

The Progressive Era

- Following the War and what is generally seen as the Reconstruction period the country would be fundamentally reformed to be far more centralized and aggressive abroad
- Progressivism was initially based in Puritan or Yankee religious traditions but became increasingly secularized
- The Progressive era is generally defined as the time frame from 1890 (populism) to WWI but this represented the high point of a political shift that was gradual and core beliefs that were well established prior to that time.
- Religious and cultural conflict became increasingly prominent and voting patterns were very closely aligned with ethno-religious cultures
- As WWI approached the political alignment between Germanic and Eastern European immigrants to the Northeast and Midwest with Yankee or Puritan populations, that was critical in determining the outcome of the Civil War, would fracture

Progressive Vision and Theology

- As progressivism evolved from its religious roots throughout the 19th and 20th century into modern neo-liberalism, it still retained many of the characteristics of a religion along with the collective vision for society
 - Coming out of the failed War of Southern Independence the vision became clearer and seemed achievable coupled with the rapid advance of human technology
 - It also in many ways became more dangerous in its ability to promote “good wars” and turn conflicts originally based on political and economic objectives into moral and religious crusades
 - *“With surprising consistency, though to varying degrees over time and with shifting emphases, Americans have been habitually drawn to language that is redemptive, apocalyptic, and expansive. Americans have long experienced and articulated a sense of urgency, of hanging on the precipice of great change, of living in the “fifth act” of history, as poet and philosopher George Berkeley famously wrote about the emerging American empire in the eighteenth century. They have fallen easily into the Manichean habit of dividing the world into darkness and light, Evil and Good, past and future, Satan and Christ. They have seen themselves as a progressive, redemptive force, waging war in the ranks of Christ’s army, or have imagined themselves even as Christ Himself, liberating those in bondage and healing the afflicted”* Historian Richard Gamble – Hillsdale
- American journey became intertwined with Biblical history, images, and language which developed a sort of dual meaning
 - Historian Ernest Lee Tuveson observed in Redeemer Nation, *“they considered themselves in fact as advancing to the next step beyond the Reformation—the actual reign of the spirit of Christ, the amalgamation of the City of the World into the City of God.”*

Progressive Eschatology (End Time Beliefs)

- Progressive Christian (Congregationalists, Northern protestant groups)
 - The nearly universal belief here was progressive millennialism
 - The new eschatology of the time, which was most influenced by Salisbury rector Daniel Whitby, saw the continued progress of the church leading to a steady improvement of man and society gradually leading to the millennium as the culmination of Christian history without supernatural intervention
- Fundamentalist
 - Developing Premillennial Dispensational theology that would be dominant in American Evangelical churches by the mid 20th century (Initially formed in the North – to be covered separately)
- Progressive – Secular
 - There was a secular eschatology that was (and arguably still is) based around Hegel with the main difference from Progressive Christian being that one was Germanic and the other Anglo-Saxon
 - In a practical sense this was virtually the same as the Progressive Christian eschatology
- Historical Protestant Orthodoxy (So Baptist, So Methodist, Church of Christ, etc.)
 - These followed an amillennial Interpretation representing Augustinian beliefs
 - “the end of the world is considered inevitable, since the world and its history are finite and God is infinite. After the coming of Christ, the world moves toward its end, and the return of Christ itself is seen as taking place “in the last days.” Christianity teaches that before the Second Coming there will be a general apostasy in mankind, Nations will turn away from Christ and his Church and rely only on their own strength (humanism)...” Alexander Dugin
- End Times, paranormal, occult
 - This time saw a great increase of interest in all these topics that didn’t parallel earlier history
 - Séances , Wiji boards, tarot card readings and the like were very common and were big sellers

Progressivism's Demographic Limitations

- This sort of thinking didn't make inroads into the Evangelical South until at least the 1890's and then only slowly after that
 - It was, however, the belief system of the Northern elite or political class and was overwhelmingly represented in politics and all forms of literature and media
- Appeal consistently based in belief in ethno religious superiority
 - *"I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth."* John Adams
- Following continued to be limited almost entirely to northern Protestantism and principally to those of puritan or Anglo-Saxon decent
 - Actively opposed by Catholics and high church Lutherans in the North

