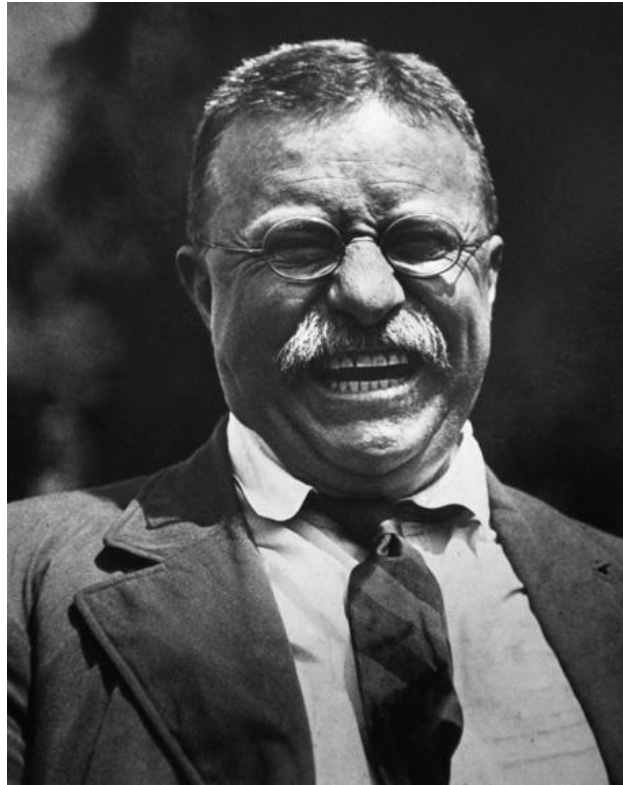


**Theodore Roosevelt, idealistic reformer or conservative in disguise?
A reinterpretation of the 26th President of the United States**



MA Thesis

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The cover photograph is derived from <http://www.uncompromisingcommitment.org/articles/2012/11/theodore-roosevelt/> (accessed July 1 2014).

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1: Introduction

Carved in the Black Hill granite of South Dakota, next to the faces of Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln, is the bespectacled face of Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the United States. Mount Rushmore was intended to represent the founding, expansion, preservation, and unification of the United States, with Theodore Roosevelt representing its preservation.¹ He is remembered not only for the preservation of nature in the form of reservations like the Yellowstone National Park which he founded, but also for preserving American society in times of great turbulence. While TR might also be seen as a fervent imperialist, in Mount Rushmore President Jefferson was memorialized as the ultimate expansionist because of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 which doubled US territory. It is easy to imagine Theodore Roosevelt's reaction to the honor of being included in this monument: it would please him very much to know that his eyes will forever look out on his beloved rough wilderness of the Dakotas, where he had some of the best adventures of his life. It would pride him even more to know that Abraham Lincoln was next to him; doubtless his annoyance to share the Mountain with Thomas Jefferson will be diminished somewhat by that great honor. Lincoln seemed to Roosevelt everything that a president should be: powerfully intervening in the country's affairs when he deemed this necessary. Jefferson on the other hand embodied what Roosevelt feared: a decentralized system with much power for the States, believing in the common people to do what is best for themselves and the country without need for intervention from the national government.

The inclusion of Theodore Roosevelt in this monumental representation of four of the United States' iconic presidents can be seen as a testament to his legacy. Usually when a poll is held to rate the past presidents, Americans put the first Roosevelt in the top five most popular presidents of all time.² In popular opinion, he is remembered as the leader who steered America into the 20th century, in a time when unprecedented growth changed society and challenged the values and morals that had seemed so self-evident before. Within these changing circumstances, Roosevelt the trust-buster protected the rights of the common working man by putting a stop to large corporate monopolies.³

¹ Why These Four, <http://www.nps.gov/moru/historyculture/why-these-four.htm> (accessed May 20, 2014).

² Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Rating the Presidents: Washington to Lincoln <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/choice2004/leadership/schlesinger.html#chart> (accessed May 20, 2014).

