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## 19.4 Varieties of Progressivism: T. R. and Wilson

John Milton Cooper, Jr.

"Progressivism" encompassed a variety of reform interests and mentalities, as well as separate movements at the local, state, and national levels. The diversity of progressivism was reflected in the three-cornered presidential election of 1912 in which Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson presented competing "progressive" visions: the New Nationalism of Roosevelt versus the New Freedom of Wilson. Many historians of the progressive era have attempted to explain the differences between these two views. One of the best recent analyses comes from political historian John Milton Cooper, Jr. In his book *The Warrior and the Priest*, excerpted here, Cooper compares the personalities, beliefs, and styles of leadership of these two towering figures of the early twentieth century.

### *Consider:*

1. *What, according to Cooper, were the most important differences between the views of Roosevelt and Wilson;*
2. *Which of the two had the more "democratic" view of leadership;*
3. *Whether the label "progressive" fits Roosevelt or Wilson better.*

. . . According to the great majority of analysts at the time and later, Roosevelt and Wilson did not differ greatly on the major issues. . . Both Roosevelt and Wilson strained to accentuate their differences and thereby, albeit often unwittingly, misrepresented each other. . . .

The distortions by both candidates arose from the heat of the campaign but also in part from the two men's agreement on many specific issues. Roosevelt and Wilson had to play up their differences because on matters of immediate concern, their real differences were few. . . .

The similarities and agreements between Roosevelt's and Wilson's positions did not mean, however, that no important differences separated them. . . . the outlines of their divergence showed up on the two issues they discussed most in 1912—the trusts and leadership. . . .

. . . Roosevelt implicitly accepted three propositions: that the biggest corporations had for the most part achieved their stature through efficient competition, that large corporations were here to stay, and that present economic conditions represented progress. But for him those were not the most important concerns. . . . He believed that the main economic task of government lay in protecting the victims and clients of large-scale enterprise through greatly strengthened regulation and supervision. . . .

Wilson disagreed on all [these] points. In his distinction between big business and the trusts and in his insistence on restoring competition, he implicitly accepted three opposite economic propositions: that comparatively few of the biggest corporations had achieved their stature through efficient competition, that those corporations were not necessarily here to stay, and that present conditions did not always represent progress over the past. . . . Far from believing in laissez-faire, Wilson maintained that government must intervene actively and continuously in the economy because "unregulated competition" had resulted in the growth of the trusts and the stifling of competition. The other consideration he stressed was the entry of new competitors into the market. Contrary to their public images, Wilson held much more dynamic economic views than Roosevelt. He believed that the main task of reform was to revitalize the economy through governmental actions to open the market to fresh entrants. . . .

. . . The leadership issue boiled down to inspiration versus education. With his prophetic, evangelical approach Roosevelt sought, in the root sense of the word, to inspire. He wanted to breathe into people a resolve to be better than they were, to instill in them devotion to larger goals and greater effort. With his "schoolmaster" approach to leadership, Wilson similarly sought, in the root sense, to educate. He wished to draw out of people recognition of their own best interests, to let them enlighten their ordinary pursuits. The issue between them over the purposes of government came down to one of paternalism versus representation. . . .

To an extent, Roosevelt and Wilson stood as twentieth-century analogues to Hamilton and Jefferson. . . . Unlike Hamilton and Jefferson,

SOURCE: John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983), 208-

they did not differ over governmental power and centralization, despite Roosevelt's assertions to the contrary. Nor did they laud either manufacturing or agriculture as morally or socially superior to the other. . . . But Roosevelt and Wilson did differ fundamentally over the same matters—their conceptions of human nature and the role of self-interest in society—that they believed had separated Hamilton and Jefferson.

. . . Roosevelt remained, by his lights, self-consciously Hamiltonian and anti-Jeffersonian in his views. For all his buoyancy and his spirits, Roosevelt was not an optimistic man, and his politics were not based upon an optimistic view of people. He regarded individuals' selfish, private interests as not only barriers to the attainment of public good but also sources of antisocial passion and potential civil conflict. . . .

