The Lost Promise of Progressivism

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Across the range of Progressive writings and throughout this entire period one finds a persistent attack on rights and individualism as worthy foundations for American national democracy. In their economic writings Progressive intellectuals constructed a powerful case against theories of property rights premised on natural rights. All rights to property, they argued, should be seen as granted by the community contingent on the performance of duties set by the community. The rejection of natural rights as a foundation for moral or political reasoning was not even considered to require a defense; what was contentious was their claim that rights per se should be considered as neither primary or autonomous. This denial of the primacy of rights took many forms and was deployed in many different settings, but behind these forms and settings is a psychological, social, and political theory in explicit opposition to the "rights talk" that legitimated the regime of courts and parties in the nineteenth-century polity. The direct form of the Progressive critique was familiar enough: any social evolutionary view of man and society must reject as a starting point both the autonomous individual and the idea that there is a fundamental dualism between society and the individual. The indirect critique of rights consisted in linking rights-based thinking to the institutions and practices in the United States most condemned by informed moral opinion.

The most obvious form of this latter critique was to link rights claims to individualism and individualism to selfishness and greed. Here, the most powerful counter discourse was that of Christian citizenship expressed as the social gospel. Simon Patten, for example, lists as one of the ten principles of social Christianity "the doctrine of social responsibility, in contrast with individual rights." The northern Baptist theologian and ecumenical leader, Samuel Zane Batten, declares in The Christian State, "just so far as democracy means the enthronement of self-interest and the apotheosis of individual desire . . . so far it becomes an iniquitous and dangerous thing." George Herron declared more than a decade earlier that "the law of self interest is the eternal falsehood which mothers all
social and private woes; for sin is pure individualism." Until political life is emancipated "from merely individual theories of freedom, it cannot see the divine social kingdom."

Rights as individualism was also attacked as the source of social disintegration. John Dewey, in one of his earliest essays, "The Ethics of Democracy," maintains that a theory of democracy premised on isolated individuals and aggregate majorities is

in effect, simply an account of anarchy. To define democracy simply as the rule of the many, as sovereignty chopped up into mince meat, is to define it as abrogation of society, as society dissolved, annihilated. When so defined, it may be easily shown to be instable to the last degree, and so difficult that a common will must be manufactured—if not by means of a contract, then by means of a combined action of the firm of Party and Corruption.2

Charles Horton Cooley, Dewey's colleague at Michigan in this early period, showed the ways in which individual rights rested on formal-legal assumptions about social and political institutions. This combination is false both to life and to the requisites for moral and political order. Writing what must stand as one of the most biting criticisms of a "constitutionalist" understanding of American political life contained in a standard college textbook, Cooley declares:

Formalism goes very naturally with sensuality, avarice, selfish ambition, and other traits of disorganization, because the merely formal institution does not enlist and discipline the soul of the individual, but takes hold of him by the outside. . . . The lower "individualism" of our time, the ruthless self-assertion which is so conspicuous, for example, in business, is not something apart from our institutions but expresses the fact that they are largely formal and unhuman, not containing and enlarging the soul of the individual. . . . In so far as it is true of our time that the larger interests of society are not impressed upon the individual, so that his

2. Dewey, 1969, 131. This 1888 essay was a review of Sir Henry Maine's Popular Government, a favorite in earlier Mugwump culture and featured in Godkins's Nation. Batten, 1909, 247, calls the doctrine of "individualism and atomism . . . a doctrine of anarchy and confusion and can never bring social peace and progress."
private impulses cooperate with the public good, it is a time of moral disintegration.\(^3\)

Although these critiques of democratic individualism abounded,\(^4\) they shared the feature of equating rights discourse with what today is called "negative" liberty, the freedom from the authority of other persons and institutions. The alternative starting point for the Progressives was a conception of democratic citizenship informed by values of "positive" rather than "negative" liberty. Batten, while granting that the initial struggle for liberty "is almost wholly a story of negatives," insists that "true liberty is a positive thing, and to consider its negative aspects alone is to miss its high and divine significance. . . . True liberty means the voluntary sacrifice of self for the common life." Democracy must become "positive and constructive, . . . must now declare what are the things that are truly honorable and authoritative; it must now define and illustrate the true titles of nobility and worth" (Batten, 1909, 217, 219, 244).

This dichotomy was a litany in Progressive writings, voiced in the languages of economics, ethics, sociology, and religion. The economist Richard Ely defines "true liberty" as "the expression of the positive powers of the individual," which is possible only within a framework of "social solidarity." And because we can "thrive only in a common wealth . . . we fulfill our own mission and develop ourselves in body and mind" through obligations to others, through subscribing to a "social ethic." It is this ethic which unites "self and others, the individual and society . . . in one purpose."\(^5\) Dewey's college textbook *Ethics* makes this same distinction.

3. Cooley, 1909, 349 and 351; see also his 1902, 422–31. Thomas M. Cooley was his father; one of the foremost constitutional scholars of his day, he was founding dean of Michigan's law school, first chairman of the ICC, and author of *A Treatise on the Constitutional Limitations Which Rest upon the Legislative Power of the States of the American Union*. Herbert Croly calls down an anathema on those who would reform by appeal to a rights-based vocabulary: "They do not realize . . . how thoroughly Jeffersonian individualism must be abandoned . . . and they do not realize how dangerous and fallacious a chart their cherished principle of equal rights may well become" (Croly, 1909, 153). And see his critique of the Bill of Rights as the basis of political theory (1914, 217–19); and Beard, 1928a, 106–11, for his complacent discussion of their lack of applicability. In a 1915 article in the *New Republic*, Croly summarized these same ideas in still another way: "Any graduate student fresh from the political science department of a contemporary university can triumphantly perform the work of demonstration. Abstract rights of any kind have ceased to command very much reverence" (quoted in Stettner, 1993, 111).

4. See, for example, Abbott, 1901, 68–100; Hadley, 1903, 73–99 and 126–49; Ross, 1918, 214–17 and 269; and discussion in Herbst, 1965, 118–20.

5. Ely quoted in Kloppenberg, 1986, 280 and 289. Croly calls for "the ideal of individual justice . . . being supplanted by the ideal of social justice" to express this same contrast (1914, 146).
Although negative expressions of liberty were necessary "in the struggle in which the moral personality has gradually won its way," it is only a sense of duty to society that "enable[s] an individual to realize the weight and import of the socially available and helpful manifestations of the tendencies of his own nature and to discriminate them from those which are socially harmful or useless. . . . [These] phenomena of duty in all their forms are thus phenomena attendant upon the expansion of [individual] ends and the reconstruction of character." Like the social psychologists James Mark Baldwin and Charles Cooley writing earlier, Dewey adroitly turned negative rights claims into an argument for positive liberty. The recognition and moral legitimacy of claims against society and government, he says, reside only in their predicted capacity to "be socially embodied" in new and higher duties. Disembodied claims for liberty, in contrast, are superficial and often destructive of social bonds because the agent seeks only to avoid liability defined by external rules. True liberty—what Dewey calls "effective freedom"—requires "positive control of resources . . . trained powers of initiative and reflection requisite for free preference and for circumspect and far-seeing desires" (Dewey and Tufts, 1908, 432, 438). In the concluding chapter in his sociology textbook, Cooley rejects the common notion of freedom as "the absence of constraint" as "not especially pertinent to our time and country."

If the word is to have any definite meaning in sociology, it must therefore be separated from the idea of a fundamental opposition between society and the individual, and made to signify something that is both individual and social. . . . The definition of freedom naturally arising from the chapters that have gone before is perhaps this: that it is opportunity for right development, for development in accordance with the progressive ideal of life that we have in conscience (Cooley, 1902, 422, 425, 423).

Significantly, Cooley then equates this notion of personal freedom to an equally developmental and progressive notion of collective freedom: any notion of personal freedom "that is not part of the general onward movement of society is not free in the largest sense." And if this is the case, "the social order is antithetical to freedom only in so far as it is a bad one. Freedom can exist only in and through social order . . . because nothing else can supply the multifarious opportunities by means of which all sorts of persons can work out a congenial development

through the choice of influences." It only remained to show, then, that the matrix of free institutions—"government, churches, industries, and the like"—have as their primary purpose the growth of human freedom "and in so far as they fail to perform this function, they are wrong and need reconstruction."18

Whether this critique of negative liberty was put in economic, historical, psychological, or philosophical terms, the claims made for positive liberty were all anchored in strong conceptions of social or associational membership and political citizenship. One form of this expression was to say, with Batten, that "personal freedom can come only through social regulation" exercised by a matrix of political and social institutions. Another way this idea was expressed was to say with Dewey that, as the social order becomes more comprehensive and organizationally diversified, the opportunities for freedom are multiplied—but only if one also multiplies obligations to and through those organizations. Because institutions shape and empower individuals for action, Cooley concludes that "all innovation is based on [institutional] conformity, all heterodoxy on orthodoxy, all individuality on solidarity." In the words of Hadley, freedom is "an institution rather than a principle; a help to the realization of public morality, rather than a postulate of morality itself."19

**FREEDOM, EQUALITY, AND THE SOCIALLY CONSTITUTED SELF**

Positive liberty is socially constructed and maintained by institutions. In the political sphere this relationship is often readily granted: political freedom substitutes self-government for external restraint, but the purpose achieved is still governance. This argument lies at the basis of the conclusion that political freedom is a hard-won historical achievement. In Lyman Abbott's words: "Self-government is not an assumption on which we are to start in framing a government; it is the goal which we are to reach by means of government" (Abbott, 1901, 100).

External political freedom and internal moral self-discipline are inseparably connected both as modes of self-government and as individual expressions of socially constituted and institutionally sustained

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8. Cooley, 1902, 426–28. This sociological formulation mirrors Dewey's ideal of a pragmatic liberalism as a method combining social and individual development in a democracy. This formula has been forcefully restated in Anderson, 1990.