³ Why These Four, <http://www.nps.gov/moru/historyculture/why-these-four.htm> (accessed May 20, 2014).

It seems as if the popularity of this 26th President, at his time the youngest Executive in Chief to have occupied the Oval Office, is as uncomplicated as it is widely shared. Leaving the White House, President Clinton announced that he felt ‘the work that we did the last eight years made us the heir of Theodore Roosevelt’.⁴ In the same vein, Al Gore’s head of communications in his presidential campaign intentionally crafted a ‘message more in the tradition of progressives such as Theodore Roosevelt, who confronted powerful trusts, rather than the populists who railed broadly against elites of all stripes.’⁵ Some years before that, Gore’s main opponent Bill Bradley wrote: ‘I’ve always admired the progressives, such as Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, who enabled the private sector to flourish but in a way more responsive to national purpose’.⁶ The 2003 reissue of Roosevelt’s selected writings *The Man in the Arena* quotes Senator John McCain on its cover: ‘My God, what a superior man TR was’.⁷

1.1 Debate and main question

Reviewing the above claims by prominent politicians, it is already clear to see that Roosevelt’s legacy is not uncomplicated after all. While it is understandable that politicians will align themselves with a former popular president, it is interesting to see the variety of claims that are made about Roosevelt’s actions by leaders from each end of the political spectrum. While one highlights his enabling of the private sector, another praises the President’s progressive reform.

When it comes to the historical debate, the differences are even greater. Historians have both praised TR’s progressive reform, and chastised him as a conservative in disguise. The aim of this thesis is to revive the debate on Theodore Roosevelt as a reformer. It is a debate that has never been truly resolved, in part because its most prominent participants have always focused on opposing elements of Roosevelt’s presidency, while neglecting to approach him holistically. In the historiographic debate on Theodore Roosevelt’s reform record, which is often intertwined with the debate on Progressivism, certain trends in history-writing are quite

⁴ Robert D. Johnston, ‘Re-Democratizing the Progressive Era: The Politics of Progressive Era Political Historiography’, *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1 (2002) 68- 92, there 68

⁵ Johnston, ‘Re-Democratizing the Progressive Era’, 68.

⁶ Ibidem, 68.

⁷ Theodore Roosevelt and Brian M. Thomsen, ed., *The Man in the Arena, the Selected Writings of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York 2003), cover.

clearly visible. By evaluating the debates on progressivism and on Roosevelt in separate chapters, I will be able to show how historical opinion on each had been shaped.

Moreover, by evaluating the debate as it has played out so far I will be able to show the gaps in the research on Theodore Roosevelt's political thought. In arguing that Roosevelt was either a Progressive or a conservative, historians have foregone the possibility of a third option: that Theodore Roosevelt was neither an idealist Progressive nor a secret conservative, but instead had his own solid understanding of his country's unique history and circumstances in his time. I will show how this understanding developed, and how it shaped his political thought and actions before and during his presidential career. In showing how this presidency has historically been approached, either as closely intertwined with the Progressive Movement, or with a determined focus on a perceived binary, contradictory policy, I will be able to clarify what the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt should be. The narrow approach of viewing Roosevelt through either a progressive or a conservative lens has mostly contributed to diffusing the meaning and legacy of his presidency. By approaching Roosevelt's presidency holistically and showing what the different facets of his policy have in common, I will be able to uncover the underlying political ideology, which is in fact unambiguously present from the very beginning of his political career.

1.2 Concept and theory

Before I will lay out the historiographical debate on the Progressive Movement in the next chapter, first it is essential that I touch upon the term 'progressive'. In response to the unprecedented economic growth that the United States experienced at the turn of the 20th century, along with an enormous influx of immigration, among some groups of citizens the idea began to take hold that there was a need for an activist government that would provide for its citizens. While some picked the fruits of industrialism, it was clear that not every part of society benefited from the newfound welfare. In the year 1900, the wealthiest two percent of American families owned more than one-third of the nation's physical assets.⁸

At the same time, the U.S. experienced a wave of immigration starting from the 1880s and peaking between 1900 and 1910.⁹ In the 1880s, 5,2 million people immigrated to the

⁸ George W. Ruiz, 'The Ideological Convergence of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 19 (1989) 159-177, there 160.

