

Advantage Book V-95 \$2.45



The Age of Reform Richard Hofstadter

057.12
602

新闻系

7997416



外文书库

THE
Age of Reform

FROM BRYAN TO F. D. R.

by

Richard Hofstadter

VINTAGE BOOKS

A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE

New York



L. C. catalog card number: 54-7206

© RICHARD HOFSTADTER, 1955

VINTAGE BOOKS

are published by ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

and RANDOM HOUSE, INC.

Copyright 1955 by RICHARD HOFSTADTER. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a magazine or newspaper. Manufactured in the United States of America.

7997416

0.729

THE
Age of Reform



TO

Beatrice



Contents

Introduction 3

I • The Agrarian Myth and Commercial Realities 23

- 1 THE YEOMAN AND THE MYTH 23
- 2 THE FARMER AND THE REALITIES 36
- 3 THE FRONTIER OR THE MARKET? 46

II • The Folklore of Populism 60

- 1 THE TWO NATIONS 60
- 2 HISTORY AS CONSPIRACY 70
- 3 THE SPIRIT MILITANT 82

III • From Pathos to Parity 94

- 1 SUCCESS THROUGH FAILURE 94
- 2 THE GOLDEN AGE AND AFTER 109
- 3 THE VANISHING HAYSEED 121

IV • The Status Revolution and Progressive Leaders 131

- 1 THE PLUTOCRACY AND THE MUGWUMP TYPE 131
- 2 THE ALIENATION OF THE PROFESSIONALS 148
- 3 FROM THE MUGWUMP TO THE PROGRESSIVE 164

v · *The Progressive Impulse* 174

- 1 THE URBAN SCENE 174
- 2 MUCKRAKING: THE REVOLUTION IN JOURNALISM 186
- 3 REALITY AND RESPONSIBILITY 198

vi · *The Struggle over Organization* 215

- 1 ORGANIZATION AND THE INDIVIDUAL 215
- 2 THE STATE AND THE TRUSTS 227
- 3 THE CITIZEN AND THE MACHINE 257

vii · *From Progressivism to the New Deal* 272

- 1 PROGRESSIVISM AND WAR 272
- 2 ENTR'ACTE 282
- 3 THE NEW DEPARTURE 302
- 4 THE NEW OPPORTUNISM 316

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 329

INDEX *Following page* 330

T H E

Age of Reform



INTRODUCTION



Just as the cycle of American history running from the Civil War to the 1890's can be thought of chiefly as a period of industrial and continental expansion and political conservatism, so the age that has just passed, running from about 1890 to the second World War, can be considered an age of reform. The surge of reform, though largely turned back in the 1890's and temporarily reversed in the 1920's, has set the tone of American politics for the greater part of the twentieth century. The reform movements of the past sixty-five years fall readily into three main episodes, the first two of which are almost continuous with each other: the agrarian uprising that found its most intense expression in the Populism of the 1890's and the Bryan campaign of 1896; the Progressive movement, which extended from about 1900 to 1914; and the New Deal, whose dynamic phase was concentrated in a few years of the 1930's.

This book has been inspired not by a desire to retell the familiar story of the primary movements of reform in the United States since 1890, but by the need for a new analysis from the perspective of our own time. My first interest was in the period from 1890 to the beginning of the first World War, but the more I worked upon the problems of that period, the more it was impressed upon me that its character could be far better understood if it was briefly compared and contrasted with the New Deal.

Hence I have added a final chapter, which should not be taken as a full exploration of that relationship. Today we are more remote in time from the first inaugural address of Franklin D. Roosevelt than Roosevelt himself was on March 4, 1933, from the first inaugural address of Woodrow Wilson. As we begin to view the New Deal in more ample perspective, even the reforms that preceded it take on new meanings. We are now in a position to see things we have not hitherto seen, and to realize the importance of things that once seemed incidental.

Our conception of Populism and Progressivism has in fact been intimately bound up with the New Deal experience. The Populist-Progressive age came to an end only with the first World War, and by the time we began to get serious histories of that age, we had been plunged into a new phase of reform brought about by the Great Depression. The views, therefore, of Populism and Progressivism that one finds in histories written during and shortly after the New Deal era bear inevitably the stamp of this second wave of reform. This is not merely to say that they were usually sympathetic, but that they were pervaded by the assumption that in some way the New Deal was both an analogue and a lineal descendant of the Populist-Progressive tradition, an assumption which is by no means totally false but which tends none the less to direct our attention away from essential differences and hence seriously to distort the character of our history. I have been at some pains to emphasize these differences.