	Denominational Adherents as percent of population 1906								
Region	Cong	Episc	Pres	Bapt	Meth	Catholic	Luth	Total	Not-Lit Prot
New England	6.44%	3.02%	0.26%	4.64%	3.86%	36.28%	0.78%	55.28%	18.22%
Midwest and West	1.57%	1.09%	3.06%	2.96%	7.92%	16.86%	6.47%	39.93%	16.60%
Middle	0.65%	3.12%	4.95%	3.32%	7.54%	25.58%	3.92%	49.08%	19.58%
Upper South and Border	0.19%	0.91%	3.64%	18.50%	13.27%	6.99%	0.93%	44.43%	36.51%
Deep South	0.08%	0.60%	2.23%	25.68%	17.06%	7.29%	0.64%	53.57%	45.64%
Total	1.27%	1.60%	3.22%	9.30%	9.87%	17.35%	3.66%	46.28%	25.26%
	Note: Children not counted in church affiliation								

Social Darwinism

- During the time period after the war, the primary external influence on progressive Christianity shifted away from Transcendentalism to Scientific Naturalism and Social Darwinism
 - Idea of Natural Rights gradually faded
 - This left the concept of individual rights in relation to collective society as nothing more than something that collective humanity can bestow and take away
- Social Darwinism, while conceptually linked to Charles Darwin, cannot be specifically attributed to him
 - When projected outside of the realm of biology it infers that life is driven by mechanical and deterministic processes and that outcomes are inevitable
 - General concept is that good decisions yield good outcomes and will become dominant
 - When applied to groups or cultures, however, social Darwinism becomes extremely dangerous as it provides justification for one group to forcibly dominate, reshape, and even eradicate another group
 - In the context of progressive Christianity during this time period, it became justification for cultural eradication that expanded to an international level
 - *“If we do not like the survival of the fittest, we have only one possible alternative, and that is the survival of the unfittest. The former is the law of civilization; the latter is the law of anti-civilization. We have our choice between the two, or we can go on, as in the past, vacillating between the two, but a third plan, the social determinism – a plan for nourishing the unfittest and yet advancing civilization, no man will ever find”.* former Episcopalian Rector and Yale faculty member William Graham Sumner 1879

Scientific Naturalism

- Scientific naturalism is a belief system that maintains that the universe and all life can be explained by deterministic mechanical natural processes (no supernatural)
 - Defined in three spatial and one time dimension
 - Became dominant in the mid to late 1800's amongst academics and elites
 - Assumed that the universe was constant and eternal – the existence of life and man remained an issue to explain which led to Darwin's theory of evolution as a final solution to God
- While providing a highly effective engineering model it hints at it's incompleteness
 - Cant explain it's existence – not compatible with change especially rapid change
 - Not compatible with free will or existence of the soul
- In the early 1800's there was still a belief in a general worldwide flood
 - This was challenged by geological evidence of sediment layers which should be consistent especially over narrow areas and there are many examples of this varying significantly
- Darwin was seen as a hero to the scientific naturalist
 - Not so comfortably with his own role – turned down offer from Karl Marx to dedicate "Le Capital" English edition to him
- Scientific Naturalism was being used to dismantle the Biblical accounts
 - Not limited to early Genesis
 - Was moving through the rest of the Old Testament and challenging the New Testament
 - Operated with little evidence (archeology, micro biology, astrophysics, etc..)

