 19th century were “popular,” “democratic,” and “progressive.” Hofstadter labeled the period from 1890 to 1940 as an “age of reform,” whereby, a “surge” of popular, democratic, and progressive reactions were sounded and corresponding social movements set forth. Hofstadter set the progressive period between two other periods of reform in U.S. history: 1) an earlier period of agrarian uprising, especially the “populist” movement,

[4] For a good, concise historiography of Progressivism up to the 1970s see William G. Anderson, “Progressivism: An Historiographical Essay,” *The History Teacher* 6 (May, 1973), 427-52.

which had its origins in Jacksonian politics and reached it peak in the 1890s; 2) the progressive period, which properly congealed by 1900; and 3) the later initiative called the New Deal, originating in the 1930s, which was less programmatic, more pragmatic, and more Federally centered than previous reform periods. Hofstadter suggested that this long string of reformism had stalled by the 1950s (he was writing his book in mid decade), partly due to the social and political institutionalization of reform, which quite literally internalized the progressive-liberal ethos into the U.S. system of government and, thereby, argued Hofstadter, the progressive-liberal ethos as a political program became more conservative so as to preserve its central position within the socio-political arena.[6]

Hofstadter invoked several definitions and conceptions of “progressivism” and “progressives,” but there were many common themes in his work. The Progressive Ethos was a broad “impulse” of “criticism and change” that became the “whole tone” of socio-political ferment after 1900. Its essence was an imprecise and nostalgic call for a “later-day Protestant revival” that preached “self-reformation,” “economic individualism,” “political democracy,” “morality,” and “civic purity.” It was also a reactionary push against concentrated economic power, inequality, and corruption, while at the same time progressivism was a narrow-minded attempt to counter industrial inefficiency, urban social disorder, and immigration.

The Progressive actors were largely “genteel,” “proper,” and “respectable” middle class reformers with an “enthusiasm” for social and economic change. They had humanitarian “vision” and “courage,” but they were not radicals and they preferred talk of “moral values” instead of initiating material improvement. Hofstadter also claimed that progressives were a

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[5] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform, From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 5.
[6] Ibid. 3, 10-14, 23-59, 133.

group of “responsible” WASP “elites” who embarked on a “status revolution”[7] to regain “deference and power,” which had been threatened by corporate capitalism, labor organizations, and ethnic political machines.

Hofstadter characterized the Progressive Movement as “rather vague,” “not altogether cohesive or consistent,” “mild and judicious,” “moderate,” “safe,” and “constructive.” This movement sought a “widespread” effort including “the greater part of society” for a “moderate” and “constructive” change in the social and political system. The movement seemed to prefer “exposure,” “information,” and “exhortation” to programmatic action and more equitable restructuring. Hofstadter noted the “radical” tenor of progressive criticisms, but he pointed out a “disparity between the boldness of their means and the tameness of their ends.” He criticized the Progressive Movement as a “moral crusade” under the spell of an “evangelistic psychology” that often devolved into a “retrograde,” “delusive,” “comic,” and sometimes “vicious” bit of political parody. Hofstadter made it clear that there was much about the Progressive Movement that could be considered illiberal and even unprogressive by its own standards.[8]

Another major historian of the Progressive period is Robert H. Wiebe whose *The Search for Order, 1877 – 1920* (1967) has been widely cited in the literature on the subject. Wiebe did not use the “Progressive” periodization and he did not refer to Progressives or Progressivism in his book, although it was mentioned in the “Introduction” by David Donald. The only time Wiebe used the term “Progressive” was in relation to the 3rd party during the 1912 presidential election, the “Progressive Party.” Wiebe’s book focused instead on what he terms “the new middle class.” This group of people congealed into what could be called a “class” by the late

[7] A “status revolution” is perhaps Hofstadter’s most contentious argument and it has been widely criticized by later historians of the period. Buenker, Burnham & Crunden (1977); Link & McCormick (1983); Chambers II (2000).

19th century and this "class" that Wiebe examines was conceptually similar to the "Progressives" that Hofstadter described. This new middle class was composed of educated and cultured professionals and specialists who were "clustered" in urban areas in the United States by the turn of the 20th century. These educated professionals had an optimistic "faith" in scientific and bureaucratic rationality and they tended to use this discursive method to focus on the country's "evils" with an "earnest desire to remake the world upon their private models." The primary goal of this new middle class was a desire for order, unity, efficiency, and cohesion in society, politics, industry, and urban development, both nationally and also internationally, in short they wanted a national – if not global – "frictionless bureaucracy." When order could not be achieved rationally, these professionals often resorted to "traditional techniques" to establish order, like force or exclusion: The new middle class would "draw a line around the good society and dismiss the remainder…separate the legitimate from the illegitimate." This new middle class used their scientific rationality to facilitate a new technocratic and managerial framework with which to gain power so as to "reorder" society, industry, and state according to what they considered universal, scientific principles of natural law.[9]

In 1968 James Weinstein wrote an important book and widely cited book on the influence of corporate capitalism on Progressive reform, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900-1918*.[10] Weinstein demonstrated a "conscious and successful effort to guide and control the economic and social policies of federal, state, and municipal governments by various business groupings in their own long-range interest as they perceived it." Liberalism changed from its 19th century roots of individualism and laissez faire to an early 20th century "new liberalism" of

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[8] Ibid. 5-6, 8-9, 11, 15-17, 19, 21, 135, 149, 152, 163-64, 182, 185-87, 196, 203, 206 211-12, 216, 288-301. These pages contain Hofstadter's major descriptions of Progressivism, Progressives, and the Progressive Movement. Hofstadter quotes "evangelistic psychology" from Fredric C. Howe's *The Confessions of a Reformer* (1925).