I should perhaps explain the unusually broad sense in which I use the terms "Populism" and "Progressivism." By "Populism" I do not mean only the People's (or Populist) Party of the 1890's; for I consider the Populist Party to be merely a heightened expression, at a particular moment of time, of a kind of popular impulse that is endemic in American political culture. Long before the rebellion of the 1890's one can observe a larger trend of thought, stemming from the time of Andrew Jackson, and crystallizing after the Civil War in the Greenback, Granger, and

anti-monopoly movements, that expressed the discontents of a great many farmers and businessmen with the economic changes of the late nineteenth century. The Populist spirit captured the Democratic Party in 1896, and continued to play an important part in the politics of the Progressive era. While its special association with agrarian reforms has now become attenuated, I believe that Populist thinking has survived in our own time, partly as an undercurrent of provincial resentments, popular and "democratic" rebelliousness and suspiciousness, and nativism.

Similarly, by "Progressivism" I mean something more than the Progressive (or Bull Moose) Party formed by the Republican insurgents who supported Theodore Roosevelt for the presidency in 1912. I mean rather that broader impulse toward criticism and change that was everywhere so conspicuous after 1900, when the already forceful stream of agrarian discontent was enlarged and redirected by the growing enthusiasm of middle-class people for social and economic reform. As all observant contemporaries realized, Progressivism in this larger sense was not confined to the Progressive Party but affected in a striking way all the major and minor parties and the whole tone of American political life. It was, to be sure, a rather vague and not altogether cohesive or consistent movement, but this was probably the secret of its considerable successes, as well as of its failures. While Progressivism would have been impossible without the impetus given by certain social grievances, it was not nearly so much the movement of any social class, or coalition of classes, against a particular class or group as it was a rather widespread and remarkably good-natured effort of the greater part of society to achieve some not very clearly specified self-reformation. Its general theme was the effort to restore a type of economic individualism and political democracy that was widely believed to have existed earlier in America and to have been destroyed by the great corporation and the corrupt political machine; and with that restoration to

bring back a kind of morality and civic purity that was also believed to have been lost.

The center of attention in these pages is neither the political campaigns, the enactments of legislatures, the decisions of the courts, nor the work of regulatory commissions, but the ideas of the participants—their conception of what was wrong, the changes they sought, and the techniques they thought desirable. My theme, then, is the conception the participants had of their own work and the place it would occupy in the larger stream of our history. While my book is, in this sense, primarily a study of political thinking and of political moods, it is not a study of our high culture, but of the kind of thinking that impinged most directly upon the ordinary politically conscious citizen. Morton G. White in his *Social Thought in America* has analyzed the impact of the Progressive era upon more advanced speculation in philosophy, political theory, sociology, and history. My chief concern is not with such work, not with the best but with the most characteristic thinking, with the middlebrow writers, and with the issues as they were presented in the popular magazines, the muckraking articles, the campaign speeches, and the essays of the representative journalists and influential publicists. Of course the high culture and the ordinary culture overlapped and interacted, as they always do, and there were men capable of playing a part in both. At some points, too, the more speculative thinkers who could be classed as Progressives were themselves critical of important aspects of what I have called Progressive thinking. For instance, when I argue that the goals of most Progressives were profoundly individualistic, I do not forget that some of the most important speculative writing of the age in politics, psychology, and philosophy drew upon the same events and concerns to arrive at opposite conclusions. Nor do I intend to ignore the fact that some Progressive thinkers, like Herbert Croly, and even a few Progressive political leaders, like Theodore Roosevelt, were astute critics of this predominant yearn-

ing for individualism. Intellectuals, and often indeed some of our shrewdest politicians, keep a certain distance even from the political and social movements with which they sympathize, and their work becomes a criticism both of these movements and of the institutions they are directed against. One of the ironic problems confronting reformers around the turn of the century was that the very activities they pursued in attempting to defend or restore the individualistic values they admired brought them closer to the techniques of organization they feared. The most penetrating thinkers of the age understood somewhat more of this situation than was understood in common discourse.

The Populist and Progressive movements took place during a rapid and sometimes turbulent transition from the conditions of an agrarian society to those of modern urban life. Standing much closer to the completion of this change, we have in some respects a clearer judgment of its meaning, but we are likely to lose sight of the poignancy with which it was experienced by earlier generations. The American tradition of democracy was formed on the farm and in small villages, and its central ideas were founded in rural sentiments and on rural metaphors (we still speak of "grass-roots democracy"). For reasons I will try to explore, the American was taught throughout the nineteenth and even in the twentieth century that rural life and farming as a vocation were something sacred. Since in the beginning the majority of the people were farmers, democracy, as a rather broad abstraction, became in the same way sacrosanct. A certain complacency and self-righteousness thus entered into rural thinking, and this complacency was rudely shocked by the conquests of industrialism. A good deal of the strain and the sense of anxiety in Populism results from this rapid decline of rural America.