⁹ Howard P. Chudacoff, Judith E. Smith and Peter C. Baldwin, *The Evolution of American Urban Society* (Upper Saddle River 2010) 104.

United States. Between 1900 and 1910, 8,8 million followed.¹⁰ Most immigrants came from poor peasant backgrounds and settled in large industrial cities like New York, Boston and Chicago. They lived in overcrowded tenements in the city centers and found work in slaughterhouses, mills, sweatshops, or in construction and on the docks. The enormous influx of people strained the cities' public facilities, and there was a lack of sewers, water, gas, street lights, policemen and firefighters.¹¹ These problems created a fertile ground for political corruption in the cities.

These major changes in American society impacted citizens on a daily basis, and they were confronted with the fact that their world was transforming more rapidly and with more far-reaching consequences than ever before. I will use Koselleck's philosophical theory on historical time to emphasize just how great the impact of a societal change like this would be for people experiencing it. According to Koselleck, the meta-historical categories Space of Experience and Horizon of Expectation are of major influence in a societies' understanding of history. Experience is what Koselleck explains as the present past: events that happened in the past are incorporated in the experience and identity of a society.¹² Based on this experience there are certain expectations of the future: the non-experienced. However, this is not a chronological event as experiences are constantly subject to change, and expectations are adjusted accordingly. Koselleck speaks of a *space* of experience to emphasize this lack of spatial and chronological order. In the same sense, he speaks of a *horizon* of expectation to clarify that the expectations of the future only extend so far: there is always an unknown factor behind the horizon. Where Koselleck is especially relevant to my thesis is when he discusses a divergence between the two: when the present past is no longer sufficient to serve as a basis for the presence future. He takes as an example the French revolution: 'for the whole world a phenomenon that appeared to mock all historical wisdom, daily developing out of itself new phenomena which one knew less and less how to come to terms with.'¹³ The French Revolution serves here as a 'rupture in continuity'¹⁴ which causes the horizon of expectation to become increasingly blurry, as expectation can be based less and less on experience.

In chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis, I will show how this theory is applicable to the period in which Roosevelt grew up. The effects of the industrial revolution in all its extremes, from the emergence of the very wealthy to the existence of an increasingly poor lower class,

¹⁰ Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 104.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 132.

¹² Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the semantics of historical time* (Massachusetts 1985), 272.

¹³ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 281.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 281.

became more and more visible for Roosevelt and his contemporaries. The upper classes fell victim to a widespread anxiety-attack as it became clear that their future was increasingly insecure and their past experiences could no longer serve as a basis for their expectations. I will emphasize that Roosevelt grew up uniquely positioned to understand the impact of the changes in his time, and that this helped him develop his political ideals.

This growing awareness of the negative effects of industrialization is what prompted the Progressive Movement. The cities, where the problems that this new era brought along were most visible, became the source for many progressive initiatives. However, I need to stress that the Progressive Movement was not one cohesive organization. Rather, it was a collection of groups with different goals and different methods, all operating under the banner of progressivism. Some progressives emphasized the importance of battling immorality in the slums and attempts were made to ban drugs, alcohol and prostitution. Others started settlement houses in order to teach immigrants English, but also stressed the importance of good housekeeping and traditional values. Some focused on battling the corrupt political system and the power of bosses over the immigrant population. Others fought for the protection of workers and organized labor would become a force to reckon with.

As I will elaborate on this subject in the next chapter, I will show how historians have never reached a lasting agreement on the definition of progressivism, nor on its accomplishments. My use of the terms Progressive Era or Progressive Movement, will therefore not refer to a set of strictly defined progressive values, nor a strictly defined program, nor a strictly defined group of progressives. However, for the sake of clarity, when using the term progressive I will refer to the whole of initiatives that is commonly known as the Progressive Movement. Whenever I am discussing a specific group, I will point this out. The lack of a definition for the Progressive Movement is certainly a complicating factor in deciding on Theodore Roosevelt's own progressive record. However, it also shows that there is still room for a re-evaluation of the Movement and more specifically on Theodore Roosevelt's role within its many reform initiatives. Therefore, I have formulated my main question as follows: **How progressive was America's first Progressive president?**

1.3 Design of my thesis

I will be able to answer my research question by focusing on three major elements.

