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RESEARCH IN THE HISTORY OF ECONOMIC THOUGHT  
AND METHODOLOGY VOLUME 35B

# RESEARCH IN THE HISTORY OF ECONOMIC THOUGHT AND METHODOLOGY: INCLUDING A SYMPOSIUM ON NEW DIRECTIONS IN SRAFFA SCHOLARSHIP

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## NOT ALL IL-LIBERAL: ACADEMIC REFORM THOUGHT IN THE LONG PROGRESSIVE ERA

Mary O. Furner

Thomas C. Leonard's important volume provides a striking addition to our knowledge on a subject of particular relevance at a time when nationalist and populist movements across the United States and Europe are targeting immigrants as the source of myriad evils. He explores in telling detail the racial attitudes of progressive era reformers regarding subjects as diverse as immigration restriction, treatment of the mentally and physically handicapped, labor standards reform, and poor relief. Supplementing what he has written previously on the subject, his analysis adds an essential ingredient to our understanding of the underlying beliefs that informed, or actually misinformed, crucial aspects of the policy advice offered by a cross-section of academics and experts during the progressive era.<sup>1</sup> Scholars involved in the early academic professionalization of the social sciences, along with experts who staffed ad hoc government investigations such as the United States Industrial Commission, worked in research and advocacy organizations such as the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL) and the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, or led new administrative agencies such as the Children's Bureau come under his gaze.

Looking at the "long progressive era" from the 1880s through the 1910s, Leonard argues persuasively that a significant number of these influential

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knowledge makers and discourse shapers shared a belief that traits thought then to be distinctive to each of a hierarchically arranged system of ethnic and racial groups were passed from one generation to the next by heredity, perpetuating — even accentuating — supposed natural inequalities of virtue, talent, and productivity among racial groups. Transcribed in the observance of variations in skin color, the measurement of heads, the administration of intelligence tests, and the study of nonachieving families, what passed for accurate knowledge of differential traits supported fears on the part of a largely Anglo-Saxon descended elite that those “races” whose meager consumption habits and prolific sexual reproduction, contrasted with the more cultivated tastes and smaller family production of the older stock, were leading to “race suicide.” Actualized in law, he argues, these beliefs underlay the adoption of policies that prohibited immigration of “undesirables,” permitted and even mandated sterilization of “defectives” and, along with other more overt forms of discrimination, justified denying the suffrage to people of color.

Among the thinkers who held and propagated these beliefs were many whose names were well-recognized across the numerous publics engaged in building up the key public policy discourses of the period, including an influential cadre of economists who had been trained in German universities or otherwise influenced by members of the German historical school. These scholars then founded the American Economic Association in 1885 on an anti-laissez-faire platform and established the first specialized departments of economics in the early publicly funded or privately endowed research universities. Key members of Leonard’s focus group are the University of Wisconsin’s Richard T. Ely, John R. Commons, Charles McCarthy, and Frederick Jackson Turner; the University of Michigan’s Henry Carter Adams and Charles Horton Cooley; the Wharton School’s Simon Nelson Patten and Scott Nearing; Columbia University’s John Bates Clark, Richmond Mayo-Smith, and E.R.A. Seligman; Harvard’s Frank Taussig and William Z. Ripley; Yale’s Arthur Hadley and Henry Farnam; Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson and Frank Fetter; the University of Chicago’s economists Edward Bemis, J. Laurence Laughlin, and Thorstein Veblen and sociologists Albion Small and Charles Henderson; Cornell’s Jeremiah Jenks; and Stanford’s — later Wisconsin’s — E. A. Ross. Female reformers such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Francis Willard, and Grace Abbott receive Leonard’s scrutiny, as do National Bureau of Economic Research founder Wesley Clair Mitchell and AALL’s long-time leaders Paul U. Kellogg and Irving Fisher. Religious leaders Walter Rauschenbusch and John Ryan are included, along with journalists Jacob Riis and Ida Tarbell and, among the political leaders of the era, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Thus Leonard’s indictment includes practically the entire panoply of those credited in much of the historiography of progressivism with leading the way toward constructive, indeed often democratic, reform.<sup>2</sup>

Leonard’s overriding purpose is to demonstrate that nearly all of these influential figures promoted a form of pseudo-scientific racialism based on their

acceptance of three related concepts that were central to eugenics: “the primacy of heredity, human hierarchy rather than human equality, and the necessarily illiberal idea that human heredity must be socially controlled” (Leonard, 2016, p. 109). The evidence for the endemic progressive commitment to eugenics comes in the final six chapters of the book, grouped under the heading “The Progressive Paradox.” But as a framing structure for his exposure of the progressive reformers’ commitment to strands of eugenics, he first offers four chapters under the heading “The Progressive Ascendancy.” These chapters present his interpretation of progressivism as an ascendant political movement and explore the broader ideology behind it, which, he argues, should be regarded as essentially “illiberal.” Thus Leonard makes it a key goal of his study to overturn a widely accepted view of progressives, in the era he studies and in important recent historiography, as more democratic and egalitarian in their aspirations and more interventionist on behalf of the poor than those conservative thinkers and politicians whose influence and policy arguments they opposed.<sup>3</sup>