corporate social responsibility and the rationalized expansion of the regulatory, "liberal" state. Many business leaders in the late 19th and early 20th century made a conscious decision to use liberal reform "as a means of securing the existing social [and economic] order." Liberal reforms were meant to incorporate various socialist and labor initiatives, while delegitimizing socialist and labor movements, and liberal reforms sought to stabilize, rationalize, and expand the apparatus of the state as a method business friendly of market regulation, which corporate interests could oversee or control. A member of the National Civic Federation and a utilities magnate, Samuel Insull, argued in 1909 that corporate leaders should "help shape the right kind of regulation" before "the wrong kind [was] forced upon him." At the Conference of Republicans of the State of New York in 1913, Elihu Root, also a member of the NCF, argued that the Republicans needed to "meet industrial and social demands of modern civilization, so far as they are reasonably consistent with our institutions." Paraphrasing Theodore Roosevelt, Weinstein argued that by the 1920s many corporation leaders began to see that "social reform was truly conservative." The rhetoric, legislation, oversight, and enforcement of worker collectives, trust regulation, workers compensation, reduction of the work day and work week, and wage increases could all be managed by corporate interests so as to safeguard the long term profits of corporate and monopoly capitalism from the more radical agitation of socialists and labor unions.[11] And as long as corporate leaders were willing to keep up a rhetorical front of corporate responsibility and regulation then political leaders like Teddy Roosevelt, Wilson, Taft, and even Franklin Roosevelt were willing to conflate (using the rhetoric of "hearty cooperation") national with corporate and even monopoly interests. Even when truly concerned reformers like

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[9] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search For Order, 1877 – 1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 112-13, 128-29, 154-56, 161-68, 170, 174, 181, 198-99.
[10] James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900-1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

Frank P. Walsh tried to outline progressive industrial reforms, "the proposals were made mostly by men whose conscious purpose was to help the working man, while stabilizing and strengthening the corporate system," which lead to the "rise of a new corporate oligarchy."[12]

By 1970 "Progressivism" was being reexamined by historians. In "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement,'" Peter Filene called the whole conception of Progressivism and the Progressive Movement into question. He argued that what had been commonly called "The Progressive Movement" never actually happened. He said that there was never a monolithic and unified movement working towards a clear, let alone agreed upon, social and political program. The notion of a unified movement, Filene argued, was a "mirage." The concept of a "Progressive Movement" was a "dead end" because the data on reformers during the period from 1890 to 1930 "stubbornly spill[s] over the edges" of the concept of "Progressivism:" "The more historians learn, the farther they move from consensus." Filene argued that just because "many Americans in the early 20th century were 'reformers'" does not mean that "these Americans joined together in a 'reform movement.'" Filene argued, "The evidence points away from convenient synthesis and toward multiplicity" – social reform in the U.S. at the turn of the 20the century was "ambiguous, inconsistent, [and] moved by agents and forces more complex than a progressive movement."

And further, Filene argued, if there was a "progressive" ideology that united some reformers, it was "at best" "heterogeneous" and "lacked unanimity of purpose either on a programmatic or on a philosophic level." Filene even cited Michael Rogin's 1967 work *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* whose research questioned whether the

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[11] Weinstein argued that socialism was the "only serious ideological alternative to [the] politics of social responsibility" used by progressive and corporate coalitions, although he criticized the socialist tendency to place faith in the regulatory state without a full understanding of its corporate capitalist backers (117, 132).
[12] Ibid., ix-xiii, 33, 58, 61, 143, 212, 252.

Progressive Party could even be considered "progressive" based upon its diverse membership and contradictory platforms. Filene ended his article by focusing on the "diversity" of reformers during the period and the conflict and consensus between these diverse groups. He argued for a conception of "shifting coalitions around different issues" by which diverse reformers and reform groups practiced "political factionalism" and "ideological improvisation" in broad and contradictory efforts at reforming U.S. society, culture, and government.[13]

In response to Filene's charge, three respected and widely published scholars in the area of early 20th century U.S. history published *Progressivism* (1977). In this book John C. Burnham, John D. Buenker, and Robert M. Crunden each drafted a statement and a rejoinder to discuss the usefulness and accuracy of "Progressivism" as a tool for understanding early 20th century political and social reform in the U.S.[14]

In the first essay John C. Burnham argued that Filene's "obituary" was "premature" because Filene along with other scholars had focused too much on particular aspects of the diverse political and local history of the period, which "ended up refining progressivism out of existence." Burnham argued that "Progressivism" needed to be re-evaluated and he suggested two new ways to conceptualize the term: 1) the "coalescing" of a number of reformist streams that "reinforced" each other, "cumulating" into "what contemporaries recognized as progressivism;" and 2) specific socio-political "changes" that actually occurred around the turn of the 20th century.[15]

[13] Peter Filene, "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement,'" *American Quarterly* 22 (1970): 20-34; John D. Buenker, John C. Burnham, and Robert M. Crunden, "Introduction," In *Progressivism* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1977), iv-viii.
[14] John D. Buenker, John C. Burnham, and Robert M. Crunden, *Progressivism* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc., 1977).
[15] John C. Burnham, "Essay," in *Progressivism* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc, 1977), 3-29.

Burnham invoked Clyde Griffen's concept of a "progressive ethos," which was defined as an "an idealism marked by the 'juxtaposition of a practical piece-meal approach to reform with a religious or quasi-religious vision of democracy.'"[16] Burnham argued that this "progressive ethos," an optimistic and scientific "moral fervor" to change the world, sparked a "progressive movement" around 1907-08 when journalistic criticism gave way to direct action and, thereby, inspired a "confluence of specific reform streams." These reform streams were primarily based within non-governmental voluntary organizations because progressives were "ambivalent" if not "mistrustful" of government action.[17] Burnham argues that while "concrete achievements" outside of formal organizational efforts (membership lists, meetings, organizational literature) are "hard to demonstrate," the membership numbers and sheer diversity of organizations was testament to the "awesome demonstration of the power of determined private citizens." Progressivism was also a "practical evangelism" based on professionalism, efficiency, expertise, and science, which lead to an "ideal of unselfish service and efficiency," which in turn manifested itself in programs providing care, service, and protection. These aid programs, carried out primarily by voluntary organizations, sought to reform behavior and change people – socially, politically, culturally, morally, hygienically, and linguistically. Often reform organizations used education and persuasion to bring about this change, but coercion was not out of the question, especially when progressives thought reform was necessarily in the best interests of the recipient.

[16] Burnham is quoting Clyde Griffen, "The Progressive Ethos," in *The Development of an American Culture*, eds. Stanley Coben and Lorman Ratner (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970): 120-149.

[17] Burnham argued against claims linking progressivism to welfare statism: "Equating the extension of governmental power for social justice purposes, or what came to be called welfare statism, to the spirit of progressivism is therefore an error. It is true that many Americans admired German cameralism and socialism. And many Americans did come to think that the neutral state would have to intervene more actively to maintain traditional liberty and freedom in society and so become a service state. But to portray the attitudes of progressives toward political activity and power as anything beyond ambivalence is to distort the movement beyond recognition" (15).