Reform Darwinism

- The conflict between Social Darwinism and any form of Christian Orthodoxy was stark and obvious. Summarized by religious historian Gregg Singer as follows:
 - *“It is obvious this could only have been uttered by one who had completely dismissed from his thinking the Christian view of man, and this was the case with Sumner, He denied that man was created by God in his own image and instead that he is completely the product of blind natural (evolutionary) forces”*
 - *“That man had no real control over his own destiny, but is swept along by natural and cultural forces over which he has no control, and in the face of which, he is helpless. This was also true of the social order of which he is apart “*
- Alternate form of Social Darwinism developed to bridge the gap with the developing idea of a “Social Gospel”
 - associated with Lester Frank Ward (father of sociology – solid Puritan background) and led to the development of the welfare movement which started to take root not long after the war and kept expanding and being integrated into the government
 - Both were similar in looking at outcomes as being deterministic but the reformers sought to intervene in natural outcomes which would control the *“evils of evolution”* and would inevitably drive society towards collectivism
 - *“In this great struggle (for survival) brute force played a diminishing part, and mind an increasing one. Low cunning and animal sagacity, though very prominent, were more and more supplanted by more refined and subtle manifestations of the same psychic principle. This advance was greatly accelerated by the growth of institutions and the establishment of codes of conduct requisite to life of collectivity. The rude animal methods were intolerable by natural selection, if not otherwise, society discarded them.” Lester Frank Ward*

Reform Darwinism - Historical Interpretation

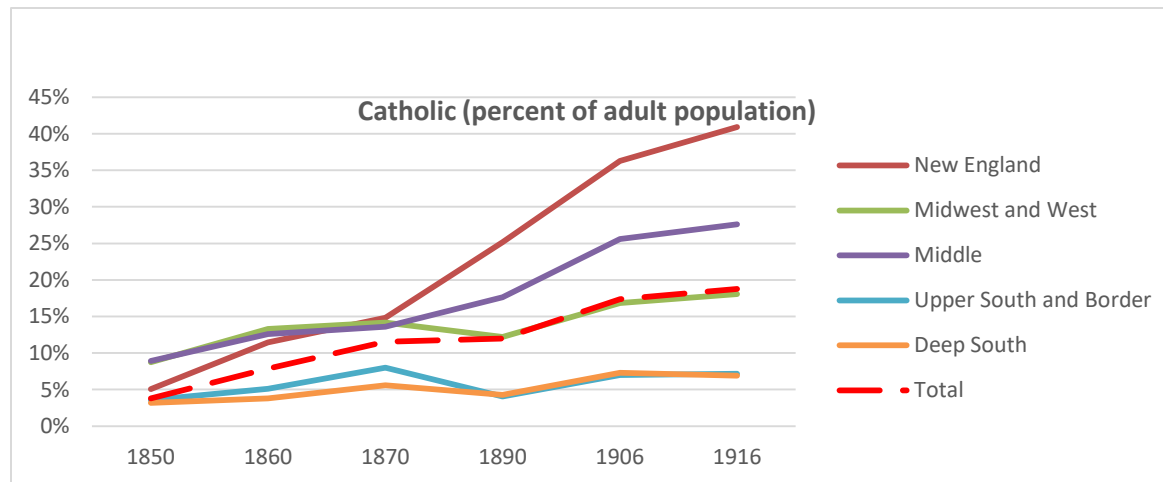
- View of history characterized by continuous improvement and perfection was carried over into their interpretation history
- Literary and cultural commentator Sacvan Bercovitch, who is considered a foremost scholar on puritan America, described this as follows:
 - *“they incorporated Bible history into the American experience—they substituted a regional for a biblical past, consecrated the American present as a movement from promise to fulfillment, and translated fulfillment from its meaning within a closed system of sacred history into a metaphor of limitless secular improvement”*
- Progressive interpretations of history and religion were taught and propagated through a seminary system that emphasized social service and an interdenominational federation