9. Batten, 1909, 245; Dewey and Tufts, 1908, 436; Cooley, 1909, 314; and Hadley, 1903, 44.
values. In a democracy the good citizen must strive to embody regard for the entire community, what Dewey called a "generalized individualism . . . which takes into account the real good and effective—not merely formal—freedom of every social member" (Dewey and Tufts, 1908, 472, emphasis added). This requisite of political democracy cannot be supplied by politics alone but requires the coordinated institutional power of the entire society. Indeed, proof that one is capable of self-government on these terms would necessarily require that one work actively to insure that all members of the society do in fact have the resources to participate as equal members. A "generalized individualism" is inseparable from "the democratic movement of emancipation of personal capacities, of securing to each individual an effective right to count in the order and movement of society as a whole" [Dewey and Tufts, 1908, 481]. The very term "ethics of democracy" entails this notion of self and freedom; without this entailment, democracy would only be a mechanical register of individual preferences. Its citizens, lacking "powers of intelligent self-control . . . will be in bondage to appetite, enslaved to routine, imprisoned within the monotonous round of an imagery flowing from illiberal interests, broken only by wild forays into the illicit" [Dewey and Tufts, 1908, 438].

Charlotte Perkins Gilman begins her feminist analysis of work by identifying the "ego concept" as the basic error in social analysis. Whereas all people have separate desires and personal consciousness, we have them as (natural) animals and not as (social) persons: a distinctly "human consciousness is collective." People, like all animals, have either female or male sexual characteristics and impulses, but our common humanity and therefore our identities as persons—as women and men—are constructed in and through society. As social influences and interests increase, so each person enlarges his facilities and capacities, becoming more distinctly human. Sexual equality, then, emancipates everyone from a biological individualism powered by ego and sexual drives into a higher sphere of consciousness and human relationships. Duty to our humanity is both the precondition and the

10. Gilman, 1904, 59; see also 79–124. In Reconstruction in Philosophy (1920), Dewey makes this same argument: "When the individual is taken as something given already, anything that can be done to him or for him can only be by way of external impressions and belongings: sensations of pleasure and pain, comforts, securities. . . . Only in the physical sense of physical bodies that to the senses are separate is individuality an original datum. Individuality in a social and moral sense is something to be wrought out. It means initiative, inventiveness, varied resourcefulness, assumption of responsibility in choice of belief and conduct. These are not gifts, but accomplishments" (1982, 191).
cause of progress; the victory of human consciousness is the victory of social consciousness.

In the modified Hegelian language of Cooley, without anchoring the self in social institutions that contain and transmit authoritative ideals of life, "we are ruled by native impulse and that private reason which may be so weak when detached from a rational whole; . . . it is as if each one should sit down to invent a language for himself." And like the "beautiful soul" excoriated by Hegel, Cooley contrasts the "whining questions" constantly afflicting those who seek to evade their clear social duties as husband or wife or worker or parent to the "pride in . . . self-devotion" of those who "know what their duty is and have no other thought than to do it." Without the ethical resources of free institutions by which and through which to discover and express one's identity, the individual will have no choice but to be in perpetual opposition to the larger society, "and in turning against others he destroys himself. The embittered and distracted individual must be a bad citizen."11

RIGHTS AS RESOURCES
AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The ethical resources necessary for the exercise of positive liberty in a democracy must be complemented by many other resources essential for a self-determined life. In the textbooks on philosophy, sociology, and economics and in reform writings intended for the larger public, discussions of rights as positive liberty became calls for the social provision of resources deemed essential for their exercise. In this way, an individual-rights language reappeared but now firmly tied to its positive origins within the framework of social duty. This relationship is most clearly seen in the earlier discussion of industrial wage labor. Society has a duty to restrict working hours and Saturday labor, and workers should demand these restrictions as a right; but these claims can only be honored in the context of the requisites for equal participation in a democratic society. Regular and organized leisure is a necessary resource for self-help, self-improvement, and "sustained intelligence in the voting constituency" (Kelley, 1905, 109). Society has a duty to encourage and support trade unions and workers have a right to form and join them because "the creation of an industrial organization . . . will

11. Cooley, 1909, 353–54. This mirror's Gilman's contempt for those who condemn the rich for being social parasites, but "who would do the same thing if [they] had the chance" because they share the same individualist economic and social theories (1904, 346).
serve to make individual workers enlightened, competent and loyal cit­izens of an industrial commonwealth’’ (Croly, 1914, 379). Society has a
duty to provide and make universal compulsory public schooling, and
every child has a right to an education because ‘‘this is a precedent to
self-government.’’ Just as monarchies provide for the education of the
king’s children, so democracies must provide for the education of their
future rulers: ‘‘the children of the people are educated by the state be­
cause they are to rule the state. In America we all belong to the royal
family; therefore the state educates us all.’’ 

Educational rights, industrial rights, women’s rights, and political
rights were all justified ‘‘positively’’ as resources necessary for effective
participation in a democratic society. Indeed, discussions of the social
requisites for individuality and the economic, social, and political req­
uisites for maintaining free government were of one piece. In a book on
wealth creation, Simon Patten discusses the distribution of income as
modified by economic rights and the ways in which their guarantee un­
derwrites future economic growth in an industrial economy. He most
naturally starts with ‘‘market rights’’ to insure openness and transpar­
ency of exchanges, security of property, and freedom to cooperate in
economic undertakings; but then he adds three other categories of
rights as resources. Included under ‘‘social rights,’’ Patten lists rights
to a home, to homogeneity of population, and to decisions by public
opinion; under ‘‘rights to leisure,’’ recreation, cleanliness, and scen­
ery; and under ‘‘exceptional rights,’’ those of the poor and unemployed
to relief and those of women to independent provision of income.

Dewey makes a similar argument for the provision of material and
intellectual resources in his discussion of the ways in which freedom
and responsibility can be understood in their ‘‘positive central mean­
ing.’’ For Dewey, social progress and democracy consist in the contin­
uous process of translating formal-legal rights exercised by the few into
universally available positive ones.

It is the possession by the more favored individuals in society of an ef­
flectual freedom to do and to enjoy things with respect to which the
masses have only a formal and legal freedom, that arouses a sense of
inequity, and that stirs the social judgement and will to . . . reforms
[to] transform the empty freedom of the less favored individuals into
constructive realities (Dewey and Tufts, 1908, 439).

parentis justifications for compulsory schooling, and he insists that moral educa­
tion must be a central part of the curriculum (164–65).
13. Patten, 1902a, chap. 3. See also Abbott’s discussion of ‘‘industrial rights,’’
1901, chap. 4.
These rights include physical rights to decent living conditions and personal security and rights to economic welfare, especially the right to work. But note the conflation of right and duty: "Until there is secured to and imposed upon all members of society the right and the duty of work in socially serviceable occupations, with due return on social goods, rights to life and free movement will hardly advance much beyond their present largely nominal state." This same right or duty obtains for "rights to mental activity" or freedom of thought. So long as the spiritual treasures of mankind are the property of the few and while most men do not have sufficient leisure, even rights of speech and conscience remain only formal and ineffective (Dewey and Tufts, 1908, 445-48).

A not-so-hidden corollary of treating rights as effective resources for their positive exercise is that their equal provision carries with it a much heightened demand for self-discipline. Equal rights read in this way is another way of saying that to the extent that they are insured, the average American runs out of excuses for irresponsible and socially destructive behavior. The possession of these rights, like the possession of property or of extraordinary talents, is a trust, even when the possessors include most members of the society. And every extension of positive rights carries with it an expectation of higher average standards of behavior. In today’s language, Progressives treated emancipation as empowerment but added that empowerment entails expectations of more social responsibility and greater self-discipline. Given their institutional analysis of the socially constituted self, this relationship is implicit. Given their theories of the relationship between individual and social reform, this relationship is necessary. And given their commitment to democracy as the enhanced capacity for self-government, this relationship is a good to be desired and struggled for. Nowhere are these parallel arguments made more clearly than in discussions of women and freedom.

"WHEN THE MOTHER OF THE RACE IS FREE"

Framing Progressive discussions of freedom from the standpoint of the woman question reveals both their differences from the nineteenth-century discourse of rights and the relationship Progressives sought to establish between personal freedom and national democracy. From the beginnings of mass political parties associated with Jacksonian democ-

14. This understanding of rights was also implicit in much of the earlier abolitionist literature and underlines the inseparability of emancipation and social control. See Walters, 1978, chaps. 5 and 6, and discussion of hegemony in chapter 1 above.
racy there was a perverse dependence of democratic individualism on the denial of rights to Negroes and women. Their legal subordination constituted the unbridgeable dividing line above which all white males were equal. Thus, both the pride of citizenship and a distinct American political identity were constructed in opposition to both nonwhites and women. Paradoxically, then, to urge emancipation for either women or slaves (or equal rights for Negro males in the North) was seen as a threat to equal rights and democratic individualism. All white men were equal because each stood in the same superior relationship to all women and to all Negroes. If that foundation of equality were removed, "aristocracy" as hierarchy could soon reappear in political life. In the case of freed slaves, voting qualifications would necessarily be reintroduced, qualifications that some blacks would meet and some whites would not. In the case of women, suffrage would not only further empower many women who already possessed resources far superior to those of most men—witness the success of prohibition in states and localities—it would undermine the political role of the father in the family. Without the resource of that form of patriarchal authority and identity, the average American white male would have little else to fall back on. With that resource he could have pride in his citizenship and his freedom without the need to make any substantive demands on himself. Equality and negative freedom were his from birth. Democracy on these terms made the costs of citizenship, like the costs of public lands following Indian removal, very cheap.

If it can be said that all horizons privilege, then the horizon of nineteenth-century equal rights was the privilege all white men had over all

15. Peterson, 1966. Most anti-Jacksonian political movements were products of evangelical culture and espoused values closely associated with later feminism. See also Watson, 1992, on this "ambiguous legacy" of Jacksonian democracy.