As is well-known, historians over past decades have offered a number of conflicting interpretations of the progressive movement, along with a wide range of “takes” on the key qualities, commitments, and roles that marked their collective identity. An early rendition, led by so-called progressive historians such as Turner and Charles Beard, situated progressivism as the latest episode of an conflict endemic throughout the nation’s history between the people and the interests, between the American democrat and the American plutocrat, in which progressive activists fought for democrat reforms that would empower the people politically against their increasingly wealthy and powerful oppressors. But for the successors of Beard and Turner, among them so-called consensus historians writing during the circle-the-wagons era of the early Cold War, the notion of an eternal conflict gave way. Richard Hofstadter deployed a sociological and psychological analysis that gave the progressives an identity marking them as rather pathetic victims of status anxiety produced by their declining position as members of a middle class caught between angry workers and wealthy capitalists. Political scientist Louis Hartz, in turn, struck a retributive blow against the progressive historians’ conflict thesis by insisting that a single ideology had been controlling over all of U.S. history, an “irrational Lockeanism” underlying a shared consensus across class lines based on a commitment to individualism and private property. Political fights became then merely scuffles between small-propertied and large-propertied interests, and progressives were nothing more than sanctimonious boss busting, trust busting individualists seeking, under the best construction of their motives, to overcome political corruption.

Developments since the 1950s derailed both of these approaches. The “discovery of republicanism” as a founding ideology by Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, and others created a persistent tension between a liberal economy achieved by freeing the market and a just society achieved through politics and

informed by the benign intentions of an independent and virtuous citizenry. Also across mid-twentieth century analysis came the incorporation of methodological currents such as Weberian/Parsonian sociology, structural functionalism, modernization theory, insights regarding hegemony drawn from Marx and Antonio Gramsci, social control and organization theories, and cultural constructions interrogating the roles of race, gender, and culture in the political and ideological formation.

The "linguistic turn" of the 1970s and 1980s, which continues, and is present in Leonard's work, encouraged a turn away from then the dominant "new" social history and a return to the study of ideas and ideology. This was not mainly, as in the intellectual history of old, aimed to trace the movement of ideas from one great mind to the next, but rather to excavate and historicize the ways that historical subjects created discourses, invented vocabularies of analysis, and constructed or deconstructed meanings. In this spirit in 1982 came a key intervention by historian Rodgers (1982), who offered sage advice to scholars studying progressivism and attempting to understand the progressives.<sup>4</sup> Stop looking for essences, he counseled; stop trying to figure paradigmatically "who" the progressives were and "what" they stood for. Attend instead to the issues that they framed as needing action and the discourses that they invented and shared, both among their own circles of experts and with a broader range of publics. Unlike the unitary public sphere that Habermas (1962) had initially posited as the container of debates regarding what the state should do, the study of progressivism in this manner, extending until this day, required excavation of a more complex social and intellectual order. It aimed to seek the multiple identities of, the varied meanings created by, and the modes of communication within both dominant and subaltern publics: women, racial and ethnic minorities, diverse elements of the working classes, socialists, anarchists, people who inhabited diverse sexualities, and the like.

At the start, Leonard's *Illiberal Reformers* transgresses the search for multiple identities by placing all of his progressives in a single discourse aimed to discredit the philosophy and eliminate the policy legacy of what they styled as an oppressive regime of laissez-faire. After adopting Daniel Rodgers' suggestion that progressives created a "discourse of dissent," Leonard essentializes the "shared, recognizable, historically specific set of understandings" that united them. Thus, embracing a collectivism that elevated the importance of the nation over its particular parts, he claims, progressives condemned the individualism that lay at the core of traditional Smithian/Ricardian liberalism. They extolled efficiency at the expense of liberty. They adapted to their own purposes the antimonopoly rhetoric also mounted by populist political movements of the day against the emergence of the all-powerful trusts.

Leonard's argument for the progressives' assault on philosophical and operational individualism, presented in Chapter 2, "Turning Illiberal," introduces an intentional conflation in the meanings of the term "illiberal" that runs throughout his study. On the one hand, illiberal — intended in this meaning as

"il-liberal" — describes the progressive economists' rejection of the economic individualism, earlier enshrined in an ascendant mid-nineteenth-century laissez-faire economics, which they proclaimed was immoral and unworkable in their industrialized, urbanized, consolidated present. That outworn Smithian faith had relied upon the workings of an unseen hand to convert each individual's selfish pursuit of private gain into the collective good. Leonard's progressives rejected this dogma as an outdated guide to policy in an era of increasing economic interdependence. Advocating a turn to increased governmental regulation, they became state builders seeking to manage the functioning of the economy through bureaucratic controls delivered by an administrative state populated by experts. With Lester Ward and others like him, they personified society as an organism capable of being guided by a "collective mind" whose intentions experts could best discern.