Robert M. Crunden's "Essay"[18] drew on the work of Eric Erikson[19] and argued that "progressivism" was a "frame of mind" or "frame of reference" composed of basic "moral and emotional attitudes" that many of the "leaders" of the reform period shared. Crunden believed that Progressivism was not "specifically political or social, but rather cultural" to which he added, "progressivism was essentially religious" – a "form of displaced Protestantism:" Progressivism was the "spirit" and the "motivation" that inspired reformers. Crunden defined a Progressive as "a person of strongly religious upbringing who displaced the moral concerns of his youth onto the very real social, industrial, political and aesthetic problems of his maturity, and who attempted to solve these public and personal problems within a Protestant, moral frame of reference." Crunden held up Jane Addams and John Dewey as "psychological paradigms of the progressive experience." Crunden also quotes Frederic C. Howe, a self-described reformer, who earlier wrote about the Progressive's "evangelistic psychology:

> I was conformed to my generation and made to share its moral standards and ideals…early assumptions as to virtue and vice, goodness and evil remained in my mind long after I had tried to discard them. This is, I think, the most characteristic influence of my generation. It explains the nature of our reforms, the regulatory legislation in morals and economics, our belief in men rather than in institutions and our messages to other peoples…all a part of that evangelistic psychology that makes America what she is.[20]

While Crunden argued that Progressives were primarily motivated by religious and psychological concerns, he did not discount or deny that other factors, like economical or

[18] Robert M. Crunden, "Essay," in *Progressivism* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc, 1977), 71-103.

[19] Crunden summarized Erikson's theory in this way: "Erikson has demonstrated suggestively how crises in childhood and youth can combine especially with religious milieus to produce effective political movements, and to create moral frames of reference in which certain values and reactions seem to be taken for granted. He has also placed his considerable prestige behind the contention that great leaders articulate and find ways of resolving the important psychological conflicts in the culture of their time" (72). Crunden draws from Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York, 1950, 1963); *Young Man Luther* (New York, 1958); *Ghandi's Truth* (New York, 1969). See also Robert M. Crunden, "Freud, Erikson and the Historian: A Bibliographical Survey," *Canadian Review of American Studies* vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring, 1973): 48-64.

[20] Fredric C. Howe, *The Confessions of A Reformer* (1925; reprint, Chicago, 1967), 12-17. Crunden, "Essay," *Progressivism*, 98-99.

political motivations, also played a part. Crunden argued that many historians mistake economic and political motivations as the whole story. Crunden argued that the Progressive Movement can best be understood in relation to the "psychological needs of the reformer."

Crunden's essay in *Progressivism* was expanded several years later into a book, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889 – 1920* (1982). In this work Crunden again argued that Progressivism was an "ethos," a "dominant national mood," and a "system of values," which grew out of the individual psychological needs of a culturally transitioning and professionalizing middle class. He argued that Progressives shared no single political or social platform nor were they members of a single reform movement. Progressives shared "moral values" and a commitment to the "spiritual reformation" of American democracy, and while the Progressive ethos often seemed "amorphous, inchoate, and difficult to define," it was bounded by a Protestant and democratic discourse and infused by a moral fervor to reform all facets of U.S. society. Crunden denied that there was a "progressive era," and instead focused on three generations of U.S. reformism: liberal precursors of Progressivism [reformers born before 1854], 1st generation Progressives [reformers born between 1854 – 1874], and 2nd generation Progressives [reformers born between 1874 – 1894]. Crunden's book makes several historical character sketches of individual Progressives, like Jane Addams, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and George Herron, in order to describe how a "progressive ethos" infused these individuals' specific reformist impulse.[21]

John D. Buenker's "Essay" in *Progressivism*[22] marked a growing divergence on the subject. He stood in agreement with Filene's "shifting coalitions" theory and against the "ethos"

[21] Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889 – 1920* (1982; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), ix-x, 39-40, 64-68,164, 274-277.
[22] John D. Buenker, "Essay," in *Progressivism* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc, 1977), 31-69.

theory of scholars like Burnham and Crunden. Buenker argued that since "Progressivism" had been defined so many ways it had lost clear meaning except in relation to a specific political party and, thus, Buenker claimed, "as a description of either an ideology or a political program, I find it worthless and misleading." Buenker argued that trying to define Progressivism as a "common set of values" was disingenuous because it either gets defined too broadly (and thus just about every middle class person at the turn of the century could be described as "Progressive") or it gets defined too narrowly (and thus becomes "ambiguous" and "contradictory" in relation to specific individuals).

Buenker argued that there were many Progressive populations and programs and each had a different set of values. Thus he believed that Filene's "shifting coalitions" conception seemed the most appropriate theory with which to describe the various early 20th century reform movement(s). Buenker argued that the idea of shifting coalitions was a more "comprehensive explanation" because it can take into account diverse reform movements composed of diverse people with diverse motives who may have on certain occasions accommodated or cooperated on specific reform issues: "the politics of compromise, conciliation, and coalition," Buenker noted, "have been the hallmark of the American system from the beginning." A focus on shifting coalitions put primary emphasis on the political arena as the plane where compromise, conciliation, and coalition took place.[23] But he also noted that individual reformers had complex identities and conflicting social relationships, which in turn further fractured any coherent notion

[23] Buenker wrote: "In a larger sense, Americans turned to politics because it was the only forum the nation possessed for ameliorating the conditions wrought by industrialization, immigration, and urbanization and for accommodating the competing demands of various economic, ethnic, and geographic groups…In a highly competitive society there was not a real sense of community to sustain concern for the less fortunate. For better or worse, only politics provided an arena where conflicting groups could face each other under established ground rules and attempt to resolve their differences. The political system, alone of America's institutions, was based upon the existence of pluralism and diversity; it was constructed by compromise and specially designed to provide a means of accommodating conflicting interests" (46-47).

of personal "ethos" that a historian might construct. Buenker demanded a complex reckoning of the specific social, cultural and political relationships and identities of individual reformers both prior to and during public reform debates and policy coalitions.[24]