16. Howe, 1979, 23–68 and 181–209, on differences between Jacksonians and Whigs; Peterson, 1966, 137, 143, and 214–33, on the relationship between the achievement of universal white male suffrage and new restrictions of male Negro suffrage in New York; Morgan, 1972, on slavery and democracy. Both Jeffersonian and Jacksonian thought was liberal-individualist at the national level, but would allow strong and intrusive government, and thus "civic republican" virtues, within homogeneous regions, states, and communities. This same duality informed Jacksonian ideas of the proper constitution of the Democratic party as discussed in Jaenicke, 1986.

17. This is exactly what Tocqueville saw as the weakness of American individualism and what Croly sought to overcome with a national democracy. Kann (1990, 57–62 and 72–77) argues that this burden fell largely on women who, without formal political power, were held responsible for inculcating civic virtue. Underneath a formal liberalism was a hidden and largely gendered civic republicanism. This argument, in the context of the welfare state, is amplified in Skocpol, 1992, 311–72.
women and all people of color. Hints of what an alternative national horizon might be are found almost everywhere in writings urging the extension of women's rights. Anna Howard Shaw, president (1902–15) of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), argued that American women needed the suffrage more than French women or English women because the latter two were ruled by their own kind whereas "in this country American women are governed by every kind of man under the light of the sun. There is no race, there is no color, there is no nationality of men who are not the sovereign rulers of American women." A parallel argument, made in terms of character, was voiced in the authoritative History of Woman Suffrage, edited by Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper.

These arguments were buttressed by more explicitly feminist ones as well. Voting rights for women would materially and symbolically augment a distinct and needed voice in American politics. Even without the vote, women reformers, with their many allies and with extensive organizational and communication networks, were already a powerful force in the land, starting with the prohibition movements of the late 1870s and growing by the year. Indeed, extensions of women's rights requiring only (male) state legislative changes or (male) judicial decision and not constitutional change requiring popular majority assent, were an unalloyed success story, at least outside the South. Moreover, legislated reforms of a broader nature dealing with mothers' pensions, child

18. Given federalism, for many Americans there were really two separate horizons, regional or local, and national. The latter, under the Constitution as a "neutral framework," also legitimated as equal these separate and more provincial identities. In this way, a southern yeoman or slaveholder could see himself as the independent and equal citizen of his county and state in the same way that the New England citizen could see himself in his town meeting: and, for that reason, both could see themselves as free and equal Americans as if no horizon existed at all.

19. Quoted from Kraditor, 1965, 126. The NAWSA was by far the largest and most powerful of the woman suffrage organizations at this time. Under the leadership of Shaw, the organization grew from about 17,000 members in 1905 to more than 100,000 in 1915. Ibid., chap. 1, for an overview of women's rights organizations and state suffrage laws. It was no accident that the white South and the ethnic-Catholic North found a common home in the Democratic party.

20. Quoted in Kraditor, 1965, 94: "A real democracy has not as yet existed, but... the dangerous experiment has been made of enfranchising the vast proportion of crime, intemperance, immorality and dishonesty, and barring absolutely from the suffrage the great proportion of temperance, morality, religion and conscientiousness; that in other words, the worse elements have been put into the ballot-box and the best elements kept out" (from vol. 4, 1902).

21. In the preface to vol. 4, History of Woman Suffrage, Susan B. Anthony declares complete victory, except for the vote, for the 1848 program, that is, "to acquire an education, to earn a living, to claim her wages, to own property, to make contract, to bring suit, to testify in court, to obtain a divorce for just cause, to possess her children, to claim a fair share of the accumulations during marriage" (quoted in Kraditor, 1965, 79).
labor, delinquency, and prostitution—all viewed as the special concern of women and urged by women's organizations—were successful even without woman suffrage. A final "constitutional" victory, however, would symbolically legitimize that voice and, perhaps, bestow increased power and prestige on the organizational expressions of feminist values in the society.

Furthermore, their victory would be a victory of northern ideals of the family, evangelical Protestant ideas of morality in politics, and Federalist-Whig-Republican ideas of antipartyism and national citizenship. By the early twentieth century, these values were already clearly ascendent. Woman qua woman, an ever-growing audience was told, embodied many of the values of increasing importance in the modern age: the entire logic of social evolution favored the traits that women already possessed. For Gilman, political rights for women would correct the distortions in political practices and institutions caused by male monopoly of them:

Men have made a human institution into an ultra-masculine performance; and, quite rightly, feel that women could not take part in politics as men do. That it is not necessary to fulfill this human custom in so masculine a way does not occur to them. Few men can overlook the limitations of their sex and see the truth; that this business of taking care of our common affairs is not only equally open to women and men, but that women are distinctly needed in it (Gilman, 1911, 223).

As early as the 1880s Frances E. Willard declared that "woman's evolution has carried her beyond [men]" but with the spur of equality, men will be able to "climb to the same level some day."²² The equation of women with advanced morality and self-control was symbolized by the canonization of Jane Addams. In a contest in 1906 to discover "Who is the best woman in Chicago," Addams not only won, but she and fellow settlement-house workers monopolized the first four positions.²³ But the clearest relationship between freedom for women and reform-

²². From Davis, 1973, 91. This difference, she adds, gives him "a sense of larger liberty and her an instinct of revulsion," perhaps explaining why "the loves of women for each other grow more numerous each day," especially now that "any capable and careful women [sic] can honorably own her own support" (90–91).

²³. Davis, 1973, 199. The contest rules stipulated that contestants be restricted to unmarried women because "unless a married woman ignores the wishes of her husband it is difficult for her to achieve the same degree of goodness that the unmarried woman does."
ing the nation—between rights and substantive power—was in discussions of the marriage relationship. Like John Stuart Mill, who commented upon it in his 1869 essay on the subjection of women, American feminist intellectuals and their male allies knew that the prevailing political economy of marriage would forever frustrate the achievement of the society they envisioned. Without major changes in the marriage relationship, distinctly feminine virtues in American public life could be directly expressed only by unmarried women (or those few married women in decidedly unconventional marriages), leaving their married counterparts with the secondary task of socializing males to higher ideals through their roles as wives, mothers, and Sunday school teachers. And given the increasing socialization of life and therefore the demand for a higher social ethic, women in traditional marriages would be increasingly less positioned to understand and to inculcate that ethic. In Gilman's language, men are in fact "more human" than women because of their privileged opportunities to participate in the larger society, even though women qua women have precisely those values that the larger society needs to make it more human. Like Mill, these feminists viewed the economic and psychic dependencies in the marriage relationship as one of the last remaining barriers to the achievement of a true democracy. Within the context of the implicit exchange of sex for support and all of the competition for wives and husbands, the family that occurred was portrayed exactly the way Mill portrayed it, "a school of despotism" that undermines and distorts the better lessons taught in the larger society and culture. If families could become transformed into schools of national democratic citizenship, progress in all areas of American life would be insured.

Gilman was the most influential exponent of this explicitly feminist

24. This is the larger message of Addams, 1902, chaps. 1-4; and Gilman, 1903.

25. Gilman, 1911, 184 and 235. Her larger argument, of course, is that male or "androcentric" culture has appropriated and therefore distorted the socially created and distinctly "human" sphere of life (22-25 and 132-35).

26. Mill, 1970, 174. Gilman, 1911, 40, echoes this depiction: "The child should receive in the family, full preparation for his relation to the world at large. His whole life must be spent in the world, serving it well or ill; and youth is the time to learn how. But the androcentric [male dominated] home cannot teach him. We live to-day in a democracy—the man-made family is a despotism." Mill (1970, 160 and 166) was not reticent about the content of this despotism. The family is the last enclave where animal passion can be expressed without discipline: "He can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations ... this power seeks out and evokes the latent germs of selfishness in the remotest corners of his nature ... offers to him a license for the indulgence of those points of his original character which in all other relations he would have found it necessary to repress and conceal, and the repression of which would in time have become a second nature."
position, but muted variants of her argument were voiced by Progressives generally. The reason for her influence was less her claims for women's legal rights than the fact that her feminist vision was seamlessly interwoven into a social evolutionary perspective that ratified the new industrial economy, embraced the cosmopolitan perspectives of the new sociology, and recommended the same order of socialized discipline to bring about social fulfillment. Her case for the restructuring of the marriage relationship on the basis of equality did not rest on any claims of natural or human rights or on any a priori assumption of sameness deserving of legal recognition in marriage.

Her entire argument is shaped within a social-evolutionary perspective resting on a materialist theory of moral advance. Historically, the economic dependency of women on men and the male need to struggle against other males for economic sustenance was a natural necessity—and remains a necessity in most parts of the world. Like Patten's depiction of the structural and value requisites of a "pain" economy, Gilman's story of the transition to conditions necessary for a new marriage relationship is the achievement of the abundance, surplus, and leisure that comes from the physical, intellectual, and organizational mastery of nature. This mastery is not of external nature alone: democracy and moral progress require a parallel self-mastery. But whereas the conditions of the larger society now warrant the hope of achieving an order within which equal and authentic freedom can be experienced by every member, the traditional family relationship necessarily prevents its fulfillment. Men will never be able to exercise full self-mastery over their instincts so long as they continue to enjoy such a "cheap and easy lordship" over their economically dependent wives. Wives, in turn, will lack the psychic and moral resources to fulfill their goal "to make more feminine, and so more human, the male of the human race." So long as their self-interest and security depends upon being "over-sexed" to compete in the marriage market and to maintain the marriage relationship, that long will women remain a barrier to human progress.

A further connection between Progressive discussions of freedom

27. Patten, a close student of Mill's writings, had already gendered Mill's entire economic theory, especially pointing to the influence of Harriet Taylor in introducing the role of "social ideals" (Patten, 1899, 336-39; see also 318-35). Because of the close publishing dates, there is no evidence that either Gilman or Patten was aware of the other's work, even though they run strikingly parallel. One explanation is that both Gilman and Patten had been heavily influenced by Lester Ward.