Yet at other times for Leonard the signifier "illiberal" no longer refers to the act of historicizing the rules for an economy's workings around changes in its technologies, organization, and structure for the production and distribution of income and wealth. Rather, it encompasses the progressives' adoption of an entirely *ahistorical* view of humanity's organization as they adopted and lobbied for acceptance of a theory of radically unequal human traits and abilities inscribed upon a fixed hierarchy of racial groups and dictated by the supposed inescapable determinant of heredity. Here, as elsewhere, an intention to recover a diverse set of complex and evolving discourses has given way to a practice of probing selected texts for the supposed essentials of the "progressive mind." Further essences of that collective mindset are revealed in Chapter 3, "Becoming Experts," where the efforts of first-generation academic economists to define, professionalize, and control the disciplinary boundaries of their field seem unitary, failing to recognize sufficiently the methodological and substantive debates generating pressures from within the discipline. Through one such instance of intra-disciplinary conflict, economists opposed to preaching the benefits of bigger government forced removal of a divisive statement of the purpose for its professional organization that had branded the dominant laissez-faire school as outdated, impolitic, and immoral. Leonard glosses this division entirely.

Following this, in Chapter 4, "Efficiency in Business and Public Administration," we learn that the economic progressives' diagnosis of the ills of the American economy found it uncoordinated, plagued by wasteful competition, and in need of the skilled and (following Taylor) the top-down scientific management that only experts could provide. The cure, in a word, was efficiency, an attribute they often found in the gigantic industrial combinations of the era which were, irrationally in their view, opposed by the popular movement against the trusts. The appeal of efficiency also, we are told, propelled consideration of a variety of ways to deter immigration by supposed less productive arrivals from eastern and southern Europe. In one such discussion, over whether setting a national minimum wage would slow the flood by rendering

the less able unemployable, economists' differences are noted (Leonard, 2016, pp. 158–165).<sup>5</sup> Leonard fashions those who favored it — Ely, the *Survey*'s Paul Kellogg, Father John Ryan, Charles Henderson, Albert Wolfe,<sup>6</sup> and Henry Seager<sup>7</sup> among others — as “left progressives,” whereas their most influential opponents — J. Laurence Laughlin, Arthur Hadley, and Frank Fetter — become “right progressives.” Here as elsewhere essentializing the commitment to efficiency has broken down.

But an essentializing tendency returns in an erroneous account of the differences between the Roosevelt and Wilson positions on the trust question. There were differences not sufficiently revealed here as well among scholars and reformers regarding the implications for the public good of concentration of ownership. For the firms deemed to be natural monopolies, leading historical economists such as Adams and Ely advocated strict public control of rate charges or outright public ownership. This category extended, they argued, to all that class of businesses employing well-established technology and offering services that benefitted from economies of scale. For Ely and Adams, this included public utilities and transportation facilities but not manufacturing or farming, which they deemed yielded constant or decreasing returns. But Cornell economist Jenks (1894) argued to the contrary that capital-intensive manufacturing firms also enjoyed significant scale economies that posed barriers to entry; yet public ownership could hardly go so far. And, happily for the public weal in his view, evidence showed that combinations typically restricted their price demands in order to extend their markets and discourage entry by potentially competing firms. Taking yet another approach to the need for state action, Yale's Hadley (1886) counseled that the public could have the benefit of concentrated capital in manufacturing if only modest changes in existing laws reassigned responsibility for industrial accidents, increased acceptance of unions and collective bargaining, and mandated public disclosure of earnings and profits as a check on price gouging of consumers.

Not well-noticed here also is that others who claimed to be progressives clearly recognized greater dangers that arose when concentration of ownership yielded monopoly power, among them capture by powerful interests of politicians on the take. Example included exposure of Rockefeller's ability to demand rebates from railroads and exorbitant profits for public utilities or railroads that won exclusive charters from corrupt government officials. These were gains from dirty dealing, not efficiency, that demanded an outright ban and criminal penalties.<sup>8</sup>

Still, following the American Political Development School's lead, Leonard contends that, in search of efficiency, the “fledgling economists...cast their lot with the administrative state,” which they believed would rationalize a depression plagued Gilded Age economy by disciplining the behavior of its key component parts through expert administration. Leonard usefully recovers the rhetorical condemnations of laissez-faire and affirmations of the benefits of expert administration from individuals as diverse as Hadley, Farnam, Ely,

H.C. Adams, and Commons. But, again, he fails to record the significant policy differences between them. For Leonard, the professionalizing economists occupy the center of a supposedly unified movement in which they and like-minded occupants of other social locations combined to spread the influence of a discourse calling for dramatically growing the — to them — culpably minimal state enshrined in the discourse of laissez-faire. He leaves no room here for those progressives of a corporate liberal persuasion who — as detailed by historians Martin Sklar (1988), James Livingston (1987), and Ellis Hawley (1978) — preferred associative action among private parties, permissive combination of competing businesses, and modest voluntary concessions by employers to conservative labor organizations, leaving little need to call for state intervention.<sup>9</sup> Like the progressives in Skowronek's (1982) account, those in Leonard's were eager to displace a “state of courts and parties” with an appointed government bureaucracy staffed by experts in agencies shielded from direct political control who were free to manage, regulate, and promote efficiency on behalf of their vision of the needs of the social whole. Individuals among these more statist progressives are not credited with a thirst for class justice.<sup>10</sup>

