

Review Essay

Exposing the Paradoxes of Progressivism*

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In *Illiberal Reformers*, Princeton professor Thomas Leonard tells the story of the Progressive intellectuals and activists who “led the Progressive Era crusade to dismantle *laissez-faire*, remaking American economic life with a newly created instrument of reform, the administrative state” (ix). In sum, Leonard argues that their policies were illiberal (opposing individual rights) and deeply troubling (trampling the civil and political rights of those viewed as deficient by the ruling elites).

Leonard’s book is built around four of his journal articles in the *History of Political Economy*.¹ He provides a fascinating tour of history, philosophy, economics, political science, and science in the Progressive Era. He describes the role of ideology and idealism in public policy—as applied to the most notable time in American history when elites held sway. His work is a sobering remembrance of a time when social progress was king (defined a certain way and despite staggering costs for certain individuals) and science was respected or even deified (even when it was being done poorly).

Leonard describes the historical context that led into the Progressive Era. In a nutshell, economic issues predominated: financial crises, growing evidence of income and wealth inequality, domestic migration from rural to urban, concerns about immigration, the ebbs and flows of early unionization, government’s

* Thomas Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

ambivalence about big business, and so on (ix, 3–6). A relatively *laissez-faire* approach to government had dominated, but life and economy seemed to be changing rapidly—and in ways that were deeply worrisome. Should there be a greatly expanded role for government?

The Rise of Progressivism and Its Economists

Leonard divides his book into two parts. The first section describes the ascendancy of Progressivism, divided into three “acts” (ix). First, the actors emerged onto the stage: secular thinkers and Protestant evangelicals who were passionate about helping others and helping society. Second, the actors developed “rhetorical weapons” for arguing against the (relatively *laissez-faire*) status quo as “economically outmoded and ethically inadequate” (x). Third, by relying on experts within the bureaucracy, they began to embrace government policy as the preferred means to the end of reforming the troublesome status quo.

Progressives were a combination of secular activists and those who would be labeled today as members of the “Religious Left” and the “Religious Right.” Many of them decided to “turn pro” in reform organizations; journalism; the university (particularly in economics, law, and sociology); or more broadly, in “public life.” Typically, their activism was from an outsider’s position—as elites, arguing for a government of experts to help the common folk, and especially, to improve society. “Progressives did not work in factories; they inspected them. Progressives did not drink in saloons; they tried to shutter them” (7).

Often, activists were the children of mainline Protestants or evangelical ministers. They were proponents of the Social Gospel—a move “from saving souls to saving society . . . just as salvation was increasingly socialized, so was sin” (13). They were more interested in society and more prone to envision its redemption than the more-closeted fundamentalists.² In response to the changing economic conditions, they started “mutual aid societies” and “an impressive network of voluntary agencies” (6, 13).³ These efforts were deemed ineffective—or effective but scalable upward by government.⁴ Given the government’s power to get things done and the Progressives’ faith in its ability, their focus quickly moved to public policy as the chosen means to godly ends.⁵

In chapter 2, Leonard details the impact of German universities. In part, the influence was intellectual (18, 21–22), but he argues that American Progressives were also drawn to the professional prestige granted to German intellectuals. With *laissez-faire* prescriptions for government to “do little,” there had not been much for American economists to do—or reasons to garner respect. But regulation and

intervention implied the usefulness of knowledgeable experts, building credence in the field. “Economic reform could be a vocation, even a distinguished one. . . . *Laissez-faire* was inimical to economic expertise and thus an impediment to the vocational imperatives of American economics” (18, 29).⁶

American universities grew rapidly during this era—fourfold between 1870 and 1900 (19). In large part, this was driven by a growing ability to afford college. More participation in college also led to more respect and recognition for colleges and professors—a positive cycle of growth for those in academia and those who wanted to invest their expertise in government.