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the Progressive Movement as a response to a rupture in the continuum of the United States' history that was comparable to the circumstances Koselleck based his theory on. Two factors contributed to this rupture: first Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, which declared an end to the era that to a large extent created American identity. Second, the unprecedented progress that the United States experienced, and the perceived speeding up of time because of that progress. The sub question that will be answered in this chapter is: What was the Progressive Movement and what caused it?

In Chapter 3, I will discuss Theodore Roosevelt's unique position within this period. Not only was he the son of a father who worked to help those who indirectly became victims of the nation's new welfare, and not only will it become clear that TR would forever remain true to his father's convictions; as a historian and reforming politician, Theodore Roosevelt was uniquely positioned to understand the historical and political circumstances of his age. This would lead him to obtain a thorough understanding of the wrongs in his society, and of what needed to be done to address them. In this chapter I will provide a brief biography on TR, and address his place within the debate on progressivism. Two sub questions will be answered here: what is Theodore Roosevelt's personal background, and how has he been evaluated by historians?

In Chapter 4, I will show how Theodore Roosevelt's political thought developed and was the source of his reform initiatives. I will detail four themes that showcase Roosevelt's progressive ideas, the first two in his pre-presidential career, and the latter two once he is president. For this chapter, the sub question is: why is Roosevelt seen as a progressive?

Finally in Chapter 5, I will focus on two major elements that have caused TR to be classified as a conservative. The first paragraph will deal with the balance between capital and labor, while the second will discuss his ideas on race and, related to that, his foreign policy. The sub question central to this chapter is: why is Roosevelt seen as a conservative?

In my conclusion, I will evaluate my findings and show how Theodore Roosevelt's unique background and personal convictions fueled his political thought, which was the source of both his reform initiatives and also of those political actions which are perceived to be his most conservative. This will allow me to provide a new explanation of and insight in the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt's presidency.

While on the whole I will focus on Roosevelt's domestic policies, because this is the domain of progressive reforms, I will also discuss his views on foreign policy. This is an essential part of his political thought, as the President had clear ideas on what America should look like as a society, what kind of people her citizens should be, but also on the position of his beloved nation in the world. These ideas to some extent informed his ideas on domestic policy. After evaluating the ideals behind his political reform measures, which is the main focus of my thesis because it most clearly showcases the thread of political conviction that consistently runs through Roosevelt's policies, it will be all the more clear that his more "conservative" actions in fact fit seamlessly into his larger political ideal.

1.4 Method and sources

I will use qualitative research into both secondary and primary sources. My secondary sources include biographies of Roosevelt, including the first two parts of the recently finished trilogy *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (1979), *Theodore Rex* (2001) and *Colonel Roosevelt* (2010) by Edmund Morris, and Kathleen Dalton's personal take on TR in *Theodore Roosevelt: a Strenuous Life* (2002). Both have been very valuable in offering vast overviews on TR's life, which allowed me to follow him in every detail of his career. Both biographies take a very personal approach which very much enlivened the subject for me.

Matthew Frye Jacobsen's *Barbarian Virtues* (2000) is another key part of my secondary literature. He details how immigrants were instrumental in creating the beginnings of the American Century, and provides the reader with immensely valuable context on the economic use of immigrants, at home and abroad. He also provides an interesting interpretation of Theodore Roosevelt's view on America's position in the world.

Joseph J. Varga's *Hell's Kitchen and the Battle for Urban Space* (2013) details the circumstances in the United States' largest city in the period of Roosevelt's presidential and pre-presidential career. He also gives a great overview of the theoretic background of urban reform within Social Studies.