The indictment of the progressives rests at times on insufficiently grounded or otherwise questionable statements. For example, we have the charge that the progressives “were so sure of their own expertise as a necessary guide to the public good, so convinced of the righteousness of their cause to redeem America, that they rarely considered the unintended consequences of their ambitious but untried reforms.” (xi) Really? We are not told what consequences they ignored. But we do know that one of the most prominent and respected among them, Adams (1887), cautiously limited the range of state interventions he proposed. Early on, he called for labor standards regulation to prevent exploitation of workers by unscrupulous employers, but he ruled out for the United States significantly more statist social welfare programs routinely on offer in Europe, such as public housing, guaranteed employment, and state-supervised contract bargaining.<sup>11</sup>

Even Ely, described here as “the standard bearer of progressive economics,” carefully detailed what he expected from the empowerment of unionized workers. And more than this, economists fundamentally disagreed, with profound implications for policy consequences in an era of massive strikes and lockouts, over the increasingly important question of what it was that established the rate of wages, an issue quite fundamental to determining what government's role in the class bargain should be. The first president of the AEA, Walker (1887), argued that labor was the privileged “residual claimant” to the distribution of the product of industry after fixed sums were deducted for interest and the rent of an entrepreneur's ability. Harvard's Taussig (1894) responded by defending key elements of the wage fund theory that Walker assailed. And soon after — plagued by the question whether workers received their just deserts — the first American marginalist, Clark (1899), offered a version of productivity theory that set the wage as equal to the marginal product of the last

worker hired whose product would allow his employer to stay in business. These differences had huge implications for projected outcomes of an existing distribution of income that other, more statist and democratic "new liberals" saw as radically unequal.<sup>12</sup>

The tension that Leonard describes between advocacy and objectivity does not warrant the suggestion that "[a]dvocates don't care about the truth, except as it affects their case, and experts are supposed to care only about the truth." This preposterous charge is contradicted by the upsurge of empirical investigation aimed to lay down a factual basis for evaluating the causes and impact of economic changes such as the rise of monopoly or the contraction of the currency following return to the gold standard. Typically in these years economists and other progressives far more than their predecessors based their advocacy of reforms such as the pros and cons of tariff protection, the adoption of an income tax, or the high social costs of wage levels below the cost of a decent existence on detailed reporting of the state of existing conditions (Leonard, 2016, p. 36).

Advocacy and objectivity initially became opposed, as this reviewer has argued elsewhere, when reprisals by wealthy donors or conservative university trustees led to firings of professors, bringing strong external pressure for defensive moderation of their public statements that leading figures within the profession, acting in their view prudentially, also encouraged. Adopting this mode of professionalization, economists eagerly sought to influence public policy decisions in safer, more politically defensible ways by staffing public investigations such as the United States Industrial Commission (USIC), 1898–1902, empowered by congress to investigate the implications of the great merger movement and recent developments in labor relations. Working with the USIC, expert economists led by Jenks endorsed what has become known to historians as the corporate reorganization of American capitalism, in which mainly voluntary, nongovernmental arrangements would achieve economic stability. On the labor side, they supported the extension to every state of the eight hour day for men in mining and smelting operations upheld recently by a Utah court. Nothing here raised a challenge to the determinants of the existing distribution of income and wealth (Sklar, 1988; Wunderlin, 1992).

But Progressive Era economists' service as experts crossed a far wider ideological spectrum than Leonard's generalized assessment allows. Working for the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, 1913–1915, a staff that included some 50 young economists trained either by John Commons at Wisconsin or by Jacob Hollander at the Johns Hopkins turned a body charged to investigate the causes of conflicts between labor and business into a powerful exposé of structural inequities in the industrial economy. Institutionalists in approach, they believed that markets were far from being the natural systems described in either *laissez-faire* ideology or marginal utility theory. Rather, such arrangements were embedded in law and custom, changing over time in the social relations they produced. These changes reflected past policy interventions and demanded in that fraught moment a purposeful reallocation of rights and

obligations. Thus the development of the corporate form of business organization had concentrated power in the hands of often unaccountable boards of directors, these experts found, and propertied interests had become able routinely to call in state power, including armed militias, in the decades following the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. Attacks on unions had weakened workers' bargaining power.<sup>13</sup>

Through the USCIR staff hearings and reports, these investigators sought to reveal how historically constructed, singularly repressive institutions surrounded and underlay the industrial labor relations of their era. Direct questioning of John D. Rockefeller forced him to acknowledge his role — through exerting behind-the-scenes pressure on Colorado's governor — in the violent suppression of striking workers by the state militia in the Ludlow Massacre. Other witnesses exposed forced deunionization, worsening working and living conditions, and feudal conditions in company towns. Reports compiled from government statistics documented declining real incomes over recent years for a large fraction of the working class. Income data showed that four-fifths of adult male family heads earned less than the \$800 a year deemed barely sufficient to support a family, whereas few working women were able to earn the \$8 per week needed to support themselves decently.<sup>14</sup>