Broader philosophical issues were also at work. In classical economics, self-interested behavior was constrained by competition, the market, and minimal (but effective) government. Natural law and a penchant for individualism combined into a belief that this sort of political economy would always result in a well-ordered and prosperous society. Progressives saw history as contingent and argued that “a new economy necessitated a new relationship between the state and economic life” (21)—in this case, a much more active relationship, with the state becoming a far more dominant partner.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Supreme Court had ruled that corporations were legally considered “persons.” Both the state and the corporations were seen as persons by Progressives. The chief founder of the American Economic Association, Richard Ely, saw the state as an “organism” (101) and as “a moral person” (24). Leonard also quotes Ely’s student, Woodrow Wilson: “government is not a machine, but a living thing” (101). How should these persons relate to each other? “[Business] must answer to the state. . . .” (25). What about the extent of the state’s dominance in this relationship? Progressives were ambivalent about corporations—distrusting their motives but admiring their efficiency and wanting their productivity.

The personhood issue had far-reaching impact. Progressives often had an elevated view of the state, but it was also helpful to portray the state as a caring person. Problems seemed easier to manage when seen through the lens of smart people operating within a social-engineering metaphor. “America’s economic challenges were as comprehensible and tractable as the purely technical problems addressed by engineers on the factory floor” (34). If society is an organism, you can treat it as a single unit—easier to manipulate than a large, diverse set of persons. Because an organism cannot survive or at least thrive with handicaps, parasites or other potential threats could reasonably be “treated” or eliminated. Ironically, the promotion of state and corporation to personhood came at a time when the personhood of certain sets of actual persons was being diminished because of this same ideology.

Antitrust in Theory and Practice

The relationship between antitrust policy and Progressivism, in theory and in practice, was a mixed bag. Some Progressives preferred more consolidation, believing that fewer, larger firms would be both more efficient and easier for bureaucrats to regulate as necessary (58). Others worried about the power of larger firms and wanted to reduce market concentration.

In any case, antitrust has always been more important in the history books than it was in practice. Leonard says, “The United States was the land of the trust, but uniquely among the industrialized countries, it was also the land of antitrust” (46). The evidence indicates otherwise. Even in its supposed heyday under Theodore Roosevelt, antitrust activity was light and intermittent—with three antitrust suits in 1902, two in 1903, and one in 1904. In this arena, Teddy talked loudly but carried a small stick.⁷

In fact, Kolko argues that business interests *captured* the regulatory powers of the state, using them to restrict competitors—what he labeled “the triumph of conservatism” because the regulations worked to conserve the status quo. “It is business control over politics rather than political regulation of the economy that is the significant phenomenon of the Progressive Era.”⁸ What was true even in the Progressive Era is certainly true today—that government is far busier enhancing monopoly power for interest groups than in restricting its growth.

The Role of Government Revisited

What about the general role of the government in the economy? Leonard (32–33) credits John Stuart Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) for promoting the idea of “market failure”—instances such as public goods, natural monopoly, and externalities where markets struggle to be efficient. In these contexts, government regulation has the potential for enhancing social efficiency.

Also on Mill’s list was “agency problems”—inefficiencies within businesses, caused by gaps in knowledge and motives among owners, managers, and employees. In the meantime, Frederick Winslow Taylor’s ideas about ways to increase business efficiency had become prominent. Through science, analysis, and management’s attention to detail, Taylor promised increased productivity, higher wages, and labor peace—an attractive package (62). Armed with Taylor’s ideas about efficient business management and optimism about the potential efficacy of government regulation, Progressives saw “the market” as another area where government could deal with “market failure” and make great strides for the progress of society.⁹

Mill had been careful to note that government's role here was only "potential" and generally "feared that government cures were worse than market diseases" (32). He warned that government bureaucrats and politicians also suffered from agency problems. Such a view was clearly warranted in a time that had been dominated by patronage and machine politics. But Progressives were excited about government efforts to regulate the market—at least after the Progressives reformed the process.¹⁰

Owners and workers would benefit when "industry was governed not by self-seeking capitalists but by public-spirited experts" (63). Similarly, scientific regulations with objective bureaucrats would tame excess in business, organize the market more effectively, and serve to improve society. Advocates brought analogies from science to bear, such as surgery that was once primitive and dangerous and advances in medicine that now made it useful for society (33). So, too, with government activism.