28. Gilman, 1898 and 1911, on the distinctly feminist argument; 1904, on the economic or material preconditions for sexual equality.

29. Gilman, 1898, 337 and 132; see also 31-39. This same argument is restated in 1911, 26-43, in terms of a three-sided distinction of male, female, and human, with the third category a restatement of Progressive political economy and sociology.
and feminist discussions of rights was a shared religious vision. As befitting the relative of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lyman Beecher, Gilman's argument about "androcentric" or male-dominated distortions of human development and social advance is also a story of female atonement and humanity's salvation.  

Although this is most clearly expressed in her discussions of the triumph of the "Christ ideal" fulfilled in a truly socialized consciousness, her gendered story of evolution makes the age-old sacrifice of the woman in the household the precondition for eventual triumph. This atonement story begins with a disclaimer that "a purely feminine culture would have advanced the world more successfully" or that to men can be attributed "a wholly evil influence." Rather, like biblical history generally, and certainly through its Hegelian gloss, sacrifice and suffering are necessary to vouchsafe ultimate victory.

The mother instinct, through nature, is one of unmixed devotion, of love and service, care and defense, with no self-interest. The animal father, in such cases as he is of service to the young, assists the mother in her work in similar fashion. But the human father in the family with the male head soon made that family an instrument of desire, and combat, and self-expression.... We have to-day reached a degree of human development where both men and women are capable of seeing over and across the distinctions of sex, and mutually working for the advancement of the world. Our progress is, however, seriously impeded by what we may call the masculine tradition.

The triumph of humanity is the victory of race over sex, race meaning "human race" at its highest levels. Although women grievously suffered within the "sexuo-economic" despotism of the family, this suffering prepared the way for progress and eventual equality in a common humanity. "If the female [from the start] had remained in full per-


31. Gilman, 1904, 119–21, concluding that this emancipates us from "the narrow limits of personal life, that poor animal existence" and gives us a victory over death because the distinctly human "I" is "Human Life," which is immortal.

32. Gilman, 1911, 131–32; see also 193–207; 1904, 267–372; and 1898, chap. 7. Douglas, 1988, 128, discusses the way in which Sara Hale in the 1850s also portrayed the drama of the Atonement in sexual terms, with woman's vicarious sacrifices for man's sins finally assuring her "salvation [of]... the race."
sonal freedom and activity, she would have remained superior to [the male] and both would have remained stationary.' Now, however, "the period of women's economic dependence is drawing to a close," making possible the substitution of "inter-human" rather than merely "inter-sexual" love. Under these conditions, the "primitive form of sex-union chafes and drags," preventing as it always had marriages between "the best individuals... a union between man and woman such as the world has long dreamed of in vain" (Gilman, 137–44, passim). In teleological terms, "the relentless responsibilities of her duty as a mother" can now be fully realized; woman as the "race type" is now in the position to choose her mate, thereby fulfilling her destined role in heeding "the clarion call to redeem the race" (Gilman, 1911, 34, 49–50, 247; 1890).

Although Gilman's anthropological theories were not always accepted, her atonement story was integral to the Progressive mind. America redeemed is the race redeemed: "Women [in America] are growing honester, braver, stronger, more healthful and skilful and able and free, more human in all ways." Since women are able to select which kinds of men and which kinds of characteristics will be reproduced, the marriage relationship will no longer stand as a barrier to race improvement. "A new grade of womanhood we can clearly foresee; proud, strong, serene, independent; great mothers of great women and great men. These will hold high standards and draw men up to them; by no compulsion save nature's law of attraction" (Gilman, 1911, 250).

This beatific vision combined the new ideal of marriage with democracy in a union of ethics, religion, and politics. Gilman concluded her early book with the prediction that "When the mother of the race is free, we shall have a better world, by the easy right of birth and by the calm, slow, friendly forces of social evolution." In a poem dedicated to Jane Addams, biological and social motherhood is fused in this same imagery:

Mother of races fusing into one,
and keeping open house with presence sweet
In that loud city where the nations meet
Around thy ample hearth when day is done,
When I behold the wild tribes thou hast won
And see thee wooing from the witching street
By thy own saintly face the erring feet,
I know Love still has power beneath the sun (Davis, 1973, 205).

Vida Scudder ends her study of English and American literature by showing how its development points to the "marriage" of Christianity
and democracy in an America of one united and equal people. As preface to this union, Scudder clearly sets the problem:

Belief in democracy is the last demand of idealism. We are not likely to forget this: we whose national Credo must be spoken in the presence of the seething throngs of the outcasts of Europe. To look our national situation squarely in the face and say that the cure for democracy is more democracy requires a reverential trust toward humanity at large such as only the mystic who avoids men has in the past been able to hold with any degree of steadiness (Scudder, 1898, 246).

Writings such as the "Fabian Essays" in Britain and the flood of reform writings in America now bear "important witness to that invasion of the world of action by the idealists which we have signaled as one of the significant symptoms of these latter days." In Scudder's version, the marriage of democracy and Christianity in "these latter days" is socialism as the triumph of equality and justice.

It is difficult, it is impossible, to define or describe a tendency of which we are all disciples; but so much it is safe to say,—that with the intellectual impulse toward the reconstruction of social theory, and the practical impulse toward the activity of social service, is blending more and more a spiritual impulse deeper than either of these, imperatively desiring and seeking the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth (Scudder, 1898, 287, 314).

Each of these tendencies are "imperfect alone [but] united they become a power." They are now "rushing together" and, once united, will constitute "a sacramental union" that "draws to a close . . . the long separation between democracy and Christianity" and makes possible "freedom for more perfect collective expression than has ever yet been seen on earth" (Scudder, 1898, 314, 318).

While voiced in terms of equal suffrage and legal equality in the marriage relationship, feminist claims for a recognition were also made in the name of a substantive vision of political and economic life that the exercise of these rights would bring into being. Democratic individualists in nineteenth-century America were fully aware of this. The connection between women's rights and Progressive goods posed a deep threat to their identities and impelled them to deny women and Negroes the vote to keep that vision from becoming a reality. In opposing women's rights they were not only opposing "the firm though loving government of heroic women,"—to use a phrase from an 1882 hand-
book for charity workers (Boyer, 1978, 153)—they were defending the very basis of the nineteenth-century polity, which declared that the national government under the Constitution was to be strictly neutral as to ways of life, just as it was to religious belief. And insofar as nongovernmental “parastates” and the media sought to step in where formal government was thought constitutionally barred, these institutions, too, were charged with rights invasions.

But much more was involved here: the proponents of women’s rights were not different in kind from Progressive intellectuals generally. They spoke the same language across the range of their discourse, and they certainly shared the same enemies. In this sense the “extremist” demands for woman’s rights were also the moderate claims for Progressive goods. Like their abolitionist ancestors, women were often conflated with Negroes, clergymen-intellectuals, and even Christ in a common image of powerlessness, suffering, and redemption. Both feminists and Progressives were fully aware that when Gilman, for example, spoke of the female principle against the male in order to insure the triumph of a distinctly human or social ethic, her effective reference was the myth of New England and all those of both sexes who were authentic members of the redeemer nation. She and they knew that abolitionism was also a “female” principle against the slavemaster-husband-despot, North and South, and that as many men as women were abolitionists. In short, “women” in Gilman’s writings meant “progressive” and progressive in the larger literature meant a program of reform to defeat what Gilman called “androcentric” politics and culture—the party system, competitive economics, politics as a game, a wholesale reliance on law and punishments, a religion of threat and damnation.

33. Albion Small, although he did not always agree with Gilman, opened the pages of his journal to her and her allies and wrote on the relationship between women’s educational opportunities, the family, and social progress. At the turn of the century more than half the undergraduates at the University of Chicago were women and one-third of all Ph.D.’s awarded to women in the social sciences before 1900 were awarded by Chicago (Fitzpatrick, 1990, 84 and 75). The Annals was equally open to women’s issues. Patten wrote at least three articles in the periodical press on themes supportive of Gilman’s general theory (Independent, September 1906, 674-81, and December 1904, 1244-49; and Twentieth Century Magazine, July 1912, 254-62) as well as in the Annals itself (56 [1914]: 111-21).

34. The fact that this critique was often expressed in gendered terms does not limit it to feminist demands; the alliance of romanticism and socialism was often expressed the same way. Charles and Mary Beard (1927, 2: 431 and 721) easily blended Charlotte Perkins Gilman into their larger narrative of American reform and progress. Their textbook became a standard, published continuously from 1927 to 1954. Charles Beard also wrote a pamphlet, “The Common Man and the Franchise,” in 1912 for the Men’s League for Woman Suffrage, a cause in which his wife Mary was very active.
PROGRESSIVE FREEDOM AND CONTEMPORARY LIBERAL THEORY

Recent critiques of liberal political philosophy within the anglophone tradition offer instructive points of comparison to Progressive writings critical of rights. Except for some feminist writers and some students of John Dewey, discussion today is conducted in happy ignorance of Progressive writings and therefore reproduces unawares many of the same logics and arguments. While this veil of ignorance has some advantages for constrained discourse, it has the disadvantages that the contemporary variant often lacks concrete historical and institutional locations and therefore is without a crucial political dimension and an institutional memory.