Joshua David Hawley's *Theodore Roosevelt, Preacher of Righteousness* (2008) is one of the few books on TR that do not focus so much on his action packed life, but instead attempts to shine a light on Roosevelt's political thought.

Richard Hofstadter's *The American Political Tradition* (1948) was instrumental in providing me with insight in the analysis of Roosevelt as a conservative. His book *The Age of Reform*

(1955) was very valuable in explaining some of the main concepts used in one of the dominant analyses on progressivism.

My primary sources consist of the Theodore Roosevelt papers in the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg. I paid special attention to the reels dedicated to his pre-presidential career. I also studied the newspaper articles, speeches and declarations from before and during his presidency. Further primary documents include TR's own published writing: letters, speeches, and his autobiography. These are for a large part published online, and accessed through the websites www.archive.org and www.theodore-roosevelt.com. I also focused on Roosevelt's own historic writing, especially *The Winning of the West* (1889-1896), to gain insight in his perspective on American history and culture.

2: The Progressive Movement

Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner published their book *The Gilded Age* (1873), subtitled *A Tale of Today*, with an apology in its preface. Sadly, the authors wrote, they had to make do with their own creative imagination in writing the satirical tale of greed and corruption in the governing classes. They could not use any real-life examples, because

‘in a State where there is no fever of speculation, no inflamed desire for sudden wealth, where the poor are all simple-minded and contented, and the rich are all honest and generous, where society is in a condition of primitive purity and politics is the occupation of only the capable and the patriotic, there are necessarily no materials for such a history as we have constructed out of an ideal commonwealth.’¹⁵

What followed was an account of precisely those wrongs, in a humorous sketch of the state of American society. The term Gilded Age has ever since remained as the appropriate name for the last three decades of the 19th century. Just one year before its publication, New York City Boss William M. Tweed, leader of Democratic municipal headquarters Tammany Hall, was revealed to have looted the city treasury and collected at least thirty million dollars in pay-offs.¹⁶ Corruption was in fact so widespread in not only municipal politics, but also the national administration, that the term “Grantism” came to stand for the large scale fraud and bribery practices under President Ulysses S. Grant.¹⁷ For readers of Mark Twain, the real-life public figures they read about in the papers, were easy to recognize in the book’s array of speculating, self-promoting opportunists.¹⁸

In 1876 at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, organizers sought to divert the people’s attention from the economic and political uncertainties. Not only were America’s citizens losing faith in their political leaders, but they also had their incomes to worry about, after the Panic of 1873 proved to be the start of a five-year depression. In Philadelphia though, such worries were to be held at bay. Instead, the Fair focused the attention of some ten million visitors at the glories of the recently re-united nation. As a ‘school for the nation’, the Exposition showed a new ‘confidence in the vitality of America’s system of government,

¹⁵ Twain, Mark and Charles D. Warner, *The Gilded Age: a Tale of Today*, 2.

¹⁶ Paul S. Boyer ed., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People* (Boston/New York 2008), 488.

¹⁷ Boyer, *Enduring Vision*, 488.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 488.

as well as in the social and economic structure of the country.’¹⁹ ‘We thank Thee for national prosperity and progress, for valuable discoveries and multiplied inventions, for labor-saving machinery relieving the toiling masses’, Bishop Matthew Simpson summed up the Centennial Exposition in his convocation.²⁰ Here in Philadelphia in 1876, all the seeds had been planted: accelerating and unprecedented progress, political and corporate corruption, and a resulting change in American identity. Some decades later, the Progressive Movement would sprout from these very seeds.

2.1 Origins

The Progressive Movement spans roughly from the 1880s to the end of the 1920s, and has for the last century been a popular and widely contested area of research among scholars. As I have noted in the introduction to this thesis, the debate on the age of reform has followed several trends in history writing. I will elaborate further on this debate in a historiographic discussion on the Progressive Movement in the next paragraph. While I aim to remove the person of Theodore Roosevelt from the more general debate, when it is necessary to mention him I will not neglect to do so. In Chapter 3, I will lay out the historiographical debate on TR separately, in order to approach him on his own merit. First I will sketch the developments that are most commonly mentioned as the factors causing the Progressive Movement.