Daniel T. Rogers offered a look at the concept of "progressivism" in 1982.[25] He noted that the term went from "one of the central organizing principles of American history" to a "corpse that would not lie down." The debate of the meaning of progressivism was "acute and troubling." He described the literature on the subject after 1970 as moving away from the ethos of Progressivism and actors in a Progressive movement to its "context" – the "structures of politics, power, and ideas within which the era's welter of tongues and efforts and 'reforms' took place." The "fundamental fact" researchers of the 1970s focused on was the "explosion of scores of aggressive, politically active pressure groups" in an era of "shifting, ideologically fluid, issue-focused coalitions, all competing for the reshaping of American society" of which the Progressives were only one group. Actually, Rogers argued, the group of reformers called the "Progressives" were really many distinct individuals and associations that "shared no common party or organization," had "deep disagreements," but from time to time shared ideas and rhetorical strategies.[26] Progressive politics, like other forms of politics in the era, were "coalition politics, prone to internal fissures." And this was perhaps one of the distinctive features of the era, the "rise of modern, weak-party, issue-focused politics." The other distinctive feature was the "revolution" in "social organization:" "the eclipse of the local, informal group" and its

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[24] Ibid., 31-40, 43, 56, 59 63.
[25] Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10 (Dec 1982), 113-132.
[26] Rogers argued that Progressives did not "share a common creed or a string of common values," but instead shared a "cluster of ideas" and "three distinct social languages." These languages were a "rhetoric of antimonopolism," "an emphasis on social bonds and the social nature of human beings," and "the language of social efficiency." Rodgers said the Progressives were great "users" of ideas as a "set of tools" with which they made "progressive social thought distinct and volatile" as they brought together all three of the reformist languages together into a powerful and "dynamic" "constellation" "from which they drew their energies and their sense of social ills, and within which they found their solutions" (122-27).

“replacement by vastly bigger, bureaucratically structured formal organizations,” most importantly the business corporation and the regulatory state. Rogers spent some time reviewing the literature of New Left historians like Gabriel Kolko and James Weinstein whose research described the “new corporate phase of capitalism,” which allowed the corporation to become the “dominant” economic force of the 20th century.

In 1983 Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick published a short but detailed historiographical summary of the literature on Progressivism up to 1980. Link and McCormick organized the previous scholarly literature into six schools of analysis:

1) a conflict between “ordinary” and wealthy Americans
2) the continuation of a long tradition of agrarian protest
3) an urban, WASP, professional, middle-class movement trying to organize society, thereby, remedying industrialization, urbanization, and immigration
4) an urban, WASP, professional, middle-class movement on an intolerant moral crusade to remake America inspired mostly by their own personal problems
5) reformers from the “wealthiest” groups of society out to address social ills
6) diverse reform groups with divergent missions who often formed “shifting coalitions” to address and combat particular issues

For all six schools, Link and McCormick warned, historians have not often separated “purposes, rationale, and results” in their research. These are three very different yet mutually informative categories of analysis. The authors pointed out how many historical studies of the period have exaggerated a single category of analysis to the exclusion of others.

Despite all the diversity on the subject, Link and McCormick did offer their own summation of “Progressivism.” They noted there was “no unified movement,” but many “diverse” and “convulsive reform movements” with many diverse and contradictory goals that came through the U.S. between the 1890s and 1917. These reform movements were typically led by “crusading” middle- and upper-class, native-born, professional Americans who sought in one way or another to address and ameliorate specific social ills, especially those social problems

resulting from urbanization and industrialization. The typical Progressive reform pattern began with investigation of a problem, which led to organizing a response, which in turn led to educating the citizenry, and often ended with the pinnacle of Progressive reform – legislation: Reformers "assumed that passing a law was equivalent to solving a problem and that government officials could be entrusted to enforce the measure in a progressive spirit." And while different reform movements and leaders articulated distinctive discourses of social justice, they were all usually "simplistic, traditional, moralistic" and programmatically warranted some kind of narrowly defined social control. Specifically, the authors pointed out an often neglected aspect of Progressivism: "coercive" Progressives. Coercive Progressive programs sought to impose social control and they took various forms, like the White Jim Crow movement in the South, Americanization programs, and moral reforms such as temperance and prohibition. While they made many references within the literature to the problematic usage of "Progressive," Link and McCormick argued in passing, "it might be better to avoid the terms progressive and progressivism altogether, but they are too deeply embedded in the language of contemporaries and historians to be ignored."[27]

In 1987 Nell Irvin Painter published her award winning treatment of the Progressive Era, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877 – 1919*.[28] She analyzed the politics of the era via a "hybrid political-labor history" framework. This schema allowed her to focus on the "conflict between various groups, classes, and competing ideals," which morphed into a pitched battle between "partisans of democracy" and "protectors of hierarchy" – "the struggle over the distribution of wealth and power." This great political conflict and struggle caused enormous

[27] Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1983), 1-10, 21-22, 72, 79, 84, 96-104.
[28] Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877 – 1919* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987).

amounts of "fear…plain, stark fear" in the hearts and minds of the middle- and upper-class. Painter argued that this fear "lay at the core" of many "progressive reforms." The table below displays the large gap between the very rich (0.01%), the rich (11%), and the rest of the country (88%). The great extremes of wealth caused by capitalism and industrialization became a point of concern for the great majority who owned less than 15% of the national wealth.

Distribution of Wealth and Income in U.S.A. (1890)

Class Status	% of U.S. Pop.	% of National Wealth	# of Families	Average Income per Family
Rich	0.01%	50.8%	125,000	$264,000
Upper Middle	11%	35.4%	1,375,000	$16,000
Middle	44%	13%	5,500,000	$1,500
Poor	44%	1.2%	5,500,000	$150 (poverty around $544)

Painter stressed that while income does provide the "single clearest indicator of class standing," the notion of class needed to be seen as a complex, "fluid" and ever changing classification, whereby there was no single "middle class," but rather "middle classes" (and also "many ethnicities and races"). Those elite classes with the most at stake and thereby the most influence liked to put forth ideological arguments for the "identity of interest." This belief conceptualized society as a smoothly functioning organism wherein the interests of the great capitalists and property owners were supposedly the best interests of all in society and in harmony with "laws of God or Science." Reformers acting as "democratizers" put forth a counter-conception of society. Seeing their own middle-class or working-class interests at odds with those of capitalists and industrialists, democratizers saw society torn by a "conflict of interests." Reformers often, but not always, tried to point out the interests of the "disadvantaged" within the social system and thereby argue for "the ideal of equity" and democracy, in order to confront the dangerous extremes of wealth and privilege. But lurking at the periphery of all calls for reform was the

specter of working class unrest, which from time to time would boil into a froth and cause conflicts of interest to turn into real (and often violent) social and political struggles for power. The so called "Progressive Era" was marked by a widespread call for reform and social change, however, as Painter pointed out, "the broadening consensus that change was necessary did not include agreement on the direction or extent of these changes."[29]