Religious Voting Patterns

- During this period there were clear regional voting patterns but there were studies conducted to determine religious voting patterns in areas where there were mixed Puritan / Protestant Evangelical and Other groups
 - Other groups were largely Catholic but also included a significant sampling of Lutherans
 - This was captured by author Paul Kleppner in “Cross of Cultures”
 - Data was taken primarily from the Midwest
- In the North, Midwest, and West Catholic and Liturgical voters would vote almost entirely Democratic while Northern Evangelicals would vote entirely Republican
 - Scandinavian Lutherans who started to arrive en masse in the 1890’s and settled principally in Minnesota and the Dakotas were less consistent and some accepted the activist position held by Northern Protestants
 - *“That data suggests an explanative hypothesis. Despite the religious heterogeneity of the social groups supporting each of the major parties, it is possible to abstract an important central tendency. Those religious groups offering strong support to the Republican Party were more pietistic, or evangelical, in their orientation than those offering similar support to the Democratic... Such a proposition brings perspectives in shaping party loyalties. Historians have paid but scant attention to that role. They have attempted to explain the structure of partisan affiliations without considering their relationship to other structures within the social system.”*

Election Strategy and Participation

- Elections in this time period weren't won by attracting swing voters because there generally weren't any
 - They were won by increasing the size of the demographic block and then getting them to turn out to vote
- Voter participation was high by modern standards
 - Because of the heavy immigration of Catholics from Germany, Ireland, and now Italy and Southern Europe, along with a smaller but steady growth of Germanic Lutherans (conservative Missouri Synod in particular), the Democrats were winning the demographic race
- White Southern Evangelicals were solidly Democratic while the Black Southern vote was split but the region as a whole was solidly Democrat and not seriously contested



The Catholic population made up principally of Irish and German immigrants in the North were nearing a majority in New England, the home of puritanism, by WWI. In the Midwest they help regional enclaves and were the largest single grouping.

Populism and Party Realignment

- As the result of the populace movement both parties realigned, significantly distancing themselves from their traditional base supporters and small government politics largely became a concept of a past era
 - Provided the Republican Party a way out of what would otherwise have been a mathematical vice that would have relegated them to permanent minority party status
- After the Democrats won the presidency (Grover Cleveland) and both houses in 1892 it appeared as if they had won the demographic race to control the country
 - The Democrats were the sound money free market party of that time period but that was to change. The Depression/Panic of 1894 caused large midterm losses
 - contraction naturally resolved itself in about 18 months, as always happened prior to the 1930's, but the damage was done
 - The Republicans sensing an opening moved away from support of Pietist blue laws to broaden their appeal made possible by populist factions that primarily impacted the Democrats
- Populist Movement splinters the Democrats
 - Consisted largely of farmers who had consistently fallen behind economically
 - developed around the support of looser monetary policy and currency expansion taking the form of a bi-metallic system with silver
 - The Wizard of Oz is a parody of this
 - William Jennings Bryant rose to lead the progressive Populace Party and eventually took over the Democratic Party by 1900 (sound money vs. loose money)

The Rise of Populism

- Starting in the late 1880's populists formed three groups
 - northern contingent (northern Alliance – mostly Union veterans),
 - southern contingent (Southern Alliance – mostly Confederate veterans
 - smaller black contingent (Southern Farmers Alliance and Cooperative Union)
- The three groups didn't necessarily get along well do to regional differences
 - Union pensions, which was the first really large scale federal government entitlement program was a major point of contention
 - regional differences made it difficult to adapt to the Democratic Party which led to the formation of a separate Populist Party
- Bryan provided leadership needed to form a working alliance
 - Northern style Pietist from Nebraska who supported all Blue laws and was strongly anti-Catholic
 - best known for his "*Cross of Gold*" speech
 - He was not the Democratic nominee in 1904 but gained the nomination in 1908.
 - Showed a libertarian side on foreign policy, he consistently opposed US imperialism and, after having been appointed Secretary of States under the Wilson administration resigned over this issue
 - In other respects he was a solid progressive
- Tactical response of Democratic Party in the South was to position poor Whites on a higher social level than Blacks
 - Created form of Apartheid law (Jim Crow) in many areas and took measures to suppress Black vote
 - Also had the effect of suppressing poor white vote