Nor did these investigators leave the subject of corporate power alone. Examining once again the consequences of the recent merger movement, W. Jett Lauck<sup>15</sup> and Sumner Slichter reported how concentration of ownership had left determination of the incomes of ever increasing numbers of workers in manufacturing under the control of six large banking and investment groups. Not so much instructing workers as learning from them, this expert staff held hearings "on site, in the garment trades and department stores...; in the mines, docks, stockyards, lumber camps, wheat fields, and hopyards; in Paterson silk mills full of immigrants and southern textile mills full of poor white children, unprotected by unions or laws." Here, neither F.A. Walker's "residual claimants" to the product of industry nor recipients of the "marginal product," wage earners appeared as the "residual sufferers" from irregular seasonal and cyclical employment. Collectivist and statist in its recommendations, the USCIR staff report called for a partial socialization of the control of private property and industry-wide collective bargaining with arbitration or wage boards as needed to maintain a national commitment to a living wage. Recognizing that companies installed new capital goods assets to resist wage demands, they insisted that gains from productivity-enhancing innovations should be shared rather than awarded only to investors at the expense of distributive equity. They did not justify favoring a minimum wage by claiming that it would exclude "new immigrants," as Leonard reports that eugenics-inspired experts did; indeed, immigrant labor was integral to a goodly share of the industries whose labor relations they sought to regulate and uplift, and they well knew it.<sup>16</sup>

Obviously "objectivity" is to some extent in the eye of the beholder. These investigators undoubtedly brought with them social sympathies and theory-based suppositions that influenced what questions they sought to answer and what data they gathered, as did those who staffed the parallel investigations of non-governmental investigating bodies. But this is a far different thing from Leonard's (2016, 36) charge, in regard to investigations by the AALL, that "advocacy threatened truth, and so too did truth threaten advocacy."<sup>17</sup> Leonard (2016, p. 69) backs away from his charge that progressive social scientists made a "fetish of measurement" by conceding that the social surveys they constructed "served multiple purposes: to identify the needs of the urban poor, to create moral outrage, to enlighten and mobilize public opinion regarding the plight of the poor, and also to lend objectivity to reform activism by employing scientific methods of investigation." Not a bad record!<sup>18</sup>

Nor should we fail to recognize that, here again, a large fraction of the working poor whose often dire conditions these experts documented and publicized were undoubtedly the southern and eastern European immigrants who populated a number of trades stretching from the New York City garment district to the Colorado mines! We should not for a moment ignore how these immigrant groups were injured by claims and deeds based on eugenics. Yet the turn to economic and social investigation led by progressives whose aims are often trivialized here made it possible as well to open, and to keep open, discussions essential to the processes of reasoned argument that defended the rights of workers, women, and children. The pages of academic journals and journals of political opinion were open for challenge and response regarding the veracity of evidence and the logic of the reasoning behind arguments. Clearly there were boundaries on the socialist left and the authoritarian right that were not lightly transgressed. Indeed, economists under fire for their views sometimes had a choice between protesting their fundamental conservatism, as Ely did when the University of Wisconsin regents investigated him for being too ardently pro-labor, and finding useful work outside the academy, as Edward Bemis did for a time when — abandoned by powerful colleagues there and elsewhere — he was fired by the University of Chicago (Furner, 1975).

But by contributing through empirical investigation and theoretical disputation to the framing of key public policy questions in these years, the historical and institutional economists brought vastly more accessible intelligence to the public forum than either their more pro-market, neoclassical contemporaries in the profession then or larger numbers of their quantifying, equation-writing, model-building successors in economics during recent decades have done. In league with female settlement house and social workers, male progressives pressed for creation of fact-finding arms of government ranging from the Children's Bureau to the wartime Women in Industry Service in the Bureau of Labor Statistics which later became the Women's Bureau. (The wartime Division of Negro Economics did not survive postwar budget cutting.) In line with Leonard's analysis of the acceptance of eugenics, the American Economic

Association did publish work by Hoffman (1896) maintaining that the inheritance of inferior traits predicted the extinction of the Negro race. But his haphazard statistical methods were convincingly trashed in a review by DuBois (1897). And, supported by BLS head Carroll D. Wright, W. E. B. DuBois conducted several studies of the circumstances of Negro communities across the South between 1898 and 1903 that reported data defying these findings and predictions.<sup>19</sup> Readers will perhaps also recall, unmentioned here, how his landmark social survey, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), made the devastating case that even the "talented tenth" of African Americans who were highly educated were confined to menial jobs, as he himself was, to the separate category of "Negro intellectuals."

Thus, in the decades under study here, diverse publics could draw upon empirically grounded academic and survey knowledge, gain access to the results of government reports, join with others in their communities to process these findings, and even organize to produce their own data, as AFL unions effectively did.<sup>20</sup> Elected policy makers were compelled more openly to justify their stands on the basis of reasoned argument rather than by relying on the "dog whistles" that historians of voting behavior have found they used in much of the so-called Gilded Age to arouse the religious or ethnic loyalties of constituents to stay in office.

Unlike in the instances enumerated above, Leonard's study thoroughly redeems its promise to detect and follow distinct and separate discourses in one key instance: by providing chapter and verse on the largely unconditional belief by many of his progressives in hereditary racial inequality. The second part of his book, titled "The Progressive Paradox," offers chapters that explore in minute detail — with hundreds of telling quotations — the commitment to eugenics espoused by many prominent economists, social scientists in other fields, and political leaders from the late decades of the nineteenth century through the 1930s. In these accounts, by carefully selecting statements suited to his purpose, Leonard details the rise and impact of multiple discourses regarding the engines of human progress, stressing a diversity of views that was often glossed over regarding the issues addressed in the earlier chapters.