And yet it is too little realized that the farmers, who were quite impotent as a special interest when they were numerous, competing, and unorganized, grew stronger as

they grew relatively fewer, became more concerted, more tenaciously organized and self-centered. One of the clichés of Populism was the notion that, whatever the functions of the other vocations, the function of the farmer was pre-eminent in importance because he fed, and thus supported, all the others. Although it has been heard somewhat less frequently of late, and a counter-ideology of urban resentment has even begun to appear, our national folklore still bears the heavy imprint of that idea. In reality something like the opposite has become true—that the rest of us support the farmer; for industrial and urban America, sentimentally and morally committed to the ideal of the family farm, has undertaken out of its remarkable surpluses to support more farm-owners on the farm than it really needs under modern agricultural technology. It is in part because of the persistence of our agrarian traditions that this concession to the farmers arouses less universal antagonism than do the efforts of other groups menaced by technological changes—say, the musicians and the building-trades workers—to set up artificial safeguards for themselves. My opening pages are given to the exploration of this long-range swing from the pastoral legends of early nineteenth-century democracy to the complexities of modern American life.

Another circumstance attending the rise of Populism and Progressivism in America was unique in the modern world. Here the industrialization and urbanization of the country were coupled with a breakdown in the relative homogeneity of the population. American democracy, down to about 1880, had been not only rural but Yankee and Protestant in its basic notions, and such enclaves of immigrants as had thus far developed were too small and scattered to have a major nationwide impact upon the scheme of its civic life. The rise of industry, however, brought with it what contemporaries thought of as an “immigrant invasion,” a massive forty-year migration of Europeans, chiefly peasants, whose religions, traditions, languages, and sheer numbers made easy assimilation im-

possible. Populism and Progressivism were in considerable part colored by the reaction to this immigrant stream among the native elements of the population. Out of the clash between the needs of the immigrants and the sentiments of the natives there emerged two thoroughly different systems of political ethics, the nature and interactions of which I have tried briefly to define. One, founded upon the indigenous Yankee-Protestant political traditions, and upon middle-class life, assumed and demanded the constant, disinterested activity of the citizen in public affairs, argued that political life ought to be run, to a greater degree than it was, in accordance with general principles and abstract laws apart from the superior to personal needs, and expressed a common feeling that government should be in good part an effort to moralize the lives of individuals while economic life should be intimately related to the stimulation and development of individual character. The other system, founded upon the European backgrounds of the immigrants, upon their unfamiliarity with independent political action, their familiarity with hierarchy and authority, and upon the urgent needs that so often grew out of their migration, took for granted that the political life of the individual would arise out of family needs, interpreted political and civic relations chiefly in terms of personal obligations, and placed strong personal loyalties above allegiance to abstract codes of law or morals. It was chiefly upon this system of values that the political life of the immigrant, the boss, and the urban machine was based. In many ways the struggles of the Progressive era were influenced by the conflict between the two codes elaborated on one side by the highly moral leaders of Protestant social reform and on the other by the bosses, political professionals, and immigrant masses. Since they stemmed from different views not only of politics but of morals and even of religion, it is hardly surprising that the conflicts of the period, often so modest in actual substance, aroused antagonisms so intense and misunderstandings so complete.

The political value and the ideas of government that had been formed in the rural Yankee world were profoundly influenced by entrepreneurship and the ideal of individual success. The side of the left in American political history—that is, the side of popular causes and of reform—had always been relatively free of the need or obligation to combat feudal traditions and entrenched aristocracies. It had neither revolutionary traditions, in the bourgeois sense (the American Revolution itself was a legalistic and socially conservative affair), nor proletarianism and social democracy of the kind familiar in all the great countries of the West in the late nineteenth century. American traditions of political revolt had been based upon movements against monopolies and special privileges in both the economic and the political spheres, against social distinctions and the restriction of credit, against limits upon the avenues of personal advancement. Because it was always possible to assume a remarkable measure of social equality and a fair minimum of subsistence, the goal of revolt tended to be neither social democracy nor social equality, but greater opportunities. At the turn of the century the world with which the majority even of the reformers was most affectionately familiar was the passing world of individual enterprise, predominantly small or modest-sized business, and a decentralized, not too highly organized life. In the Progressive era the life of business, and to some degree even of government, was beginning to pass from an individualistic form toward one demanding industrial discipline and engendering a managerial and bureaucratic outlook. The protests of reformers against this state of affairs often took the form of demands for the maintenance of the kind of opportunity that was passing rather than for the furtherance of existing tendencies toward organization. Most Americans who came from the Yankee-Protestant environment, whether they were reformers or conservatives, wanted economic success to continue to be related to personal character, wanted the economic system not merely to be a system for the pro-