Note that Progressive faith in government and respect for the efficiency of *firms* was paired with a belief that *markets* were inefficient. Progressive economists argued that markets were inefficient because they were "unplanned," causing "economic disorder and waste" (56).¹¹ They "saw no inconsistency.... Coordination within a firm came from careful planning by experts, whereas coordination among independent firms was not planned but spontaneously ordered." (56). Market efficiency would come "from expert management, not from market discipline" (62). To this end, Progressives implemented a laundry list of regulatory efforts and agencies, especially at the federal level (44–45).

A permanent income tax (with greatly increased tax revenues) was another catalyst for the growth of government. Despite the United States' relatively brief involvement in World War I, the war's tax regime was perpetuated through the Sixteenth Amendment. Even after the troops returned home, real federal spending was more than triple its prewar levels (47).¹² In 1880, import levies comprised 90 percent of tax revenue; in 1930, the income tax accounted for almost 60 percent of revenues (43). Greater revenues allowed an increased capacity for the government to act as the Progressives wanted.

Rapidly growing government in this period led to the perception that government intervention was a novel idea. But Leonard is careful to debunk the "myth of *laissez-faire*"—that Progressivism "brought in" the state or that America had been "a stateless, unregulated, free-market wilderness" (45). State and local governments had been quite active from the beginning. Furthermore, the federal government had been active with respect to business—by *promoting* it through trade protectionism. Yet Progressivism certainly extended the role of government

toward business—in particular, the role of the federal government to regulate through objective and knowledgeable experts (46).

The “Progressive Paradox”

In the second part of the book, Leonard describes the Progressive paradox—the various philosophical and practical tensions within the camps of progressive ideology and the implications for public policy. All Progressives held to the same basic approach. They all started with discontent about liberal individualism and valued the collective over the individual, thus justifying greater social control. Therefore, the market should be supervised and regulated by the visible hand of government. These efforts would be based on objective science not politics, with a reliance on experts and elites to govern for the goals of progress, the improvement of society, and the common good.

But how were they to define the “common good”? Here, the consensus broke down, resulting in diverse ideas and factions. “If progressives agreed that they represented the common good, they regularly disagreed on what the common good was.... The upshot was a pattern of conflict and cooperation that led to shifting political alliances and to a reputation for fractiousness” (8).

One problem was that everyone recognized that government was inefficient, corrupt, and disorganized. Progressives planned to reform government on the way to reforming society. As such, government was both “an instrument and an object of reform” (35). The plan was to use “disinterested experts who were university trained and credentialed” (9).

Progressives were also motivated by a high view of populism, local governance, and direct democracy—at least in theory. The average citizen should have more control over his government—for example, to elect judges and to promote voter initiatives such as referenda and recall. In a word, the government should be more responsive to the direct voice of the people. The power of machine politicians and political bosses would be weakened. And journalists (muckrakers) would be helpful in unveiling economic privilege, political corruption, and social injustice.

Yet, to sustain a high view of populism, those who would exercise democracy must have decent knowledge and be driven by the general welfare. This leads to a Catch-22: How do you achieve such reforms when you believe that people are not (yet) smart enough to help you reach those goals? The only option is to give power to a knowledgeable and benevolent elite in the meantime—often bureaucrats at the state and federal levels of government. At least in the short-term, this militates against the quest for democracy by giving power to the nonelected and

the nonlocal. Centralized decision-making by trained experts and reduced power for local wards might make government more effective, but it would also make it more distant and isolated—and more prone to abuses of power.

In all of this, it is easy to look back and see that the Progressives had far too much faith in the motives and knowledge of those in government. Public choice economics teaches us to take a broad view of motives in government; self-interested behavior manifests itself many ways in political markets, not merely in selfless service to the common good. Austrian economics reminds us of the “knowledge problem”: even with pure motives, government actors must have amazing (or impossible) amounts of information to understand and then achieve the common good.

“The economists’ outsized confidence in their own expertise as a reliable, even necessary, guide to the public good was matched by their extravagant faith in the transformative promise of the administrative state” (35). The Progressive experts saw themselves as “a reliable, even necessary, guide to the public good . . . so sure of their expertise . . . so convinced of [their] righteousness. . . . [But they] rarely considered the unintended consequences of ambitious but untried reforms . . . [and] failed to confront the reality that the experts . . . could have interests and biases of their own” (xi). In sum, they possessed “a potent and quintessentially American combination of overconfidence and naiveté” (187).

