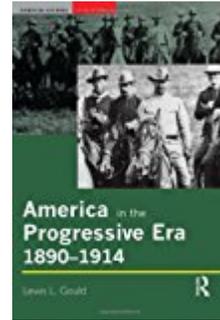


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Lewis L. Gould. *America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1914*. New York and Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001. xiv + 132 pp. \$11.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-35671-9.

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Creating Modern America

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The cowboy in the White House and the muckraking reporter from *McClure's Magazine* shared little except a belief that the government had a responsibility to make the United States a more equitable place in which to live and work. Theodore Roosevelt and Ida Tarbell are but a few of the Progressive leaders featured in Lewis L. Gould's *America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1914*. By establishing the domestic agenda of the United States for the remainder of the twentieth century, the Progressives are among the most important reformers in American history. Gould has produced an excellent narrative of their history.

Relying upon secondary sources and the memoirs of leading reformers, Gould opens his book by identifying the roots of Progressive change. As 1890 rolled around, the belief that a weak government provided the best solution to social problems was slowly being replaced by a desire for regulation to address the ills of society. In the depression year of 1893, Coxey's Army of the unemployed scared middle-class voters while President Grover Cleveland's choice to support wealthy George Pullman rather than his starving, striking workers offended many others. Meanwhile, women continued to lobby for the vote and against alcohol. Americans looked in horror at Jacob Riis's photographs of slum life and vowed to clean up the cities while others read about John D. Rockefeller and de-

termined to end business monopolies. Life in the South worsened for African Americans following the Supreme Court's endorsement of "separate, but equal" in 1896. In that same year, the pro-regulatory Populist Party aroused the electorate but the more moderate William McKinley took the White House. Although the nation did not grasp radical change, more and more Americans believed that the system needed to be changed and that peaceful means would accomplish this end.

With McKinley in office and the country soon absorbed by war, the years from 1897 to 1901 are not generally regarded as part of the true period of Progressivism. Gould argues that this impression is misleading. With the return of prosperity after four years of depression, Americans could attempt to make societal changes without risking their economic well-being. Instead of being filled with despair about the future, Americans envisioned good times ahead. Progressives especially believed that human nature was essentially good and that government could solve society's problems to create a better world. This sense of possibility and purpose gained steam with the emergence of the United States as a world power in 1898. The quick victory over Spain seemed to promise that the blessings of democracy would be extended around the globe, but ugly fighting with Filipino nationalists ate away at the desire for additional possessions. At home, the drive to regulate the growth of big business and improve government efficiency proved

popular at both the statewide and national levels. Once established in the presidency, the charismatic Roosevelt embraced a broad program of regulation and the Taft Administration continued on this path. Progressivism was at its height.

It began to decline under Woodrow Wilson. A Southerner who thought that segregation was beneficial, he showed little interest in social justice and his New Freedom did not include racial reform. World War I brought a few more Progressive victories as Prohibition and women's suffrage passed, but the spirit of reform died by 1918. The war had moved the country back to its essentially conservative base. Gould concludes the book with a collection of twenty primary documents, a chronology, a glossary, and a who's who of reformers and their opponents. An annotated bibliography guides students to all of the major primary and secondary sources that cover this era.

Although Gould has masterfully condensed an enormous amount of information, his book does contain a serious omission. Gould notes immigration restrictions in

this era but connects anti-immigrant legislation with a demand to reduce the number of people coming into the country from Southern and Eastern Europe. On the West Coast, in particular, racial animosities sparked demands for controls upon Asian immigration. This book needs at least a mention of the "yellow peril." Gould should note that Roosevelt, perhaps the most well-known and certainly the most influential of the Progressives, responded to the demands of a prejudiced public by negotiating a "Gentlemen's Agreement" with the Japanese government in 1907 to halt the influx of Japanese immigrants. Additionally, historians of Latin America and the Caribbean might quibble with Gould's claim that Americans drew back from expansionist policy in 1900.

Despite these shortcomings, Gould has created a book that is likely destined to become a classroom classic. He presents a balanced look at both the successes and failures of Progressivism. The rich collection of documents and guide to further reading will appeal to instructors while students will appreciate both the book's price and its short length.

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