Effect on Voter Participation

- These changes effectively created a one party system in the South through the 1960's with low participation
 - The region was severely impacted by this over the long term as the Democratic Party took the South for granted and the Republicans felt no obligation towards the South as there was no constituency there for them to appeal to
- For the next 20 years or so there were two progressive parties
 - Sound money and social conservatism became permanent minority positions
 - Also coincided with America becoming an international military power
- Voter participation dropped dramatically after this shift occurred
 - In the South voter suppression and non-competitive elections led to participation levels dropping from as high 75% in 1876 and 68% in 1880 all the way down to 50% by 1900 and 38% in 1904
 - Outside of the South, Liturgical voters dropped out on a large scale with no party left to represent them. Since then 60% for a presidential election is considered high (prior to machine era)

Turnout rates in Presidential Elections outside of the South	
1896	78.3
1900	71.6
1904	64.7
1908	67.9
1910	55.9
1916	59.7

Economics / Demographics

- North / Midwest
 - Economically and politically dominated by those of Anglo-Saxon / Puritan decent
 - Large number of new money Gentry created by the Civil War (military suppliers)
 - Nominal religious affiliation of this group was Congregationalist / Unitarian / Universalist with some Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Baptists
 - Industrial workforce made of first and second generation Irish, Germanic, Eastern European, and increasing number of Southern European immigrants who were predominantly Catholic
 - Virtually no ethnic minorities prior to 1910 and Indian population had been effectively displaced
 - Rural population in Midwest made up of Germanic immigrants (middle class), Yankees especially in the more northern areas, and an increasing number of Scandinavian immigrants starting app 1890.
- West
 - Still had a small and isolated population
 - The coastal areas were populated mainly with people from New England or Midwest
 - The climate in these areas was generally advantageous and comfortable
 - Apart from coastal areas and a few rivers and lakes, the entire area is a high desert with little rainfall and drastic temperature swings
 - This area couldn't be effectively utilized until large scale earth moving equipment became common
 - Management of water was the initial challenge
 - What settlement occurred was principally related to mining and was diverse but also isolated

Economics / Demographics – The South (cont..)

- The South was by far the poorest section of the country with per capita income as late as 1937 being only half of the average for the rest of the country
 - Tenant farmers and sharecroppers, made up 53 percent of all Southern farm families both black and white (higher percentage were black but higher number were white)
 - Both Blacks and Whites living in these circumstances were equally destitute
- Many causes for this – some circumstantial and other were policy driven
 - Drastic loss of working age men took several generations to normalize
 - monetary policies along with consistently depressed cotton prices
 - While the South had one third of the nation's school children during the great depression, it had only one-sixth of the educational funding
 - Because of poverty, the most capable would leave to find better opportunities elsewhere leaving the South with a greater concentration of the old and the young (Southern migration addressed separately)
 - One third of the South's population was school aged as opposed to one-fourth for the industrial states
 - There were some attempts to industrialize the South most notably by Henry Grady, who was editor of the Atlanta Constitution and leader of an investment group who attempted to attract industrial investment away from the North
 - Their success was limited however, despite significantly lower operating and plant costs because Northern interests manipulated rail rates to offset the difference

Black America prior to WWI

- Because there was only a very small Black or minority population outside of the South, the desperate southern economic conditions disproportionately impacted African-Americans
 - Eased by migration to North and West starting just prior to WWI
- As Blacks and poor whites started to compete for the same subsistence level employment, the racial situation degraded
 - With the rise of the Populist movement, poor whites voted for anti-planter and anti-Black candidates
 - When the Farmers Alliance gained strength, seven Southern states required segregated railcars
 - As the white populists challenged the establishment Democratic Party aristocrats of the time, blacks were caught between the two groups
- The low point in African-American post antebellum history came from around 1890 to 1920 and then from there very gradually improved until the mid 60's
- This was also a period of time that corresponded with reductions in foreign migration that benefitted American workers in a broad sense