Perhaps the most powerful voice of reform came from educated and elite men who wanted a more "clean, efficient government" operated by a rationalized bureaucratic machinery and run by an advanced cadre of elite professionals. Painter argued that reform initiatives during the period were often very "ambiguous" and rarely a "straightforward story of altruism" because "nativism, racism, and sexism" pervaded both the reformist impulses and the reformist programs of these educated elites. By the early 20th century many middle class and agrarian reformers, including the so-classed Progressives (like the Progressive Party's presidential candidate, Teddy Roosevelt), saw the United Stats 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. Progressives under the banners of "New Nationalism" or "New Freedom" 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

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[29] Ibid., xii-xiii, xix, xxiv, xl, xliii, 279-80.

prosperity of a nation are desirable chiefly so far as they lead to the moral and material welfare of all good citizens."[30]

The most frightening voice of reform came from the laboring classes and political radicals who often spoke in the name of working class interests. Often disposed and exploited, lacking any real propertied interest in the social order, workers expressed their frustration through "strikes, boycotts, and cooperative enterprises" in order to pool their collective strength as a means to gain bargaining leverage with their industrial masters. It was not until the late 19th century that workers and radicals, especially socialists, began turning to the political process and electoral politics as a way of "influencing" the U.S. economy and factory workplaces. Labor and Populist leaders began to see that "they would have to take a hand in shaping the laws that governed them," which meant lobbying the state and federal governments "to seize the powers to regulate" the industrial economy on the "behalf" of working class interests. Women and ethnic minorities also tried to use the political process in order to highlight their marginal status and seek redress through political rights, but these efforts were largely unsuccessful during the "Progressive Era," with the exception of white women who were able to gain suffrage by the end of WWI.[31]

Painter also talked at length about race and racism in the U.S. She discussed the racialized U.S. foreign policy and imperialist interventionist projects of the period. Formally mapped out in 1885 at the Berlin Conference, the world had been divided by white Europeans, and also by the turn of the century Japan. By 1900 Europeans ruled over 1/5 of the world's land and 1/10 of the world's human population. Each dominant European nation assigned itself "national spheres of interest" over which each nation, through soft and hard exercises of colonial

[30] Ibid., xxviii, 8, 136, 258, 268.
[31] Ibid., 70-71, 231-52.

mastery, exploited favorable terms of trade and natural resource extraction. The U.S. via a revitalized Monroe Doctrine asserted control over the Americas and the Caribbean with expansive moves across the Pacific and into China. With some envy for the preeminent stature of Great Britain, Painter argued that an "Anglo-American identity of interest" coupled with an "Anglo-Saxon chauvinism" congealed in the later 19th century as the English-speaking countries united under the racialized banner of "the natural superiority of Anglo-Saxons." 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." 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 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.[32]

Another article by John D. Buenker published in 1988 argued for the existence of "two full-blown political cultures," which influenced and defined the socio-political and cultural identifications of Americans during the turn of the 20th century.[33] Despite the "complexity and diversity of motives, goals, methods, and results" of socio-political and cultural struggle during this period, Buenker argued for two distinctive and primary "competing political cultures." These two political cultures were especially important in defining the relationship between the individual and society, and they set up distinctive battle lines within the "arena of structural reform:" 1) the "new politics" of a "modernizing" ideology of "atomistic aggregation of sovereign individuals," which was associated with the "reformer-individualist-Anglo-Saxon complex," and 2) the "old politics" of an "ethnic identification" of "organic networks," which was aligned with the "boss-immigrant-machine complex." Buenker argued that these two world views shaped the context out of which individuals defined their socio-political-cultural identities and allegiances, but they should not be seen as some oversimplified dualism: "The choice made by individuals was not a dichotomous one between the sovereign individualist or organic network world views. Rather, the two views functioned as antipodes on a continuum or as the rows and columns of a matrix on which each person found his or her own identity out of a bewildering variety of permutations that changed over the life cycle." The Progressive coalition would have been associated with the "new politics" and part of their mission, under the terms

[32] Ibid., Ch 5 & 7.
[33] John D. Buenker, "Sovereign Individuals and Organic Networks: Political Cultures in Conflict During the Progressive Era," *American Quarterly* 40 (Jun, 1988), 187-204.

Buenker introduced in this essay, was to confront and defeat the "old politics" for control over the socio-political-cultural reform that would govern the new century.

In 1999 Alan Dawley published a major work on the broad period of reform infusing the early 20th century: *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State*. The central question of his book (and the broad period of reform under study) was not about Progressivism but about "how could the existing form of the state, designed generations earlier for an agrarian-commercial society, withstand the brawling conflicts and relentless evolution of an urban-industrial way of life?" Dawley argued that the "crux of American history" around the turn of the 20th century was the "reckoning between a dynamic society and the existing liberal state." Progressivism was only a small, but important part of this much larger and very global issue.

His book broke down the reckoning of state and society into three stages. The first stage was "imbalance" and he located this stage between the 1890s and 1913. During this period U.S. society was "on a collision course" with its political system based on laissez-faire liberalism and the inequality it bred. Liberty and political right were "reserved" for wealthy, white men and as other groups struggled for socio-political inclusion, the "polarities of class and culture intensified" and "struggles broke out" across the nation. Many reform initiatives reacted to this conflict so as to resolve it, but different reformers often fostered conflicting visions, which only furthered the melee. And behind it all, Dawley argued, was a "contradiction between the needs of society and the existing political system." The next stage, from 1914 to 1924, was a time of "confronting issues" by the state resulting in an increase in state intervention and regulation, whereby, the "governing system" of "state embedded in society" began to change in dialectical relation to social struggles. The last stage from 1925 to 1938 marked a "resolution" of state intervention to "restore balance" to the governing system. The New Deal was the primary

institutional impetus of this resolution, but Dawley was quite clear in arguing that this new policy program focused on "neither liberty nor equality, but security."