Science, Eugenics, and Progressivism

Progressives also brought confidence about Science (the ideal) and science (its practice) to the table. Unfortunately, the science of the time had determined that “progress” implied excluding, eliminating, or restricting people who were deemed deficient in some way—most notably, certain ethnic groups, the disabled, and women. As such, Progressivism’s “braiding together of the admirable and the reprehensible, starts with its veneration of science”—most notably its embrace of Darwinism, eugenics, and “race science” (189).

Progressive inferences were driven by broader social values—“the seemingly bottomless American wells of racism, sexism, and nativism” (xiii).¹³ Those popular beliefs were then driven by two other Progressive principles. The values were dressed up and rationalized by contemporary scientific work, and government experts were charged with using this science to make the world a better place.¹⁴

All of this added other tensions into Progressive circles. Should we restrict those who are less able, or should we work to protect them from heredity, environment, bad choices, and big business? Leonard observes, “the great contradiction

at the heart of Progressive Era reform—its view of the poor as victims deserving state uplift and as threats requiring state restraint”—resulted in an “unstable amalgam of compassion and contempt,” which helps explain why “Progressive Era reform lent a helping hand ... while simultaneously narrowing that privileged circle by excluding the many it judged unworthy ... and did both in the name of progress” (xii–xiii).

Leonard is also helpful in describing race science in detail. Scientists wanted to determine cause and effect for intelligence, correlating it with head size and shape.¹⁵ Crucially, government offered many subjects who could be measured: “Captive groups could not say no ... school children, the institutionalized, US Army draftees, and immigrants ... were all made available to Progressive Era social scientists...” (70). The *Journal of Political Economy* published “an outpouring” of articles in the field of “anthroposociology.” Scholars calculated a “cephalic index” (the ratio of head width to head length) and used it to “scientifically demonstrate a permanent race hierarchy”—in particular, that superior races had longer heads (71–72). The scientific effort soon expanded into intelligence tests and manifested itself in public policy through “literacy tests.”

Not surprisingly, all of this connects to the emergence of Darwinism. Leonard begins chapter 6 with the claim, “It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Darwinian thinking to American economic reform in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era” (89). Almost everyone invoked Darwinian thinking: “There seems to have been something in Darwin for everyone.... Darwin inspired exegetes of nearly every ideology” (90). Of course, it could be used to justify Social Darwinism and *laissez-faire*, seeing “the economic status quo as survival of the fittest” (90).¹⁶ Darwinism was also invoked to motivate progress and call for intervention aimed at the betterment of the species. These disagreements are not surprising because “Darwinism was itself plural, and Progressive Era evolutionary thought was more plural still” (90). With the various ideologies in play, one suspects that the exegesis of Darwin was really *eisegesis*.

One key, debatable question was asked: Is evolution progressive or random? Although Darwin usually seemed to advocate random change, Leonard cites Darwin’s statements that support a progressive view of evolution (93). And “Darwin’s ambiguity on progress was significant. Conservatives used the Darwin who promised progress to defend the social status quo.... Progressives used the Darwin who promised mere change to reject the status quo and to argue that reform was necessary” (93).

Beyond that, Progressives really preferred an evolutionary process that “[made] leaps”—as advocated then by T. H. Huxley (94) or more recently by Stephen Jay Gould (“punctuated equilibrium”). A picture of gradual change was not ideal

for what Progressives wanted to achieve. “The problem was that natural selection was wasteful, slow, unprogressive, and inhumane. The solution was social selection, which improved upon nature” (100).

Ironically, these Darwinists were advocating a form of “intelligent design,” along the lines of the domestication and breeding of plants and animals. “Artificial selection substituted human mastery for Darwinian drift” (103). Moreover, Progressives were looking for “not only improved efficiency but also moral improvement” (104) through heredity and environment. Eugenics would work on the genes and public policy would limit the ability of markets to tempt good people to behave badly. (The earlier assumption had been that markets constrained people and reduced bad responses to temptation.)