2.1.1 Economic progress

The inventions and machines that were displayed in Philadelphia were signs of an unstoppable process: the growth of the American market. Jacobsen describes the twofold changes happening in the American economy as follows: ‘the nation’s regional economies became more thoroughly integrated with one another, but the national economy itself became more thoroughly integrated into a world economic system’.²¹ With America entering the world market, her citizens were introduced to a new attitude to the nation’s economy on the World Fair. Not only could they hear the roar of new machines, and examine for themselves crude metals and new railway cars; take a look at new consumer items like cutlery, glassware, sewing machines and fashionable dresses; and view innovations like the telephone: foremost, the fair was especially equipped to point out ‘new staples of American economic thought: the fear of domestic

¹⁹ Robert W. Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair* (Chicago 1985), 11.

²⁰ Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York 2000), 15.

²¹ Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, 17.

“overproduction” and the appetite for foreign markets to absorb the resulting surplus of American goods.’²² The saturation of the American domestic market and the necessity of cultivating foreign markets were constantly mentioned by Philadelphia newspapers during the Fair.

For American citizens, this meant that they saw their environments change even more rapidly. Already they had seen the rise of a new form of corporate organization, where technological innovations, creative management systems, and limited liability helped shape new giant corporations. One of the most aggressively competitive areas of business was the railroad industry, where entrepreneurs such as Jay Gould were developing new business models in order to finance their enormous expenses, selling stocks and bonds to the public to raise money. In 1900, the total railroad mileage in the United States spanned 193,000 miles, which was more than in all of Europe, including Russia.²³ To be able to keep such an organization running, the railroads contributed to innovations in the use of the telegraph, setting up hierarchical organization structures, and accounting systems, to name but a few. The railroad companies were even responsible for the 1886 division of the country in four different time zones in order to avoid scheduling difficulties.²⁴

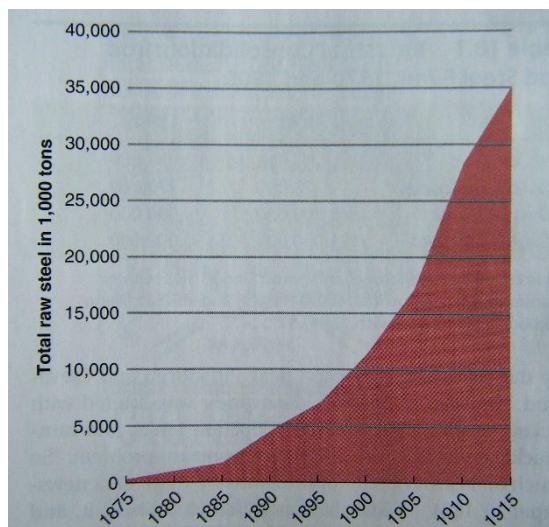


Figure 2.1: Steel production 1875-1915

Source: Paul Boyer ed., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People* (Boston/New York 2008), 539.

Another pioneering great corporation was Andrew Carnegie’s Carnegie Steel, which first ventured into vertical integration: the controlling of all aspects of manufacturing from raw materials to the finished product. By 1900, Carnegie Steel employed twenty-thousand people as

²² Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, 16

²³ Boyer, *Enduring Vision*, 535.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 536, 537.

the world's largest industrial corporation. Worried about his domination of the market, J. Pierpont Morgan of Federal Steel bought Carnegie's company for half a billion dollars, combining the two in the United States Steel Corporation, the first business worth over a billion dollars.²⁵ Figure 2.1 shows the sheer magnitude of the growth in the steel industry, a result of new technologies and improvements in plant organization, as well as the above mentioned vertical integration. After the railroad and steel companies, the oil, sugar, tobacco, salt and meatpacking industries followed suit and participated in the enduring race to cut costs, lower prices, and fiercely compete amongst each other.²⁶