The Ontological Argument

Three patterns of contemporary criticism are of particular value for comparison with Progressive writings. The first is what Charles Taylor and others call the ontological argument, the presuppositions about the "selves" who make rights claims and who are the bearers of rights. What degree of social solidarity and prior agreement are individuals presumed to have before they can begin to discuss rights and justice? While many defenders of liberal individualism (Nozick, Larmore, Ackerman) respond today that issues of identity and community are irrelevant to liberal justice, both feminists and "communitarians" have insisted that some such presuppositions are made willy-nilly and that a denial of this constitutes a de facto advantage for certain ways of life over others under the guise of neutrality. Moreover, any liberal theory of distributive justice, such as Rawls's, "which involves treating the endowment of each as part of the jointly held resources for the benefit of society as a whole," must presuppose some meaning or "horizon" to the term "society as a whole." Furthermore, given the range and intrusiveness of the activities of the modern liberal state, how is normative sense to be made of those activities under the assumptions of a "neutral framework" open to all citizens equally? In short, how can a rights-based dis-

35. On the communitarian critique, Galston, 1991; Sandel, 1984; Taylor, 1989; on the feminist critique, Okin, 1989; Shanley, 1991; for the use of these arguments against a discourse based on rights, Glendon (1991), whose book is subtitled "the impoverishment of political discourse."

course premised on disembodied selves serve to make sense of our own
lived experiences in a democratic society? 37

A liberal "view from nowhere," so this critique goes, leads either to
willful blindness as de facto obligation or to an alienated perfectionism
and the withdrawal from political life as a corrupt world of raw power.
Thus, an ontological critique of liberalism, especially when combined
with a theory of language and human agency (Taylor, 1985), charges
that no viable political order, democratic or otherwise, can be built on a
foundation of equal but disembodied citizens. The polity that under­
writes personal and civil rights first requires a people to constitute the
polity. Attempts to explain and to justify any standing regime outside of
this connection either hides a social ontology (often male or rich) under
the cover of neutrality or unconsciously draws upon the normative re­
serves of a particular tradition to sustain its claimed universality. In
short, a regime that takes rights seriously needs "a sense of mutual
commitment . . . sustained . . . by encumbered selves who share a
strong sense of community." 38 Once this "need" is recognized, the
twinned issues of nation and identity immediately present themselves.
What ways of life are to count as valid tickets for equal membership?
What common "horizons" or values constitute the boundaries of the
community within which membership is claimed or sought? Feminist
critiques of rights have stressed the identity and equal-respect implica­
tions of this argument, whereas communitarians have stressed the is­
sues of civic education and patriotism. Neither, however, can avoid both
sets of issues because identity issues are also issues of membership and
loyalty, and vice versa. 39

At the most abstract level, critiques and defenses of liberal individual­
ism now and in the Progressive era differ very little. What is strikingly
different are the institutional and social assumptions lying just below
the surface of these two discussions. In late-nineteenth-century def­
fenses of liberal individualism, the institutional guarantor of "neutral

37. Glendon, 1991, 14: "The most distinctive features of our American rights
dialect are the very ones that are most conspicuously in tension with what we re­
quire in order to give a reasonably full and coherent account of what kind of society
we are and what kind of polity we are trying to create."

cal critique this way: "The real difficulty is that the individual is regarded as some­
thing given, something already there. Consequently, he can only be something to
be catered to, something whose pleasures are to be magnified and possessions mul­
tiplied" [emphasis deleted].

39. See, for example, Galston, 1989; and Okin, 1989. Glendon, 1991, 146-70,
comparing American and European court decisions on homosexual rights, faults
American rights talk for forcing either-or decisions on whose ways of life are to be
accorded respect, thereby preventing discussion, compromise, and inclusion.
frameworks” and disembodied but equal citizens is the United States Constitution, a document radically restricting the reach of the national government in domestic affairs. But even the most hard-bitten nineteenth-century defender of a rights discourse at the national level simply presumed a “goods”-based politics at the local or regional level. What Croly derisively termed “the monarchy of the Constitution” was a limited and liberal formal-legal empire astride countless virtue-based “republics” (states, localities, churches, schools, families). In short, the reach and depth of nineteenth-century liberal individualism was highly constrained. The point of insisting that the federal Constitution be interpreted as a neutral framework of limited government was precisely to legitimate nonneutral—and therefore “illiberal” or particularistic—persons, localities, and regions. This equation, federal : rights = states : goods, mirrored an economic one that severely constrained the power of the national government to interfere with free markets and contracts but gave states all but free rein to intervene in these areas and elsewhere through police powers. Woodrow Wilson’s “privilege of separate [economic] development” had a cultural dimension as well: the Constitution and the party system combined to permit regions and localities to impose their own “community” cultural and moral values, including racial segregation.

Progressives insisted that social progress required the conscious adoption of “nonneutrality” at the national level; democracy now required national, not regional-local “embodied selves”; national, not local, patriotism and citizenship; and national, not party-local, institutions of civic mobilization and political education. The male-dominated family (especially in the white South and among the newer immigrants in the North) and the local political party were both barriers, not because their values were illiberal but because they were wrong, preventing the growth of an inclusive and national public good and therefore a democratic America. Both families and local party machines were “despotic” because they enslaved their participants in ways that both limited them and led to self-destructive national politics.

Today’s defenders of neutral frameworks and a national rights-based

40. This norm was so strong that Walter Lippmann, writing at the time of the Scopes trial in 1925, assumed that the federal courts had no authority to review the state legislative decisions regarding what would be taught in the schools (Steel, 1980, 216–17). This tradition of federalism causes some paradoxical results in contemporary discussions of civic education in America. Compare Gutman, 1989, 30–31, defending the right of government coercively to intervene in Amish education, to Galston, 1991, 252–55, defending the right of the Amish to be left alone. The former defends liberal neutrality as the basis for civic education, but urges state intervention; the latter defends the right of the state to teach substantive values, including patriotic and religious ones, but urges toleration and restraint.
regime can find little historical support in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American example except in a reading of the federal Constitution that limited its reach far short of protecting individuals from state and local enforcement of shared community norms. Those who defended "rights" in the late nineteenth century were also defending these parochial and local virtues; those who urged a national democratic community and national virtue were those who did battle with parochial and local virtue. Against this history, to insist on a national regime of neutral rights is to warrant ever-increasing incursions of federal power into private and local affairs, universalizing local conflicts and compelling all to act as if they were cosmopolitans. In this sense today's liberals are every bit as "imperialistic" as yesterday's Progressives but in bad faith: liberals' compulsion is presented as a value-free defense of neutrality against illiberal local attempts to compel nationally contested definitions of substantive goods. Nationalizing rights in this way undermines local democracy and even some forms of cultural pluralism without giving national democratic and national patriotic reasons commensurate with the local loss.

On this reading, the local virtues celebrated in the "civic republican" tradition become provincial and undemocratic vices from a national perspective—whether that national perspective is framed in terms of Progressive "goods" then or liberal "rights" now. Contemporary defenders of communitarian values often instinctively mirror their rights-based opponents. Stressing the value of the local, the regional, the plural (participatory democracy, the democratic family), they refuse to insist on the kinds of governmental and moral authority that might be required to instantiate those same values as national norms. Progressive academics and intellectuals, along with their feminist counterparts, were nationalists to the core, but their's was a substantive nationalism, a view of America as a coherent democracy with shared purposes and a shared project in the world.

**The Civic Republican-Communitarian Argument**

A second critique of liberal individualism today is directly related to the ontological one. This is a critique premised on the contrast of "civic

41. Walzer (1983) is the one participant in the contemporary discussion who takes into account this logic of nineteenth-century America in twentieth-century institutional terms.

42. The only nineteenth-century model for clear national norms is the Civil War, whereas all twentieth-century models are foreign wars or cold wars; none but the most romantic and conservative of communitarians would base a national liberal polity on the need for enemies.
humanism" or "republicanism" to liberal individualism. Through which "paradigm" should America be read and freedom be understood? What intellectual traditions and what philosophical arguments explain and justify public expressions of freedom as opposed to private defenses of right? Historical arguments over the meaning of the revolutions in seventeenth-century Britain and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America are also arguments over contemporary meanings and relationships of political freedom and private rights. "Liberal" readings tend to stress the bourgeois and economic components of this history and to underplay the importance of both religious and democratic elements.43 "Republicar" or civic humanist readings stress political mobilization and the public and participatory sides of revolution. They go on to insist that the primary idea of freedom is "public freedom," in contrast to despotism. Only as "communal liberty" is secured and maintained can private rights confer security, dignity, and meaning. Read this way, both in origin and in priority private rights are subordinate to public purpose just as private ends and purposes are subordinate to the rights and obligations of citizenship.44 Put in terms of ontology, even this is a false way to state the relationship: the "self" as claimant of rights is already a civic self, forged in the fires of conflict and participation. Citizenship is not a separate identity in competition with a private self, but an integral part of one's personality. Without the identities and bonds created through collective action and commitment, the resources and motives necessary to protect the rights of others as well as one's own would be lacking. This same civic humanist reading has been used by those who stress the role of Puritan religious millennialism, specific theological traditions, and nongovernmental sources of civic education [churches, schools, families] in British and American ideas of freedom.45

43. Or, critics stress the victory of the liberal paradigm to show the betrayal of authentic democratic visions that did make their appearance [Marxist version: Locke beats the Levellers, the Constitution betrays the Revolution] or to show the barrenness of modernity absent its classical-Christian roots [Straussian version: secular founders, godless Constitution, Hobbesian turtles all the way down]. Locke is almost required to be misread in both versions, that is, without acknowledging his writings on theology, church, and family.

44. The pervasive reach and power of juries in colonial through nineteenth-century America is testimony to the power of civic republicanism. Selected at random and claiming powers to judge both fact and law [often in courts presided over by elected and/or untrained judges], juries institutionalized the dependence of rights on the political community.