Leonard also describes the popularity of eugenics in the first third of the twentieth century. “[E]ugenic ideas were politically influential, culturally fashionable, and scientifically mainstream” (110). By the early 1930s, thirty states had adopted sterilization laws. The number of involuntary sterilizations peaked in the 1930s and slowed to a trickle by the 1960s, the last being performed in 1981. In all, more than sixty thousand people were involuntarily sterilized in the United States (more than half of those in California).¹⁷

One attraction for Progressives was that “uplift was socially costly. Eugenics was cheap” (117). One problem in reconciling eugenics with Darwinian thought was that “fitness” can only be “determined” retrospectively—often as a just-so story. But eugenics requires a largely *ad hoc* story based on subjective values to be implemented beforehand as policy. It “is premised on the survival of the unfit, so eugenics requires that the fittest be determined before the selective process” (119).¹⁸

This takes us back to the tension in the Progressive goals for government: make it less corrupt; make it more democratic; and give it a far larger role in the economy. Working toward any one of the goals turned out to undermine the other two (49). In practice, “more democratic” was sacrificed. For example, voter turnout dropped everywhere (from 80 percent in 1896 to less than 50 percent in 1924 [51]), but more dramatically in the South with Jim Crow.

What was the Progressive response? “Many progressives turned away ... others justified” it (50). Woodrow Wilson said blacks could not handle freedom, were “unschooled in self control,” lacked prudence, were lazy and aggressive (50). They should not be encouraged or even allowed to vote because it helped the status quo. Leonard quotes the sociologist Edward A. Ross: “One man, one vote does not make Sambo equal to Socrates” (50). Something classist rather than racist came from the economist Irving Fisher: “The world consists of two classes—the educated and the ignorant—and it is essential for progress that the former should be allowed to dominate the latter” (53).

This points to a broader dilemma for the Progressives. Is charity a benefit to recipients and society? Quoting Edward Ross, charity is “a shelter under which idiots and cretins have crept and bred” (123). Opposition to (effective) charity always seems at least a bit strange. Sometimes, opposition arises from harm to one’s self-interest, as in opposition to vouchers or charity in support of K-12 scholarships for the poor. Or charity can be criticized as ineffective for the individuals it purports to help. It can be criticized for having monetary costs that exceed its benefits. For eugenicists, the concerns were not the benefits for individuals or the monetary cost to society, but the larger social costs of allowing deficient people to live—and worse yet, to breed.

Leonard devotes chapter 8 to Progressive ideas of inferiority—broadly defined. Then, he applies those principles to particular subgroups: immigrants and other “unproductive people” in chapter 9 and women in chapter 10. “The Progressive Era catalog of inferiority was so extensive that virtually any cause could locate some threat to American racial integrity” (129).

Aside from whatever threat they posed to racial integrity, all of them were considered a labor-market problem because they were willing to work for less. This led to concerns that inferiors would cause a “race to the bottom.” Those with lower productivity could compete with higher productivity by offering to work for lower wages. As such, Progressive economists led the charge to restrict immigration (143). Immigration plummeted during this time period—ironic, given the dedication of the Statue of Liberty in 1886 (141). Certainly, the diffuse benefits and concentrated costs of freer trade and immigration always make it somewhat challenging to argue for fewer restrictions. But the larger issue in the Progressive Era was the argument that “hereditary inferiority threatened both the American workingman and American racial integrity” (130).¹⁹

The “inferiors” were saddled with pejoratives, labor restrictions, and even sexual sterilization (161). They were “unemployable” even though they wanted to work but at wages deemed unacceptable by the elites. They were “parasites” because they did not earn enough to support themselves and “served only to drag down the wages of their betters” (131). The disabled were easy to target and animus was directed along racial lines, particularly against immigrants from Asia and Eastern Europe (133–38). On the one hand, the inferiors were pitied or hated; on the other hand, they were feared for their impact on labor-market outcomes.