During the 1912 campaign Wilson came closer than at any other time in his political career to becoming an exponent of what he saw as Jeffersonian views. . . . Wilson's politics were based upon an optimistic view of people. He regarded individuals' selfish interests as not only inescapable facts of life but as instruments that must be used to improve society. . . .

Wilson was more realistic than Roosevelt in recognizing that a better society could come only by serving the interests of a majority. He did not entirely renounce service to particular interest groups. He claimed that aid to industrial workers and farmers would help such large and vital segments of society that everyone's interests would be served. Wilson did not yet embrace the proposition that government should foster the interests of less-advantaged groups or regions, but he had gone a long way toward the "broker state," which became the central political concept in support of governmental aid to social welfare and regulation of private economic activity in twentieth-century America. . . . Wilson had no answer to Roosevelt's questions about how to promote national unity, except to work through coalitions of interests. His performance at that task played a big part in shaping not only his presidency and the fortunes of his party but also the main course of twentieth-century domestic American politics.

## 19.5 Reform as Social Control: Prohibition and the Progressive Movement

Norman H. Clark

Though it had gone through two earlier waves of popularity in the nineteenth century, the prohibition movement achieved ultimate success during the progressive era in the form of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Con-

stitution. A number of historians have noted that prohibitionism had much in common with reform movements that were explicitly "progressive." One historian who makes this point is Norman Clark, whose study of the prohibition movement is excerpted here. Clark discusses the importance of progressive methods and themes in the later stages of the prohibition movement and examines how American participation in World War I provided the impetus needed for the movement's final success.

*Consider:*

1. How prohibitionists relied on motives and arguments that were typical of the progressive era;
2. The connection, according to Clark, between the progressive mentality and American attitudes concerning participation in the war;
3. Whether national prohibition could have been achieved without the impetus of World War I.

... the emergence in the twentieth century of a new generation of reformers who were determined to use bureaucratic techniques to impose their pietist values upon what they saw as a chaotically pluralistic society—determined, in the interest of social discipline, to deny their fellow citizens access to any alcoholic drinks, and grimly determined, it seemed, to abolish alcohol as well as the saloon—suggests a triumph of fanaticism inconsistent with the liberal and humane temper which since the beginning had guided most temperance activities. The conversion of the Anti-Saloon League into an antidrink pressure group further suggests that real radicals had captured one of the most powerful political machines ever fashioned in American life.

But the problem here is that by 1916 in the United States, antidrink sentiment was no longer a clearly radical persuasion; it rose as much from liberal and humane considerations as it did from any other. Just as today it is difficult to understand the debauchery of the old-time saloon, so is it difficult to understand the climate of national opinion in which antidrink proposals could receive such general and solid support. . . .

The essential insight . . . is that the vast disorder of American life surely justified keen moral anxieties. Thus the "search for order" was quite naturally directed toward the official and national validation of values which could sustain the family as the vital social institution.

The configuration of individual responsibilities implied by these values—duty, restraint, self-discipline—were, in an open society, often violently at odds with any tolerance for personal indulgences or moral pluralisms. . . .

. . . another essential insight lies in the impressive body of scientific evidence which by 1916 supported the case for total abstinence. There were, for example, the fairly recent discoveries that alcohol does not warm the body, that it is a depressant rather than a stimulant, and that it depresses the higher mental functions as well as muscular control. Such findings had been the topics of articles in middle-class magazines for a decade. . . .

. . . Moreover, investigators in the new social sciences supplied a mass of statistics to show relationships between alcohol and crime, prostitution, and poverty. . . .

. . . The course toward war led through intensified fears of disorder, through realities of sacrifice, and through urgent demands for a strong and healthy nation. Like most wars, it made people extraordinarily sensitive to their common interests, and it brought common—or dominant—values into sharp focus. The effort also sanctified bureaucratic and impersonal efficiencies to the point where almost total social control was possible. And it seemed even necessary to those who believed there could be no victories for boozy nations. . . .