Evolutionary theories of the origins of diverse life forms were the engine behind these racist ideologies. Although not entirely original, Chapter 6, "Darwinism in Economic Reform," provides an informed discussion of the multiple paths of evolutionary thought — in which conflicting strands regarding the heritability of acquired characteristics supported diverse extrapolations to public policy.<sup>21</sup> For social scientists and others attempting to parse these theories, a few key questions emerged as most pressing. Did all human groups have a common origin? Did the process of evolution inevitably produce higher types, taken in the case of humans from the standpoint of improved intelligence, morality, and productivity? Or did it only lead to — Herbert Spencer's term — the survival of the fittest merely to survive, and thus did it select typically for the best equipped to fight and reproduce in the nonhuman species, and for the

most unscrupulous, most immoral of human kind, exemplified perhaps by the magnates who had ruthlessly annihilated competitors and oppressed labor as they won the monopolies that produced great fortunes? Did the workings of heredity include the prospect that acquired characteristics could be transmitted to the next generation, as Lamarckians insisted, a finding that might have authorized concerted intervention to uplift the living standards and improve the health and morals of the poor?

Or, as sociologist Lester Ward famously taught in *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), should the unit of investigation and uplift be not the procreating individual but society as a whole, conceived as an organism capable of conscious adoption of policies aimed toward a higher state of perfection that awaited only intelligent governance? Should evolutionary thought distinguish sharply between the "genetic" evolutionary path of non-human types and the "telic" path open to human societies if they collectively selected and consciously moved to achieve higher goals? And if Ward's promise of improvement by design was attainable, what did it suggest for how societies should choose to govern themselves? Did it demand removing the least enlightened from the electorate or, as Ward intoned, mainly turning lawmaking over to a "sociocracy" of leaders learned in progressive social science who could guide social evolution?

Leonard (2016, p. 90) carefully parses out where his subjects stood on these questions, supporting the argument that progressive evolutionary thought was plural. One well-trodden path was the migration from espousal of eugenics to a determination to enact measures designed to weed out the allegedly weak and preserve the reputedly strong so as to uplift the race through inheritance. Management of breeding would work as well in human populations as it had in the improvement of animal stocks, some held.<sup>22</sup> Distinct populations would be ranked according to their ethnic and racial origins, with those of white Anglo-Saxon background rated highest and those of south-European origin and of darker complexion graded lower according to the extent that their physical characteristics deviated from those of the supposed superior race. But selective human breeding would require adoption by the several states of laws, urged by arch eugenicists E.A. Ross and Irving Fisher in the early decades of the twentieth century and upheld in *Buck v. Bell* (1927), permitting forcible sterilization of supposed mental defectives (Leonard, 2016, pp. 109–115).

Identifying "conservatives" Charles Davenport and Madison Grant as equally keen as his progressives were for imposing controls based on eugenics, Leonard invoked the power of naming once again here to fashion the entire lot – progressive or conservative – as "illiberal." His logic for using the term in this instance is that, in favoring strong state action to eliminate the unfit, the conservatives were as far from laissez-faire as were the left progressives who called for state intervention on behalf of workers and the poor. Conservationists Theodore Roosevelt and Charles Van Hise along with socialists and

radicals such as Scott Nearing and Fabians such as the Webbs by this definition also joined the ranks of the illiberal (Leonard, 2016, pp. 115–117).

With abundant evidence from their writings, Leonard numbers among the outspoken eugenicists social scientists Ely, Commons, Ross, Mayo-Smith, Charles Horton Cooley, and Simon Patten along with leading social reformers Walter Rauschenbush and Francis Willard, the latter an ardent Anglo-Saxonist anti-Catholic. Among white economists whom he studies, he argues that only John Bates Clark rejected the notion of African American hereditary inferiority, predicting instead that a removal of Jim Crow law discrimination against them and equal access to land would show Blacks to be capable of competing successfully with Whites. Among Black intellectuals, Leonard (2016, pp. 119–124) finds W. E. B. DuBois to have passionately rejected belief in a racial hierarchy and yet to have warned, marking the effects of environment on individual character, that among Black youth "the unfit were outbreeding their betters."

In his Chapter 9, "Excluding Immigrants and the Unproductive," Leonard offers telling evidence that experts took advantage of protected positions in agencies of the administrative state to develop ingenious methods for grading the abilities of various populations. Readers may well object that not enough distance separates hard-wired exterminators of supposed imbeciles from those, such as John Commons, whom the eugenics discourse inspired to work hard along neo-Lamarckian lines to uplift the entire working population. In this regard, Commons reported positive effects from unionization, placing it squarely in the American tradition of voluntary association, and urged organization of low-paid immigrant laborers. Not a hard-wired segregationist, Leonard (2016, p. 134) concedes, Commons believed that intermarriage among the urban poor would uplift African Americans supposed by others to be innately inferior.<sup>23</sup>

But for the remainder of those named above as eugenicists and many more, the threat to race improvement posed by the native-born defective classes paled in comparison to the danger presented to old-stock American workers by low-grade immigrant workers. Culturally programmed to live on much less, the argument went, these inferior people eagerly accepting the pittance that greedy capitalists offered as wages, thus undercutting the higher "American standard" that unionized workers sought to defend. Wage competition of new immigrants caused older stock workers to decide to have fewer children, critics bemoaned. Thus Leonard shows a racialist side of the National Consumers League (NCL) by quoting its first president, John Graham Brooks, to the effect "that standards of living 'were a question of race.'" Cultural icons such as Cornell University president Andrew Dickson White spewed images of barbarians at the gates (Leonard, 2016, p. 145).