At the center of Dawley's book was the "problem of hegemony:" "how was society held together (consensus) against its own inner contradictions (conflict)?" One of the central arguments he made towards explaining the successful change within the governing system was the power and strategy of elites "to regain their legitimacy by reforming the system." He links progressivism to "managerial liberalism" and "social liberalism" as viable forms of state interventionism that could accommodate reformist demands for social change while legitimizing elite management of the social and political transformations. As a solidly liberal and yet quasi-socialist ideology, Progressivism was able to "contain" socialism and thus middle-class and elite interests were able to steer reformist initiatives in more conservative and capitalist directions that did not significantly challenge the institutional structure of liberal society. Dawley argued that it was "inevitable" that "state structures and ruling values would change" – "the only questions were how, and in whose interests?" In terms of early 20th century reform initiatives and state interventionism, Dawley wrote, "Americans were dragged kicking and screaming toward social responsibility."[34] Thus Progressivism, in Dawley's conception, was a response to challenge the excesses and instability of the elite managed liberal state while containing the more threatening challenges and disorder of lower class unrest.

John Whiteclay Chambers II first published *The Tyranny of Change: American in the Progressive Era, 1890 – 1920* in 1992. He noted that many historians have written about the "Progressive Era," but they have not been clear about "the nature of either progressivism

[34] Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 1-13, 30-31, 62, 71-73, 105, 128-38, 163-65, 370, 394.

or the era."[35] Despite this confusion, he argued the concepts of a "progressive impulse or ethos" and a "Progressive Era" continued to be "relevant." He noted that while Progressivism was not a united movement, it was still "the most pervasive political reform effort since the pre-Civil War period." He called Progressivism a "controversial and complex," "multifaceted," "moderate" reform movement that "affected nearly every aspect of American life." He also acknowledged the shifting coalitions theory by stating how a "hodgepodge of coalitions" often "contradicted each other" while working for "diverse" social change. However, while he denied Progressives a "common creed or a system of values," he also described what he believed to be some common "clusters of ideas" and "social languages," like democratic ideals, rhetorical appeals to move people, a "politics of opposition." Whiteclay argued that Progressives were not often original thinkers, but there were powerful "users" of ideas in the effort to initiate social change.

Chambers devoted a whole chapter to the "Progressive Impulse" in which he defined "Progressivism" as a "nationwide movement" composed of a "number of major efforts to reform society through the power of private groups and public agencies." Leaders and participants of *some* of these reform efforts called themselves "Progressives," and hence the label often given for the whole period, but there were many radical and conservative reformers as well. Chambers noted, Progressives "battled conservatives, radicals, other reformers, and often each other." Acknowledging the multiplicity of ideological reform groups was a marked change in direction as most historians up to this point had tended to focus mostly on those particular individuals and groups who claimed the "Progressive" mantle.

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[35] Chambers noted in his bibliography that he was not able to read Dawley's *Struggles for Justice* in researching the first edition of his book. I would argue that Dawley has presented one of the clearest and most comprehensive treatments of the era and the subject of Progressivism to date.

Chambers noted that recent scholarship in the 1990s had emphasized the socio-political contexts of reform ("the environment of politics, power, ideas, and values"), and also the role of the state, specifically the relationships between different "political structures" and particular social groups. Perhaps the most notable new direction in the historiography of the period had been Chambers' use of the term "the new interventionists" to describe the whole, broad reform movement of the period, which included Progressives, but also included the many other ideological reform groups of the period The new interventionists used voluntary associations and sometimes the state to challenge 19th century lassie faire individualism and free-market capitalism and this challenge took many forms: Progressives, moderates, conservatives, traditionalists, and radical activists like socialists, communists, and anarchists. The new interventionists, Chambers claimed, left a "divided legacy." They seemed to have been more successful "at arousing indignation and protest than at maintaining effective government and substantially ameliorating urban problems." They also over-relied on strong leadership and monolithic reform visions that often led to "the tyranny of change," whereby, the general public supported or elected strong leaders but had very little impact on public planning or policy.[36]

[36] John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: American in the Progressive Era, 1890 – 1920* (1992; reprint, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), xi-xiii, 132-47, 150-51, 157, 169-71. Chambers summed up nicely the "meaning of the Progressive Era:" "In the Progressive Era, large numbers of Americans concluded that the problems accompanying industrialization meant that they could no longer rely solely on Providence or evolution for automatic progress. They lost their faith in the long-held utilitarian concept of a natural harmony of self-interests and in the functioning of a self-regulating society…With optimism and the sense of power that came from developments in science, technology, and organizational theory, the new interventionists decided that it was necessary to modify the concept of unrestricted individualism and the marketplace. They thought that intervention and intelligent direction could ensure continued growth and progress that would be consistent with the ideal of an efficient and liberal democratic society…Interventionists created new mechanisms for dealing with the problems caused by blind social forces or powerful, self-interested individuals or groups…interventionists employed organization and intervention as tools for achieving their goals and imposing conscious direction on society…The dominant development of the era was the emergence of an interventionist mood on a national scale. The need for some kind of purposeful, collective intervention…the organization of economic and social power. The local, informal group so characteristic of small-town and agrarian society was superseded as the basic framework of American life by immensely larger, hierarchically structured formal organizations…the organizational or bureaucratic revolution….Although people at all levels of society sought to influence the forces affecting their lives, particularly in the immediate environment in which they lived, the poor and the unorganized had little or no influence in the national political system" (275-82).

William Deverell argued that by 1994 the concepts of “progressivism” and “progressive” carried “diverse and heavy burdens of meaning,” which made many scholars believe that these terms had “outlived their usefulness as meaningful expressions by which to explain” the past: these concepts had lost, in the words of Martin Sklar, their “interpretive precision.”[37] But Deverell argued that scholars must not loose sight of the fact that “individuals, parties, and groups used the terms *progressive* and *progressivism* to define themselves, their work, and their outlook as the new century arrived.” He stressed that there was an “historical context” within which these terms were “borrowed, taken, utilized, even invented” and scholars and historians would do well to admit that these terms “once meant something” before these terms become jettisoned for more precise conceptualizations. Deverell noted that while progressivism had become “an embattled word, an embattled concept,” real derivatives from the “progressive phenomenon” were still visible in the current socio-political climate and discourse: “Progressivism is alive and well four score years after its birth.”

Gary Gerstle’s “The Protean Character of American Liberalism” (1994) discussed the changing ethos of American liberalism from the turn of the twentieth century to the New Deal.[38] Gerstle argued, it is “unwise to treat the liberal community as a stable political entity or to presume that the criteria for identifying liberals in one period can be applied to another. Any effort to define the liberal community must be firmly located in time and space.” Gerstle noted that the “liberal tradition” had three “foundational principles” (emancipation, rationality, and progress), but overall liberalism had a marked “malleability” that made for variant socio-political programs and ideologies.