Concerns about “race suicide” also led to a variety of restrictions in civil liberties. But what was the best way to lock the inferiors out of the labor market? The cleanest method was a minimum wage: a practical and “efficient method zeroed in on what all inferiors shared in common, low labor productivity... [The minimum wage] identified inferior workers by idling them.” From there, they could

be moved to institutions or labor camps; immigrants could retire or return to their former country; and women could go back home (139–40). “These reformers saw the removal of the least productive not as a cost of the minimum wage but as positive benefit to society ... protecting American wages and Anglo-Saxon racial integrity” (161). In a word, the minimum wage was embraced to do harm to undesirables and to improve society.²⁰

Women were another target. They were 45 percent of professional employment in 1910, but, between 1909 and 1919, forty states enacted laws to restrict working hours for women and fifteen states imposed minimum wages for women (169). The Progressives debated whether women were inferior or merely weaker, but they were generally not fond of their participation in the labor force.

Conclusion

“Eugenics and race science were not pseudosciences in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era. They were sciences, and Progressivism was, first and foremost, an attitude about the proper relationship of science (personified in the scientific expert) to the state, and of the state to the economy” (190). Thankfully, science corrected itself, eventually, but much destruction occurred because of those errors. A sober look at the science of the time should encourage humility toward one’s faith in the practice of science (and its applications), even as one strives for and embraces the ideals of Science.²¹

It was not only Progressives who held these views on science and race, but “the progressives command the historian’s attention, because they prevailed... Eugenics and race science are today discredited. But the progressive vision of how to govern scientifically under industrial capitalism lives on” (xiii–xiv). Even “if many of their names are unfamiliar today, the progressives changed everything, permanently altering the course of America’s economy and its public life” (ix). Whatever their mix of science and ideology, the Progressive Era reformers, and their work, were profoundly illiberal. We should remember the era’s assault on economic liberties, as well as the elite’s attack on political and civil liberties.

Notes

1. For an article-length summary of the book, see Thomas Leonard, “Retrospectives: Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19 (Fall 2005): 207–24.
2. This optimism also connects to eschatology, where postmillennialism was a dominant view (15). For example, *The Christian Century* received its new name in 1900 in recognition of this hopeful era. World War I and World War II were discouraging for this optimistic view in general terms. In the economic and political realms, realism and cynicism would not flower in the United States until the 1960s and 1970s.
3. See David Beito’s terrific book, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890–1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), for a history of these voluntary organizations; their impact on civil society; and how they were crowded out by government programs.
4. In *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (New York: Regnery Gateway, 1994), Marvin Olasky describes the effectiveness of charitable and governmental efforts that relied on certain principles. Dissatisfaction with the scale of successful private efforts—and the belief that government could be just as effective with larger efforts—led to the embrace of government as a primary mechanism for trying to help the poor.
5. In *Turn Neither to the Right nor to the Left: A Thinking Christian’s Guide to Politics and Public Policy* (Greenville, SC: Alertness Books, 2003), I use a framework of means and ends to analyze various approaches to government and an array of public policies. Simply said: When is government a biblical and practical means to godly ends?
6. Later economists were embarrassed by this historical episode—one catalyst for casting economics as more of a science, the move toward mathematic tools and modeling, and a more objective approach to analysis (15). After the Progressive Era, Keynesianism still envisioned a significant role for government, so economists still had plenty of work within government. Since the 1960s, the faith of economists in the efficacy of government has generally continued to fade, as macroeconomics moved from Keynesianism to the New Classical/New Keynesian debate; as socialism was revealed to be an abject failure; as the war on poverty performed well below expectations; and as public-choice economics and Austrian economics gained prominence.
7. Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900–1916* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 74. Kolko also provides the data to argue that mergers “declined sharply after 1901 ... [and were] largely restricted to a minority of the dominant American industries” (18–19). In fact, the number of manufacturing firms increased by 29 percent from 1899–1909 (26). He concludes: “Mergers were not particularly formidable and successful, and surely were incapable of exerting control over competitors within their own industries” (28). Kolko also

documents failed attempts to form voluntary cartels in many key industries—steel, oil, automotives, agricultural machinery, phones, copper, meat packing, and life insurance. Firms had a strong incentive to collude, but without government assistance, there was not enough ability to keep cartels together.