In February, when Congress granted the President authority to arm merchant ships, it also passed laws banning the sale of intoxicating beverages in Alaska and in Washington, D.C. In March, as people read of the Zimmermann Note and came to feel that war was surely imminent, Congress amended the Post Office Appropriations Bill to forbid interstate shipments of alcoholic beverages, "except for scientific, sacramental or medicinal purposes," into any state which, like Oklahoma, forbade "the manufacture or sale therein of intoxicating liquors," whether or not these states still allowed importations for personal use. . . .

Having thus embraced the crusade for national and international purity, Congress on May 18 forbade the sale of intoxicating drinks to men in uniform. . . . Under the slogan "Shall the many have food, or the few have drink?" Congress forbade, with the Lever Food and Fuel Control Act, the use of foodstuffs for distilling liquor. This shut down the stills; the saloons would soon die of the hard thirst. And the dries, in their progress, had not overlooked the deadly linkage between brewers and German influences in the nation; they made them well known and notorious. On December 8, a presidential proclamation forbade brewers to brew at an alcoholic content of more than 2.75 percent, and beer was thus converted into the kind of pale temperance beverage which had been admired by Thomas Jefferson. The President also severely limited the amount of grains that would thereafter be available for legal brewing. The country had thus gone nearly dry during the first eight months of wartime sacrifice. Then, on December

22, 1917, with majorities well in excess of the two-thirds requirement, Congress submitted to the states the 18th Amendment. . . .

. . . By January 1919, ratification was complete, and 80 percent of the members of forty-six state legislatures were recorded in approval.

## 19.6 Women's Suffrage and the Working Class

National American Woman Suffrage Association  
*Harper's*

Although the movement for women's suffrage was much older than progressivism, the suffragists of the progressive era linked their campaign with other crusades of the time. The suffragists came mostly from the same middle-class background as the other reformers, and they faced the same challenge: how to win support for their cause from the working class. Posters such as the one reproduced on page 323, "What Will Save the Home?" were used to appeal to working-class women. Yet, as suggested by the 1914 cartoon from *Harper's* magazine, these women did not respond enthusiastically.

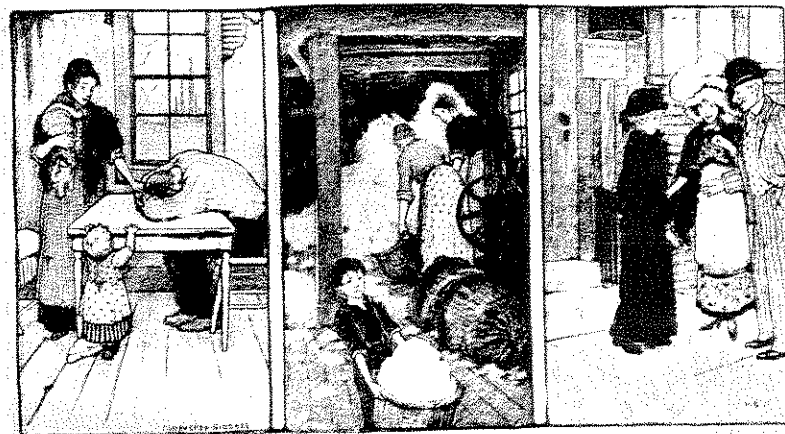
### Consider:

1. What elements in the poster identify it as an appeal to working-class women;
2. What the cartoon suggests about the attitude of working-class women toward the suffrage campaign;
3. Whether these illustrations reflect traditional conceptions of women's roles in society.



VISITOR: "But surely you believe that women should vote?"

## WHAT BREAKS UP THE HOME?



Unemployment for men. Bad employment for women and children. "The social wage."

## WHAT WILL SAVE THE HOME?

The participation of the home-maker in all governmental control of these problems. For this reason we demand

## VOTES FOR WOMEN

SOURCE: National American Woman Suffrage Association poster, courtesy of Brown Brothers; cartoon from *Harper's Magazine*. Copyright © 1914 by *Harper's Magazine*. All rights reserved. Reprinted from the January issue by special permission.