45. Glendon [1991, xiii] perfectly replicates the republican side of this historical debate in her critique of contemporary rights talk by referring to the "seedbeds of civic virtue... families, religious communities, and other primary social groups." And see Glendon, 1991, 171-83. Noll, 1990, selections 1-8, contains an excellent
The historical arguments are more explicitly political than are the battles over textual interpretation in the history of political thought. The civic humanist side of both arguments, however, places a much greater stress on intellectual elites and cultural institutions, whereas the liberal side stresses the role of property and the ways of life appropriate to a market society. Viewed through the earlier lens of Progressivism, these differing understandings are no accident. The Progressive critique of the nineteenth-century American regime was clearly a national-democratic "civic humanism," not only in its stress on public virtue and higher citizenship, but in its reliance on tradition, both religious and politico-cultural. Civic humanism, both ancient and modern, enshrines patriotism, and patriotism requires narrative discourse and collective memory. Just as Machiavelli required of every republic founding events and exemplary deeds to "make a memory," so civic humanism asks every citizen to defend the republic and save it from degradation and despotism by making new memories emulating the old and thereby "refounding" the original memory. Both the myth of New England and its refoundings in the Revolution, Constitution, and Civil War—and the biblical-historical framework of evangelical Protestantism, with its jeremiad rituals of civic religion—are integral to Progressive understandings of American nationality and the public doctrines Progressives shaped. They would have found it quite preposterous even to entertain the idea that America was built on "Hobbesian" or "possessive individualism" foundations.

These same national understandings gave Progressive intellectuals a huge popular audience and a historical pedigree for their modernist civil religion and their doctrines of social justice. Their conscious location within this system of national memory was both a political strategy and a form of expressive political action crucial to their own identities, their intellectual projects, and even their claims to scientific objectivity. Their most "modernist" readings of Christianity and their most "materialist" readings of the advance of moral progress betray this histori-

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46. Marxists are often befuddled here. Because civic republicanism has been used against certain forms of liberal capitalism, it is also taken to be more "democratic." Using that assumption to interpret American political history, especially without addressing the national-local problem, creates numerous contradictions, for examples, Norton, 1986.
cist impulse and link their public doctrines to a strong national republican reading of America as a historic people with both a history and a destiny requiring political expression in the larger world. This same impulse links them directly to their claimed ancestry and puts them in deep opposition to Jeffersonian localism and secular-constitutionalist readings of the nation. If the logic of civic humanism seems to require thick notions of time—whether classical-cyclical or Christian-apocalyptic—the logic of liberal individualism suggests the timelessness implicit in a view from nowhere: the image of America ever restored to native innocence as it pushes westward or the freedom of the rational actor who owes nothing to his ancestors and little to his posterity. As John Quincy Adams, the original anti-Jacksonian, put it, the democracy of his day was radically deficient and radically evil because it "has no forefathers, it looks to no posterity, it is swallowed up on the present, and thinks of nothing but itself."

The Democratic Individuality Argument

For all of their emphasis on the socially constructed self and the need for subordinating individual interests to a common good, Progressive academics and intellectuals also had a robust theory of individuality. By stressing social complexity, cultural tradition, and the social provision of resources, they argued that a democratic society would provide much greater scope for the flourishing of individual differences and talents than did the current rights-based regime of nineteenth-century America. This is the third theme that resonates in contemporary discussions of the meaning of freedom.

Contemporary critics of liberal individualism replicate this argument in a variety of ways. One form is to link individuality—as opposed to individualism—with deeper forms of pluralism. Progressives stressed "difference" as one of character, marked by specialization and service. Both feminists and multiculturalists today stress cultural and sexual differences and insist that these differences be publicly ratified. They maintain that a society of substantial gender, racial, and ethnic equality will make possible a "humanist" liberalism where differences will no longer be suppressed under the veil of neutral institutions but will be

47. Quoted in M. Wilson, 1967, 107. For a general discussion of the paradigms of "time" and "space" in pre–Civil War America, M. Wilson, 1974; and Greenstone, 1986. Tocqueville (1981, 396) depicts the effects of democratic individualism in almost the same words as Adams: "The woof of time is every instant broken and the track of generations effaced. Those who went before are soon forgotten; of those who will come after, no one has any idea: and the interest of man is confined to those in close propinquity to himself."
encouraged by the legal and cultural protection of minority ways of life (Okin, 1989; Shanley, 1991). With or without taking their cues from earlier Progressive feminists like Gilman, they reproduce her vision of a society where higher forms of individuality are only possible if women (and, today, minority cultures) are emancipated. In any case, there is a shared vision of democratic—some would say "romantic"—individualism in a society reconstructed by new family and new social relationships, once women and minorities attain equal standing and respect. Today's discussion is framed in terms of "the politics of identity and difference," (Connolly, 1991) rather than in the Progressives' language of the conditions for full self-development, but images from Whitman and Emerson float just beneath the surface of both discussions.

Comparing recent attempts to recover traditions of democratic individuality with Progressive writings also provides an instructive benchmark. John Dewey and Charles Horton Cooley outlined the ways in which a more comprehensive and authoritative national community would provide conditions for a higher individuality. Their attack on "dualism" in psychological and social theory was also a defense of the proposition that only a shared social ethic can sustain a society both democratic and complex and thus support the resources required for individuality to flourish. For Dewey and Cooley, differentiation and specialization were preconditions for higher forms of individuality, but this differentiation would necessarily yield hierarchy and class distinction unless both talents and identity were constructed within a larger social purpose. Dewey's call for individual "moral initiative" and Cooley's call for those with special talents and energies to immerse themselves "in the deeper currents of the general life" attested to their common belief that there is "no essential conflict between democracy and specialization in any sphere." Dualistic conceptions of man and society and a

48. Contemporary feminist writers are increasingly discovering the limits of a rights discourse in justifying institutions and practices that both protect and encourage their substantive values. Put differently, one response to the charge that recent feminist arguments do not take rights seriously enough is to admit it, but point to ways in which more communal and pluralist ways of construing democracy will result in more equal measures of respect for various ways of life. Some contemporary feminists are even rediscovering the family as an institutional resource for both feminist values and individuality, again reproducing some of the Progressive argument about its centrality. See, for example, Lange, 1991, using Rousseau to suggest new forms of democratic feminism. Perhaps Camille Paglia will soon be depicted as voicing dangerous pagan doctrines of sensuality and individualism inseparable from a pure rights discourse.

49. If these contemporary claims are expressed only in a individual rights and equal justice language, they self-destruct as claims for group privilege—a fact gradually being recognized in the literature, which is increasingly compelled to speak in the language of a larger public good.
legal order premised on that dualism stand in the way both of democracy and of individuality. "Democracy is an ethical idea, the idea of a personality, with truly infinite capacities, incorporate with every man. Democracy and the one, the ultimate, ethical ideal of humanity are to my mind synonyms."  

Herbert Croly raised these same themes in his discussion of "constructive individualism." In the nineteenth-century rights-based regime of democratic individualism, distinction and personal development were always devalued and subverted by the commercial-competitive standards of small-producer capitalism; "intellectual individuality and independence were sacrificed for the benefit of social homogeneity and the quickest possible development of American economic opportunities." The talented and specialized individual was continuously forced into the position "of selling his personality instead of fulfilling it." In a commercial society everyman must be part salesman. For individuality and personal distinction to flourish in a national setting, the social critic must carry on "an incessant and relentless warfare on the prevailing American intellectual insincerity" and be "unscrupulous" in cultivating "a genuinely individualistic practice and ideal." Only in a positive and constructive national political democracy will individuality be seen as a virtue and not an aristocratic threat because the whole range of human talents and energies will be placed in constructive relationship to the common good. There must be established for Americans "a vital relation... between the assertion of intellectual independence or moral individuality and the adoption of a nationalized economic and political system." Genuine intellectual emancipation and individuality in the past rested on highly differential access to humane culture—often only to be found by going abroad. And precisely because it was isolated from democratic culture, this traditional culture, both in Europe and America, was often narrow, defensive, and sterile. Social education in a genuine democracy, therefore, "must be, above all, a liberal education" to accomplish "for the mass of the people a work of intellectual and moral emancipation" that, in the past, it accomplished.


for a few and often with antidemocratic results.\textsuperscript{52} As in Dewey, Croly here suggests that a democratic society can liberate the individual only as it liberates political and social ideas because political and moral knowledge is a constituent element of human agency and freedom.

Recent discussions of democratic individualism and recent scholarship on "romantic-individualist" elements in the history of British and American liberal political thought (Eisenach, 1981, 192–215; 1987; and 1990a; Kateb, 1989; Rosenblum, 1987 and 1989) have highlighted many of these earlier Progressive ideas. The one factor that was integral both to these earlier writings and to the Progressives, but that tends to be lost or subordinated in contemporary readings, is the tight link between these ideas of individuality and a shared sense of purpose. Whether one draws on Emerson or Whitman, reinterprets John Stuart Mill, or reexamines Gilman's transgendered idea of freedom, the single element shared by them all is a vision of a new kind of "connectedness," a shared sense of human destiny—even a religious conception of democracy. Croly draws explicitly on Mill at the conclusion of \textit{Progressive Democracy} to declare this important teaching of "the progressive democratic faith":

> Every victorious selfish impulse, every perverse and cowardly thought, every petty action, every irresponsibility and infirmity of the will helps to impoverish the lives of other people as well as our own lives. We cannot liberate ourselves without seeking to liberate them. . . . [This democratic faith] finds its consummation in a love which is partly expressed in sympathetic feeling, but which is at bottom a spiritual expression of the mystical unity of human nature (Croly, 1914, 427).

Emerson might have said this as well;\textsuperscript{53} Gilman and John Stuart Mill already had, and a whole host of British "new liberals," drawing on both Mill and T. H. Green, were saying it too.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{52} Croly, 1909, 422; and 1914, 417. In this way, Croly echoes the calls made to Yale undergraduates by reform Republicans, discussed above, chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{53} In his study of Emerson, Irving Howe remarks, "He starts from where people actually are—slipping away from but still held by religious faith—and helps them move to where, roughly, they want to go: an enlightened commonality of vision justifying pride in the republic, a vision akin to, yet distinct from, religious faith. The remains of religious sentiment—ideality, yearning, spiritual earnestness—thereby become the grounding for a high public culture" (quoted in Wills, 1987, 387).