8. Kolko, *Triumph of Conservatism*, 3.
9. Leonard says that Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* was their bible and manifesto (60).
10. Helen Andrews points to the Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1854 and argues that the move away from patronage led to the growth of government and increased shenanigans by elites. "Civil servants who felt they owed their jobs to no one and nothing but their own merit would be independent, which was also to say impervious to checks and balances" (25). Government grew in size after World War I—in part because "the public had come to trust that government was full of people who knew what they were doing.... It was a self-perpetuating dynamic.... A complicated budget ... demanded more intelligence ... and once you've hired a cadre of clever men, why not get the most out of them?" (27) Helen Andrews, "The New Ruling Class," *Hedgehog Review* 18 (Summer 2016): 20–34.
11. Over the years, Progressives and their intellectual cousins have made various arguments that the market is "inefficient." See, for example, Thorsten Veblen's "conspicuous consumption"; John Kenneth Galbraith's view of advertising as wasteful; and in recent days, Senator Bernie Sanders' complaint about too many brands of deodorant.
12. This is a terrific example of Robert Higgs' thesis in *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)—that crisis (in various forms) results in the growth of government, both during and after the crisis.
13. To a contemporary mind, it is exceedingly difficult to imagine the participation of Social Gospel types in this worldview and policy preference. But such was the weight of progress, science, and the common good. See Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) for documentation on the promotion of eugenics from the pulpit. There were a few voices in the wilderness—for example, G. K. Chesterton's "Eugenics and Other Evils"—but those arguments did not carry the day.
14. In one sense, we have traveled a long way since the Progressive Era. Elites still wield much power, but the current (2016) presidential campaign has revealed a deep and growing distrust of elites, especially within government. At the same time, many of the same people support the (more moderate) policy preferences of the Progressives—most notably, relatively restrictive voter ID laws, trade protectionism, and tightly restricted immigration.

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15. Brain size is more difficult to measure than head size, but scientists also focused on brain size and its correlation with intelligence. The cause of brain size is not heredity but diet and environment.
16. Later in chapter 6, Leonard devotes a section to Darwinism, social Darwinism, and *laissez-faire* economics. Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner were labeled social Darwinists even though “neither was particularly Darwinist” (99). Despite thousands of scholars and scientists proudly self-identifying as eugenicists, Leonard notes that no prominent person has ever self-identified as a social Darwinist. “This should have been a clue about the label’s use as rhetoric, epithet, and pejorative, rather than reality” (99).
17. D. Eric Schansberg, “Hoosier Eugenics: When It’s Bad to Be First,” *The Indiana Policy Review* (Winter 2017), forthcoming. Indiana was the first state to pass a eugenics law.
18. One of the most staggering quotes on eugenics comes from Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, writing in *Buck v. Bell* (1927). Carrie Buck was a seventeen-year-old girl who was forcibly sterilized at the Virginia Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-Minded in Lynchburg because she had already been pregnant and her mother was mentally ill. Holmes writes: “It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.... Three generations of imbeciles are enough.”
19. David and Linda Beito explore this theme in the context of Progressive housing reforms in “The ‘Lodger Evil’ and the Transformation of Progressive Housing Reform, 1890–1930,” *Independent Review* 20 (Spring 2016): 485–508.
20. For a study in the use of labor law during this time period, with the explicit aim to benefit some at the expense of others—in particular, interest groups like labor unions at the expense of African-Americans—see David Bernstein, *Only One Place of Redress: African Americans, Labor Regulations, and the Courts from Reconstruction to the New Deal* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). In *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), Paul Moreno describes the Progressive era as “the nadir” of American race relations. In chapters 3 and 4, he discusses labor unions and labor law during the Progressive Era and its continuation into the New Deal.
21. The poor record of science on these questions has led to some allergies toward any discussion of the relevant topics. For a helpful discussion on race and society, see Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); and Nicholas Wade, “Race Has a Biological Basis. Racism Does Not,” *Wall Street Journal* (June 23, 2014). For a wonderful primer of writings in the classical liberal tradition on race and immigration, see Jonathan Bean, *Race and Liberty in America: The Essential Reader* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009)—particularly chapter 3, focusing on this time period.