Behind these complaints was the belief that living standards determined wages, not the reverse; capable workers of the higher ethnicities would not accept "coolie wages." It was not far to the logical eugenics-based next steps –



first eliminate Chinese immigration and then crusade for restriction to keep out the "new immigration" composed of lower types of Europeans, coded by their foreign ways, strange languages, and the darker hue of their skins. Admired ways to accomplish this included administering a literacy test developed by Ely student Edward Bemis for the purpose or following the advice of first AEA president Francis A. Walker to require persons permitted entry to post a \$100 bond, thus ensuring against their becoming indigent paupers living on aid.

Just as a powerful eugenic discourse developed to justify quite brutal ways of excluding undesirable immigrants and controlling the breeding of those already present, so also did Leonard's illiberal reformers create an authoritative conversation regarding the employment of women. Here Leonard carefully breaks out the separate discourses deployed by progressive reformers whose common goal was elimination, or at the very least statutory restriction, of wage labor that took women outside of their proper sphere, the home. Some called for protecting women from the hazards of employment, arguing that as "the weaker sex" they could more easily be harmed by arduous labor than men, leaving them unsuited to their primary tasks as homemakers and "mothers of the race." Others brandished the eugenics club differently by protesting either that women's work depleted heredity or that the educated women who delayed or avoided marriage were allowing the more copious breeding by women of inferior heredity to subvert the quality of future generations. Still others argued — alongside the minimum wage crusaders — that working women undercut what male workers could command, thus undermining their ability to earn the "family wage" that these experts held would make women's work unnecessary.<sup>24</sup>

Neatly parsing discourses here as well, Leonard details the splits between maternalists who saw poor working women as social and cultural inferiors in need of tutelage and protection, as against equal rights feminists who crusaded for equal treatment of women on the job and at the ballot box. He might also have noted other, more business-related reasons for the preference for hiring women in emerging forms of employment. In the new department stores, for example, managers saw female clerks as easier than male employees to discipline and manage, and in burgeoning clerical occupations employers preferred women for their imputed qualities of tidiness and attention to detail.<sup>25</sup> Overall, Leonard's book offers a vital and necessary contribution to the historical understanding and current discussions of racism and nativism in the United States and around the world. This is not to deny that the tendency for "lumping" to overwhelm "splitting" in putting a face on the progressives somewhat mars the work. Yet, although he has in one sense plowed familiar ground, made familiar in part because of his own valuable earlier contributions on the subject, we will nowhere else find the extensive mining of statements and actions expressing a virulently sordid side of what we have called progressivism. The book is a necessary corrective. Even the dual meanings ascribed here to "illiberal" challenge us to reflect that by no means every movement that has paraded as "reform" has been morally defensible. The book deserves wide

attention. It reads in new ways since the 2016 presidential election. Recent slurs against people of different religions and nationalities smack of a racial purity crusade much like the one described here. The "great America" that candidate and now president Donald Trump has promised would remain "whiter" and less inclusive than our best traditions of offering asylum and welcoming diversity have proclaimed. Yes, we can learn from history — or not!

## NOTES

1. Several of Leonard's articles in *History of Political Economy* have offered a preview of arguments contained here. Among them see in particular Leonard (2009).
2. Fiorito and Foresti (2016) note that a group of Jewish economists, including well-known figures Edwin R. A. Seligman, Jacob Hollander, and Isaac Hourwich, rejected the racism and eugenicism espoused by many of their academic contemporaries.
3. See, for example, Recchiuti (2007), Rossinow (2008), and Huyssen (2014).
4. Recently Rodgers has returned to this subject in an essay titled "Capitalism and Politics in the Progressive Era and in Ours" (Rodgers, 2014), in which he celebrates the achievement in the intervening decades of a much more textured history of progressivism that has located a far greater range of goals and efforts, undertaken by a more diverse collection of actors, associated in a fluid and changing structures of discursive linkages and coalitions. These efforts have collectively recovered a structure that has made obsolete the once-prominent binary of "the people" or a segment of them (farmers, workers, immigrants, etc.) against experts intent on social control. Seeking greater attention to the history of capitalism, he bemoans the "recession of political economy from the historiographical center."
5. The most extreme proposals for those too inefficient to be employed at a required minimum were sterilization or confinement in celibate labor colonies.
6. As detailed in Luca Fiorito (2013), Wolfe's reservations regarding eugenic explanations of individual ability were informed by behaviorism and a broader understanding of the effects of social and cultural environmental influences.
7. Seager (1904) was a major critic of judicial rejection of maximum hours laws passed under state police powers for workers in occupations deemed dangerous to their health. He made no exception for immigrant workers. In endorsing the benefits of a minimum wage for raising living standards to an acceptable level, Seager conceded that some unskilled workers would lose employment as a result, their product being less than the value of the wage. But far from eliminating them, he (1913, p. 4) counseled: "A community which sets up this standard must at the same time, if it is really to make conditions better, supply the means for making the inefficient efficient, the unskilled skilled, the shiftless and standardless capable and ambitious to command wages on which they can get ahead rather than fall behind." He did not define a population he considered "standardless," but the context suggests that they had been failed by the education system and other environmental influences.
8. See as representative examples Tarbell (1904), Bemis and Outerbridge (1891), Ely (1901), Howe (1905), and Municipal Ownership-Discussion (1906).
9. As described by historians Martin J. Sklar, James Livingston, and Ellis Hawley, among others.
10. A key supporter of expert administration separated from politics, Columbia University political scientist and first president of the American Political Science Association, Frank Johnson Goodnow, is not included among Leonard's experts.