An important question remains concerning Progressive ideas of freedom, one that shadows contemporary critics of liberalism as well. Were their attacks on "rights" strategic, self-standing, and integral to their larger public doctrine, or were they only using a critique of rights tactically, in order to get at their real foes, the interests, institutions, and practices of the standing regime? One can repeat this question from the other side: to what extent could the nineteenth-century regime of courts and parties legitimately be defended by the language of rights and liberal neutrality? This problem is not merely the abstract one of the relationship between ideas and institutions; it forces us to confront more directly the regime contexts of political theory in America and the intellectual difficulties one encounters when examining them. A test case is the defense of slavery (and the patriarchal family), a practice tacitly ratified with the Constitution and integral to the way federalism was instituted and practiced. To say that most Americans merely misread the meaning of rights in this case (and later in the case of women, wage laborers, and freedmen in the South), however, does not evade the larger difficulty. Where does the misreading stop? Can it ever stop? Every past regime in America defended by a constitutional or a rights vocabulary soon becomes exposed as hiding, but enforcing, specific clusters of substantive goods and ways of life. Does the same hold true for every future one?  

If national constitutional law is treated as if its overriding purpose is to instantiate the liberal ideal of a neutral framework maximizing rights, it would be politically self-defeating to attack the specific enemies of national political democracy without also trying to overturn the theory of constitutional rights that protects and privileges those enemies. Prevailing rights always shield a particular social order and its substantive goods and ways of life. Constitutional law, almost by definition, can hardly avoid legitimating reigning values and practices: that is what we mean when we call them reigning. In this tautological sense, a defense of prevailing rights is usually "conservative"—at least in expressing the interests and powers of extant national leadership.

55. Huntington, 1980, is both a recognition of and a capitulation to this relationship. He declares the "American creed" incompatible with durable and legitimate governing institutions. This is evident, he reasons, during every "creedal passion period." Significantly, his analysis does not include abolitionism and the Civil War as a "creedal passion period" and makes of Progressivism a periphery populism and not a movement to create and strengthen national institutions.
Over time, then, constitutional rights legitimate the standing regime in universal terms, but each regime it legitimates is a particular horizon of institutions, interests, and values. The Progressives, like many feminist and communitarian critics of liberalism today, deny from the start this constitutionalist mode of legitimating our politics. They are all claiming to be making principled and not tactical arguments. But the corollary to this stance is that they themselves must then forgo seeking to legitimate their own regime in this same constitutionalist language. When or if they win, the victory must be claimed on the basis of a new public doctrine that is a substitute for constitutionism and not merely a change in constitutional interpretation.  

On this reading, the victory of Progressivism on its own terms signaled the overthrow of constitutional government. There is some truth to this. Some attempts made to justify Progressivism (and twentieth-century American political life) constitutionally are doomed from the start. Some institutions and practices inseparable from twentieth-century American political life are simply incompatible with traditionally understood rights-based argument.  

Progressive public doctrine really did foreshadow “the end of liberalism” in America even before twentieth-century liberalism such as the New Deal was conceived. Thanks to the Progressive critique and Progressive reforms, much constitutional law soon became a dead letter—as did the party system that both depended upon and enforced constitutional powers and constitutional boundaries in the nineteenth century. Here is Charles Beard’s reading of the American Constitution, probably written in 1914, in the leading textbook on American government from its initial publication in 1910 through the 1930s:

No longer do statesmen spend weary days over finely spun theories about strict and liberal interpretations of the Constitution, about the sovereignty and reserved rights of states. No longer are men’s affections so centered in their own commonwealths that they are willing to take up the sword . . . to defend state independence. It is true that there are still debates on such themes as federal encroachments on local liberties, and that admonitory volumes on “federal” usurpation come from the press. It is true also that conservative judges, dismayed at the radical policies reflected in new statutes, federal and state, sometimes set them aside in the name

56. This is the whole point of Croly arguing that the real revolution required in America is an intellectual one, overthrowing “the monarchy of the Constitution.”
57. That is, extending the loss of constitutional protection over economic rights, which occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, to the entire system of governance.
of strict interpretation. But one has only to compare the social and economic legislation of the last decade with that of the closing years of the nineteenth century, for instance, to understand how deep is the change in the minds of those who have occasion to examine and interpret the Constitution bequeathed to them by the Fathers. Imagine Jefferson . . . reading Roosevelt's autobiography affirming the doctrine that the President of the United States can do anything for the welfare of the people which is not forbidden by the Constitution! Imagine Chief Justice Taney . . . called upon to uphold a state law fixing the hours of all factory labor. . . . Imagine James Monroe . . . called upon to sign bills appropriating federal money for roads, education, public health . . . and other social purposes! . . . Why multiply examples?  

What constitutional law had legitimated and political democracy through the party system enforced was a world of institutions and practices that has largely ceased to exist. On this institutional reading, then, the conclusion that the Progressive critique of rights prevailed does not seem absurd. We have had a revolution in constitutional law such that even its most liberal component, the Bill of Rights, no longer appears to limit Congress and certainly does not limit the president. Since the 1950s constitutional law has become an engine of nationalization, imposing what are, in effect, modified Progressive and cosmopolitan standards on states and localities. And certainly, the institutions of the twentieth-century American state, the political economy, and the larger culture are much too hierarchic and bureaucratic to be either understood or contained in the language of individual rights. These historical and institutional arguments, however persuasive, still avoid the central issue. Despite Progressive attempts to find a new

58. Beard, 1928a, 100–101. Note that all his nineteenth-century examples are from the "democratic" party. He was equally complacent about justifications for protections for free speech: "It is a hard, cold proposition: by what process are we most likely to secure orderly and intelligent government?" [36]. His review of government control over speech, from the 1798 Sedition Act to the sentencing of a girl of twenty-one to fifteen years imprisonment "for taking part in issuing a circular severely attacking President Wilson's policy of intervention in Russia" is done without any questioning of the government's right to do so (107–9). In his Economic Interpretation Beard has no kind words at all for the position of the Anti-Federalists and doesn't even mention their greatest contribution, the Bill of Rights [McCorkle, 1984, 333–34].

59. A frank recognition of this result is Macedo, 1990, 60: "In order to vindicate its overriding status, a liberal political morality will have to speak directly to illiberal personal ideals, arguing that these are false or less important than competing liberal values, or that they can be mended and made compatible with liberalism." And see Gutman, 1989, on democratic education.
language, are not our public doctrines and our political discourse today about rights or, at least, rights as ''liberal virtues?' On this intellectual and philosophical level the assertion that the Progressives have prevailed seems absurd on its face. Surely their attack on rights could only have been tactical; they could not really have believed all the bad things they said about them? And even if they did, who in America today speaks their organic, nationalist, and mystical-religious language? But here, too, there are some not-so-hidden ironies and therefore some more subtle possibilities. The contemporary institutional bastions of a language of rights and of cosmopolitan liberal culture generally are precisely those that Progressive public doctrine helped to create and served to legitimate: governmental bureaucracies; universities; professional and trade associations; corporations; trade unions; consumer groups; public interest groups of all kinds; a nonparty national media; and a kind of trans-Protestant and inclusive national civil religion, now expressed as liberal internationalism—the American commitment to freedom in the world. To defend a regime of rights once these state and parastate institutions are firmly on top (and locally based values and political parties are not) is, perforce, to defend a new regime of 'goods' or 'virtues' in the constitutional law language of neutral rights.

Such liberal virtue does not go unpunished in America. If rights are primary, then a democracy will insist on equal rights. In the absence of a common and consciously held identity within that horizon, that is, a national democratic community, these 'liberal-establishment' institutions and practices are vulnerable to attack. Every appearance of ways of life and purposes not equally included in the matrix of prevailing institutions both 'public' and 'private' is soon a claim for equal recognition and inclusion. And insofar as these specialized and hierarchic establishments are largely the product of a public doctrine that treated individual rights as secondary, they are hardly designed to withstand strict scrutiny from within a discourse they initially rejected. The only way to deflect the charge of hypocrisy, of not living up to one's own proclaimed values of neutrality and equal rights, is to proclaim some higher value than equal individual (and now group) rights—for example, economic necessity, national defense, common

60. And if the temptation to do so ever occurs, Holmes, 1989, is there to show what dangerous company we keep. Stettner, 1993, 92–99 and 164–65, valiantly tries to save Croly for later liberalism by trying to show that his Progressive Democracy of 1914 was much more respectful of democracy and rights than his earlier Promise. In fact, it was World War I and its aftermath that belatedly taught Progressives the value of a strong defense of rights—but that was when Progressives were demoralized and on the defensive.

61. This is the irony of Holmes, 1989: almost every illiberal intellectual sin he condemns was committed by the founding social science and theological faculty of his university.
sense. Contemporary liberals have been loath to do this. The Progressives were not; in many ways and on many different levels they articulated an ideal of a national democratic community where equality was achieved more by sharing projects in common and by participating on the basis of equal respect than by being equally protected in one's rights against others. Contemporary liberal public doctrine is deeply distrustful of political democracy defined as shared values. Progressive public doctrine, in contrast, was premised on this definition.

The clearest expression of their "national" reading of shared values is the social-evolutionary method itself. Freedom, whether collective or individual, is agonistic and located within historical boundaries and choices that cannot be wished away. This perspective is not only a way of countering formalism and dualism, it suggests as well a way of combining personal and national self-understanding that is both realistic and emancipatory. The older idea of individual rights, as Progressives never tired of reminding us, presumed an automatic harmony of interests, both in economic life and regarding ways of life. National history read on these complacent terms was inseparable from a kind of non-demanding virtuous materialism; because of our boundless space, America was exempt from history—nature's nation was a free lunch. The Progressives, standing in the footsteps of their clerical ancestors, would have none of this illusion, this good-old-boy mendacity. America must be understood as a historical nation with what Walt Whitman called "terrible duties" left us by our ancestors.