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[37] William Deverell, “The Varieties of Progressive Experience,” *California Progressivism Revisited*, ed. William Deverell and Tom Sitton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 1-11.
[38] Gary Gerstle, “The Protean Character of American Liberalism,” *The American Historical Review* 99:4 (Oct 1994): 1043-1073.

Classical liberalism revolved around free markets, limited statism, and bourgeois morality, which often defended corporate capitalism, segregation and disenfranchisement. By the end of the 19th century liberalism displayed a reformist edge and it organized "rational interventions in society and culture," often by turning "to the state as an institutional medium capable of reconstructing society and of educating citizens." 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-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 lead to a loss of "coherence as a political movement."

During World War I and the Red Scare Progressives felt themselves and their ideological convictions to be "impotent in the face of a reactionary nationalism." Liberals largely "give up the fight to create a new culture and new nationalism," and began to ignore the "irrational" realm of culture to focus instead on the more rational and therefore changeable realm of economics and political economy. This lead to a widespread "exclusion of ethnicity and race" from liberal social scientific analysis, which lead to a "more narrowly conceived" liberal program of

economic recovery during the New Deal years. It took the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party to bring back liberal discussions of "racial and ethnic discrimination." After World War II liberals once again "reconstituted" their political focus and began to define "issues of ethnicity and race as appropriate targets of rational social action," while treating "class politics as an expression of irrationality" and therefore beyond the scope of liberal intervention.

In 1997 Eric Foner edited a volume for the American Historical Association that offered a look at the "new" American history written over the last 20 years. Within this volume Richard L. McCormick talked about Progressivism and other reform impulses in "Public Life in Industrial America, 1877 – 1917."[39] In this essay McCormick claimed that the central issue of this period was industrialization and modernization, and how individuals and groups addressed the unsettling consequences of these two developments. There is no "coherent synthesis," McCormick argued, for describing the "complex" social, political and cultural reactions to industrialization and modernization. There were "many organized endeavors" that produced many "unexpected results." But McCormick did argue for some common themes:

> Most people confronted variations on a common problem: the defense of their families and communities against outside forces emanating from industrial growth and the increasing heterogeneity of the population. Americans faced that problem, moreover, within a common environment: a rapidly expanding economy that was causing massive dislocations, frequent depressions, and widespread unemployment.

In response to this common problem and a common environment, "virtually every segment of society plunged into public life to advance (or defend) their private values." But many different segments of society acted in many different ways for many different reasons.[40] McCormick

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[39] Richard L. McCormick, "Public Life in Industrial America, 1877 – 1917" in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 107-132.

[40] In the same volume, Alan Brinkley described the "broad conflict" of the time as the "diverse" responses of various groups that coalesced into a "broad pattern of protest," whereby, "'localistic' people were struggling to preserve control of both the economic and the cultural institutions that governed their lives in the face of encroachments from the modern, bureaucratic order" (137-40). Alan Brinkley, "Prosperity, Depression, and War,

focused on some of the major segments of society that have been covered in the recent literature: business and financial interests, industrial workers, farmers, and middle-class women. He described how they variously responded to the common problem of the era: looking to the government to promote economic growth; organizing and looking to the government to foster unionization and industrial reform; organizing political blocks and cooperative ventures; joining associations and lobbying for reform. McCormick argued that the most notable phenomenon of the era was the organization of socio-political-cultural associations that addressed a wide range of social problems from a wide range of perspectives, and "increasingly offered not panaceas but full-blown agendas for social and political change." In a certain sense these radical, Populist, and Progressive groups failed to achieve much, as decades of historians have shown, but not because they were necessarily naive or ineffective, but because "their enemies were more powerful" and because voting and policy change were seen as the only legitimate form of success. However, McCormick makes clear that reformers of this period were successful in a much larger sense; they were able to create hundreds of organized, "non partisan" associations, which were able to drain "money, manpower, and organizational muscle" from political parties, and in turn "reshaped" the governing system throughout the century along "activist" and "interventionist lines."

The "seeds of Progressivism were planted," McCormick argued, in response to two looming questions: whether social and political institutions were "adequate" enough to address and fix devastating times, and whether "democracy and economic equality were possible in an industrial society?" The Progressives[41] were not alone "in trying to use public, political means to

1920 – 1945," in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 133-158.

[41] McCormick noted that the "concept" of "Progressivism" "still dominates the interpretive literature on the early twentieth-century United States" and that for better or worse the "concept is inescapably embedded in the language

solves problems," but they might have been the most effective and successful group to do so. The Progressive project consisted of four "distinctive methods:" organizing voluntary associations, investigating pertinent problem, finding the facts, and using social scientific analysis to offer a solution. Progressives seemed to believe that experts using the scientific method could find the perfect solutions to all social problems and, further, they believed the solutions would benefit everyone as well as society as a whole. But in reality, Progressives used the rhetoric of science and the common good to mask the imposition of their own values, especially in relation to the "racial and ethnic groups they hated and feared," in their broad efforts to "improve and control the often frightening conditions of industrial life."

Another study of Progressivism was done in 2000 by a political scientist who was engaged on a longitudinal study of a much broader topic. Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* focused on the change of social capital and civic engagement in the United States over the course of the 20th century. In the last section of his book, as a way to set up and inform his policy prescriptions, Putnam devoted a chapter to "Lessons of History: The Gilded Age and the Progressive Era." This chapter was indebted to many of the books reviewed in this paper. In this chapter Putnam praised the "Progressive Era" (which he located from 1900 – 1915) as a good example of "practical civic enthusiasm," but he also said that it was suffused with "exclusion" based on class, ethnicity, and race. Progressives were a "practical" and "experimental" bunch of reformers who shifted programmatically between professionalism and grassroots democracy in their conviction that social, political and economic institutions needed to be better adapted to the modern industrial world – although

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of contemporaries and the writings of historians." While there were "varied, fervent efforts to solve the problems caused by urbanization and industrialization," the efforts of Progressives were distinctly powerful and long lasting. Progressives were largely native born, urban, middle and upper middle class, and rooted in evangelical