11. Adams appears here quite seldom; he did not fit the template of a eugenics inspired defender of measures to protect race purity.

12. Preferring over "progressivism" the term "new liberalism," I have addressed its branching into competing statist and corporatist strands, both of them opposed to laissez-faire and therefore not, in those times, "conservative." See Furner (2009).

13. Commons (1924) memorably made the institutionalist case for the inseparable connections between law and economics.

14. See United States Commission on Industrial Relations (1916). See vols. 7-9 for the Ludlow-Rockefeller connection. See also Furner (1990).

15. With Jeremiah Jenks, Lauck had served as a staff expert with the Dillingham Commission authorized by the U.S. Congress to study the impact of immigration in the U.S. Its reports distinguished sharply between the abilities and assimilability of older stock "settlers" from Northern and Western Europe and the "new immigration" from Europe's South and East, much to the detriment of the latter. Jenks and Lauck later published *The Immigration Problem* (1912), which recommended a literacy test as a way of screening immigrants for those believed to be most able.

16. On the work of USCIR (Adams, 1971). Key CIR investigators William Leiserson, Robert Hoxie, Sumner Slichter, Edgar Sydenstricker, and Leo Wolman, all economists and "progressives," do not appear in this study. Selig Perlman is credited on p.154 with describing "the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 as 'the single most important factor in the history of American labour.'" He is not mentioned as the USCIR investigator of the impact of seasonal unemployment upon workers in the garment trades who offered workable ways to remedy it. The terms "individualism" and "laissez-faire" are in the index; "collectivism" and "statism" are not.

17. It is worth noting that the AALL's fact-based presentation to Congress on the high incidence of contracting "phossy jaw" among phosphorous match workers led finally to an effective crusade to ban their production.

18. A brief reference to the Pittsburgh Survey (pp. 69-70), might also have credited female reformer and social worker Margaret Byington's *Households of a Mill Town* (1910) with revealing the harsh toll taken on mainly immigrant steel workers' families by twelve-hour days and seven-day weeks with a bi-weekly alternation of day and night work. Hers was the initial source of such information that eventually, followed by several congressional committee investigations and one by Herbert Hoover's Commerce Department, led U.S. Steel, under pressure from the conservative Harding administration, finally to adopt the 8-hour day. See Moye (1977).

19. For example, DuBois noted, Hoffman's supposed demonstration that Blacks' high death rates (data only from cities) predicted the disappearance of the race might not hold up in light of the higher death rates for whites in several cities across Europe!

20. Following this, Chapter 5: "Valuing Labor: What should labor get?" offers a hurried and imprecise gloss on the history of labor as work for others, oddly keyed to the practices of Ancient Greece and based on only two sources for the United States from its beginning to Gilded age.

21. Important earlier studies include Bannister (1979), Moore (1981), Kevles (1985), Cravens (1988), and Lombardo (2011).

22. Leonard (2016, pp. 97-98) wisely scraps the term Social Darwinism for incorrectly conveying the suggestion that the followers of Herbert Spencer to whom Richard Hofstadter applied this term took societal rather than individual fitness as their focus. The actual Social Darwinist among these evolutionary thinkers was Lester Ward, he suggests. Leonard's usefully contrasts the views of Laissez-Faire Darwinists and Reform Darwinists.

23. The NCL has been impugned for using its white label as much to protect middle-class families from disease transmitted by clothing made in unsanitary conditions as to aid low-paid workers.

24. Consulting a wider range of secondary sources might have added needed diversity to the outlooks of progressive reformers on the impacts and gendered aspects of various types of work. Muncy (1991) portrays a strong social control motive by female reformers; May (2011) shows how female reformers who engaged in helping women industrial workers organize resisted any such efforts on the part of their in-home domestic servants; and Boris (1994) explores how industrial homework such as cigar making in tenements that occupied entire families was denied regulation by court rulings citing freedom of contract. Unexplored here as well is the way that "freedom of contract" rulings allowed legal protections for women, who were deemed not to be *sui juris*, while denying them to male workers. Court rulings along these lines did not invoke eugenics when they protected women as the "mothers of the race."

25. See Benson (1986), Davies (1982), and Kwolek-Folland (1994).

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