Indicative of the power of this historical understanding are the ways in which Croly and Beard went to great lengths to discredit neo-Jeffersonian and populist critiques of the Constitution that began to appear in academic literature at the turn of the century. This alternative critique of late-nineteenth-century America—here termed "Jeffersonian socialism"—wanted to resuscitate the more lusty rights language from the Revolution in order to charge that the Constitution was designed from the start to favor rich and powerful capitalists against such simple democrats as farmers and small businessmen (and slaveholders). American populist cum socialist intellectuals had discovered Anti-Federalism. Although we often associate Beard with this position, we are simply and even radically wrong to do so. It was, in fact, Beard who launched one of the first and still the most convincing historical offensives against its first and most powerful scholarly expression.  

62. McCorkle, 1984. For Beard's critical review of J. Allen Smith's Spirit of American Government, Beard, 1908, 136-37; and discussion in Barrow, 1988, 253-66. An alternative strategy in this literature was to argue that judicial review was neither intended nor adopted in the Constitution. Again, Beard, 1912, utterly demolishes this argument, singling out Madison's and Jefferson's Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions for special scorn.
Without question, he admits, the Constitution established a powerful national government that marginally advantaged one kind of property and one kind of capitalism over another—just as the states had done the reverse under the Articles of Confederation. But the fact that neither President Jefferson nor President Jackson chose to amend the document despite overwhelming political majorities and the fact that political parties could easily nullify almost any parchment barrier to national party coalitions of local democratic wills, demonstrate the absurdity of blaming the document for America's present discontents. Indeed, the victory of agrarian and small-producer capitalism and its appropriate public doctrine of democratic individualism constitutes the major barrier to present day reform. The Anti-Federalists quite rightly saw that the best defense of their economic (reality) interests lay in opposing the adoption of the Constitution (Beard, 1915). Having failed, they turned the battle to elections and constitutional interpretations. Here, the rise of mass political parties and the sanctification of the Bill of Rights meant that, in crucial ways, the Anti-Federalist spirit won the nineteenth century, and we are all now paying for it.

Beard, Croly, and most of their Progressive teachers associated Federalist and early constitutional theory with the institutionalization of nationality, awaiting a real fulfillment in the democratization of that ideal. They, like Fiske earlier, 63 truly admired the Federalists and had little patience for either the Anti-Federalists or Jefferson. The curse of the nineteenth century was precisely in lending credence to the Jeffersonian (and especially southern) illusion that the mere expansion of rights by weakening national institutions would automatically underwrite equality, economic welfare, and distributive justice. The radical ahistoricism of this nineteenth-century self-image of "nature's nation" is of a piece with a view of the Constitution as either freedom's holy writ or some original defilement of the democratic garden. Both of these misreadings, said the Progressives, have now borne fruit: justifications for unjust corporate power and economic privilege are now made in the name of the Bill of Rights and substantive due process of law. Populist critics of the Constitution as an undemocratic document are paradoxically criticizing the use of its most democratic feature and "do not realize how dangerous and fallacious a chart their cherished principle of equal rights may well become" (Croly, 1909, 53). If they were

63. Fiske's Critical Period of American History, 1783-1789 was an immediate success, remaining in print from 1888 to 1916. A year after Critical Period, he published The Beginning of New England; or the Puritan Theocracy in Its Relation to Civil and Religious Liberty, which was published continuously through 1930.
sincere democrats, they would recognize this contradiction and support disciplined and powerful national institutions allied to a reconstituted and democratic public good. But this, alas, requires the abandonment of democratic hypocrisy and democratic individualism and the end of the "pattern American."

Jeffersonian and Anti-Federalist "nationalism" was so thin because it was so liberal; neutral, because it was too weak to take a stand. Without strong "aristocratic" enemies at home or abroad, its national ideal of personal freedom increasingly became empty and undemanding, an abstract "spirit of freedom" without national institutions or national purpose to give it definition, discipline, and substance. The Progressives insisted that freedom must have both a national and a world-historical location: without those horizons, personal freedom could as easily warrant greed, violence, and cowardly betrayal as it could reflective self-discipline, equal justice, and the willingness to defend those values. If the Progressives' writings often sounded like repetitions of John Winthrop's seventeenth-century political sermons on liberty and authority, they were, but on a radically altered contextual and institutional level. If they sounded like the Federalist clergy, praising a politics of consensus and covenant and excoriating the partisanship and irreligion of the Jeffersonians under the banner of equal rights and local virtues, they were; but again, on another level. And if they often sounded like Lincoln and the abolitionists, with their ancestral piety and their millenialist hopes in a fallen world of virtuous materialism and pervasive irresponsibility, they stand equally convicted. In short, their ontological arguments voiced in the psychological and philosophical language of the social self form a larger argument that America ought to be understood as a historic nation.

**WHOSE FREEDOM? WHOSE HISTORY? WHOSE IDENTITY?**

To link personal freedom to national democracy—a substantive and inclusive public good—not only placed issues of rights within a framework of national institutions, it redefined the idea of citizenship on those terms as well. This topic was familiar in arguments about the admission and assimilation of immigrants and about possible responses to the restoration of white rule in the South in this period. This same issue of the rights and meaning of citizenship arose with the annexa-
tion of the Philippines: can a republic have colonial subjects? Do all ideas of nation require a coherent national public? Does the identity of this public require a narrative identity, a shared story?

There are many ways of understanding the idea of America, some of which consciously attempt to deny the need for both a national public and a national public good. But this denial is also based on a narrative, one both familiar and popular. America has a liberal tradition, a huge land mass, plentiful natural resources, and a nonfeudal origin: ergo, our identity is preformed and de facto, not something to be articulated and contested. That is the "genius of American politics" (Boorstin, 1953). America is (or was or has the capacity to be) exempt from history as defined by the agonistic struggles of the nations and classes of Europe (or the Jewish nation in the Old Testament). Our national history is providential destiny in which fulfillment is the maximization of individual freedom—freedom defined as the absence of institutional restraint. Local restraints—cities, wives, churches, tight credit, intellectual tradition—do not count against this freedom and this destiny. Those duties can be evaded by changing locality, starting your own business, getting a new sidekick and a new self, dreaming new dreams, or redescribing one's reality. Although this narrative receives its most attractive guise in nineteenth-century imaginative literature, it is associated with Jeffersonian and agrarian values as well, classically captured in Tocqueville's depiction of the restlessness, the "bootless chase" for happiness, that haunts the democratic individualist. In this narrative invisible hands are everywhere. If the narrative celebrates success, providence as the market is only giving everyone his due. If the narrative is used to mobilize anger, why then the invisible hands of providence must be restored to their timeless place by destroying the visible hands of "aristocratic" authority and duty and power. And if these bad hands are not visible, but life goes sour, then the evil manipulators must be in hiding. Once they are exposed and combated, the natural course of national destiny will reassert itself. As slaves, women, and native Americans pointed out, this narrative of boundless space and open possibilities was never quite as inclusive as it claimed. Nonetheless, to be in that narrative is to live "the American dream" without

64. Lasch, 1972, 70–79, shows why both the South and New England, as increasingly marginal regions of the country, opposed annexation for many of the same "racial" reasons that some imperialists favored it. Both regions feared the hegemonic implications of a national government undertaking such large and difficult responsibilities following the victory over Spain.

65. D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classical American Literature* is the first and classic study of this narrative.
the need for self-examination, personal development, or honorable sub-
ordination to others.

Periodically, this same narrative is simply turned inside out to be-
come a story of an endless American nightmare. This narrative is also
undemanding and popular because the need for considered judgments
and difficult choices is equally avoided. This narrative also has a
"people" or political community, that of the oppressed, but they have
only a negative or reactive identity and no corporate agency to give
them concrete historical location. This narrative, too, is dreamlike and
abstract, expressing a hope for an alternative America that will some-
day be discovered. Signs and promises of its appearance break into his-
tory from time to time, but if they seek to endure by becoming institu-
tions and practices, they quickly prove to be false prophecies.66

No narrative of American identity can altogether escape the
"dream" [and perhaps "nightmare"] elements of this narrative. This is
so because American identity is constructed from American differ-
ence—difference from Europe, from the stories of "other nations." But
other narratives of American identity, both in what they affirm and
what they deny, anchor American uniqueness more in duty than in ex-
emption, in struggle rather than escape, in temptation rather than in-
nocence. Fulfillment is not a right or a condition, but a series of poten-
tially tragic, sometimes ironic, and never fully realized projects.
Knowing what these projects are and then undertaking them signifi-
cantly alters the idea of national community and national destiny. Pro-
gressive narratives, whatever their individual differences, were within
this latter structure. The narratives were set against what Progressives
thought of as a facile and mindless optimism that simply eschewed re-
sponsibility or urged public indifference, usually under the name of
protecting rights. This means that Progressive narratives contained na-
tional public agendas, projects, and causes seen as typological of past
events, past projects, past causes. This history as call to duty was un-
derstood in the mode of the jeremiad, with generous measures of pro-
phetic judgment and millennial hope served up together. But by keep-
ing fulfillment at the end of or even outside of history—pace
Fukuyama—a critical distance was established at least to the degree of
requiring a deliberate and public discussion of the extent and bounds of
the American people. This same requirement places issues of Ameri-
can national identity and purpose squarely in "contemporary history,"
requiring systematic social knowledge of uncompromising frankness.

66. This "dreamlike" quality of conceiving America is the theme of a review
essay of two recent books on traditions of anti-Americanism at home and abroad
(Bliven, 1992).
To that extent at least, the social scientist, the social evolutionist, and the social gospeler shared a narrative that denied at the start a certain kind of American uniqueness, one underwritten by isolation, innocence, and inertia. And to that extent, too, they implicitly forfeited a certain kind of American innocence and generosity, although that was not always clear to them. What was clear was that America was a nation acting in a world of nations, even as it received the nations of the world into its domain. In Progressive public doctrine, America was not to be viewed as either innocent or guilty but as just or unjust.