Putman made it clear that Progressives seemed to prefer "technocratic elitism" and "expert solutions." The main engine of reform was the voluntary association (social, political, religious, and cultural), which was the main focus of Putnam's study. Putnam argued that the period from 1870 to 1920 displayed a "civic inventiveness" in terms of the founding, range, and durability of associational organizations, which was and still is un-paralleled in U.S. history: "to a remarkable extent American civil society at the close of the twentieth century still rested on organizational foundations laid at the beginning of the century." Putnam called Progressivism a "broad and variegated" "social movement" that may not have been much of a social movement in the conventional sense; however, it represented a "civic communitarian reaction to the ideological individualism of the Gilded Age" and the primary form this reaction took was the creation of voluntary associations and socio-political institutions, which greatly increased the aggregate measure of social capital and civic engagement. It was this creation of social capital and civic engagement that marks the Progressive movement as a seminal event in the history of the U.S. and it had an impact many decades after the Progressives as a "movement" faded from the stage. But Putnam ended his chapter with a warning: "social capital is inevitably easier to foster within a homogeneous community." The Progressives' broad expansion of social capital was fostered by systematic socio-political exclusion based on class, ethnicity and race. Putnam praises the Progressive Era for its inventiveness, enthusiasm, and idealism, but warns that its particular reforms "are no longer appropriate for our time" – "Our challenge now is to reinvent the twenty-first-century equivalent."[42]

Protestantism. They sought to use the social sciences to "eradicate social conflicts" and also to temper the excesses of capitalism (121-22).

[42] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 367-401. *The Economist* noted in 2005 that "voluntary associations have been the secret ingredient of American social dynamism since the country's foundation…civic associations made Americans better informed, safer, richer and better able to govern themselves and create a just and stable society." This publication commented

The last and most recent study to be examined is Michael McGerr's *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870 – 1920*.[43] This impressively comprehensive book looked at Progressivism in relation to a broad swath of social, political, and cultural responses to industrialization and modernity. Industrialization "fractured old ideologies," wrote McGerr, and "created new ones, including progressivism."[44] Progressives articulated, in the words of one of their figure heads Theodore Roosevelt, a "fierce discontent," and they believed both in social progress and in the moral regeneration of their nation. Progressivism was the "creed of a crusading middle class" that offered the "promise of utopianism" in the wake of industrial inefficiency, urban chaos, political degeneracy, and cultural confusion. Progressivism, McGerr claimed, was a "radical movement" – what he called "the radical center" – that sought not only to "use the state to regulate the economy," but also to "transform" "other social classes," other Americans, into a new socio-cultural body politic. It was this demand for "social transformation," McGerr claimed, that "remains at once profoundly impressive and profoundly disturbing a century later."[45]

McGerr also acknowledged that Progressivism contained many "ambiguities and contradictions," but its various "fault lines" never "split wide open," partly due to the fact that the Progressive middle class was "overwhelmingly white and Protestant" and, for the most part (despite the fissures of class and gender) culturally homogeneous. This raises a central question

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on Putnam's thesis and argued for new signs of civic participation in the U.S. "The Glue of Society: Americans are Joining Clubs Again," in *A Survey of America*, *The Economist*, 16 July. 2005, 13-17.

[43] Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870 – 1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[44] McGerr described the "progressive" ideology as part of the "middle-class alienation from working-class and upper-class culture." He wrote, "Progressivism was the way in which these Victorian men and women came to answer the basic questions of human life that have confronted all people in all times and places: What is the nature of the individual? What is the relationship between the individual and society? What are the proper roles of men, women, and the family? What is the place of work and pleasure in human life?" The answers to these questions "added up to a novel set of guiding values, a new ideology for the middle class: Victorianism gave way to progressivism" – "Rethinking domesticity, rejecting individualism, reconsidering work and pleasure, and redesigning the body" (343 footnote 73, xiv, 42, 64).

about which the literature on Progressivism and early 20th century reform has been largely silent until the 1970s, but which many historians since then, including McGerr, have exposed in detail. There is a distinct and disturbing relationship between what Nancy MacLean has termed "reactionary populism" and what we have labeled "Progressivism."

MacLean's book on the Ku Klux Klan described her subject not as the backwoods yokels they are often mistaken for, but as an organized movement 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, and who thereby fomented a reactionary form of populism. 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.[46] MacLean's Klan members were going through their own status revolution, whereby, the typical Klansmen was economically better off the most blacks and many whites and often upwardly mobile, but still felt "vulnerable," "unstable" and insecure.[47]

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

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[45] Ibid., xiii-xvi, 42, 64, 67-68,

[46] 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).

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 centralized government and statist regulatory authority, and they had a willingness to use violent force[48] 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.[49] 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."[50] It is no accident of historical fortune that the

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[47] Ibid., 10-11, 52-74.

[48] 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).

[49] 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.

[50] 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.

"Progressive Era" was also the "great age of segregation" in the United States.[51] 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 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."[52] 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."[53] 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."[54]

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[51] 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 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.

[52] McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 216-17.

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

[54] 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).

So then what is "Progressivism" and what is the Progressive legacy? These terms are embedded in an "age of social politics."[55] There were many reformist groups of various political and ideological stripes at the turn of the 20th century, of which Progressivism was but one potent example.[56] There were not only many reformist groups that articulated many different reform initiatives, but Progressives also took "man paths" towards reform.[57] As a culturally homogeneous and economically secure social class (although uneasy in their security), 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. "Americanization," to introduce this broad and complicated term which is the central focus of this larger study, could be described as the essential yet myriad conceptualization for this controlling order: "America" as a nationalistic and cultural identity would be the *new order* the

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[55] 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.

[56] 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.

Progressives sought and they were very confident, as Gary Gerstle pointed out, "that their use of government and science would turn immigrants into Americans."[58]

As Robert Wiebe argued in "Framing U.S. History: Democracy, Nationalism, and Socialism," the challenge of white Americans during the 18th and 19th century was not to reform so much as to "create a social order" and that social order, my larger study will argue, was a program of Americanization, which included the formation of a federated bureaucracy centered within the corporate-capitalist State. 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 professionalism.[59] 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 century of Americanization would be the ideological center of heated debate. Preconceived notions of homogeneous and class based democratic citizenship would be challenged as many minority populations asked, "Who gets to be an American?" – and further, as a socio-cultural-political ideal, "What *ought* America to be?"

[57] Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, Ibid., 141.
[58] Gary Gerstle, "Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans," *The Journal of American History* 84:2 (Sept 1997): 530.
[59] 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.