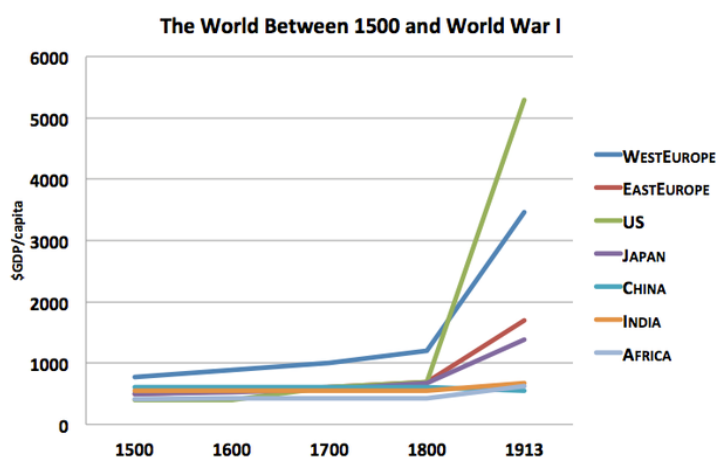


Figure 2.2 GDP per capita in the world 1500-1913

Source: Derek Thompson, *The Economic History of the last 2000 Years*,

<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/06/the-economic-history-of-the-last-2000-years-part-ii/258762/> (accessed June 28, 2014).

Figure 2.2 shows just how dramatic the economic growth of the United States was from the start of the Industrial Revolution onwards. The daily lives of ordinary Americans were drastically impacted as a result of these economic changes. For one, they were now confronted with advertising and marketing aimed at stimulating their consumption. But more important was the emergence of a new working class, as the use for skilled labor dwindled and the need for unskilled labor to fill the assembly lines grew. The increasing pace of the production process brought along an increase in industrial accidents.²⁷ While the United States' economic growth was spectacular, it also impacted people's lives as it went hand in hand with equally spectacu-

²⁵ Ibidem, 539.

²⁶ Ibidem, 539.

²⁷ Ibidem, 551.

lar downfalls. Of the years between 1870 and WWI, nearly half were depression years.²⁸ For many Americans, Jacobsen states, ‘the story of the nation’s fantastic accumulation of wealth in this period is also a story of crushing poverty’²⁹.

With all these changes in society impacting their daily lives; now Americans faced a new horizon again, with the introduction of the “terrible surplus”.³⁰ Supporters of this theory believed that the years of depression were not a sign of a fault in capitalism, but of its great success: American industry was producing such vast amounts of goods that Americans could not consume all of them. To solve this problem, it was necessary to secure foreign markets. Critics of the theory pointed out that the problem was under consumption rather than overproduction, and that more honest wage scales and measures against indebtedness could easily end this situation. However, export to other nations grew steadily and from 1883, only Britain’s exports exceeded those of the United States.³¹ The United States was becoming an economic empire.

In Jacobsen’s narrative, America’s economic expansion had a great impact on the nation’s identity. Americans would now encounter foreigners, abroad and at home. As the forces of capitalism drove them to find consumer markets abroad, so did these forces draw immigrants in. As the need for cheap labor increased, more and more people immigrated to the promised land to find work and prosperity. Frederick Jackson Turner had touched upon this very topic in his *The significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893). When the Census Bureau announced in 1890 that the American frontier was closed, Turner posed in his thesis that this was the end of an era in American History. The existence of the frontier is what made American identity, according to Turner:

‘American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier.’³²

Among the nation’s politicians and literati, this idea reinforced the drive toward economic expansion. Now that the continent had reached its borders on both sides, the seas became the

²⁸ Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, 18.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 18.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 19.

³¹ *Ibidem* 18, 19, 20.

³² Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (London 2008), 2.

new frontier, and the forging of American identity had to be moved from the frontier on the continent, to the endless frontier that was the rest of the world. Koselleck's theory on rapidly changing circumstances causing a rupture in a society's experiencing of history is relevant here in two ways: first in relation to Turner's Frontier Thesis, and secondly it relates to the economic progress in this period. This progress in itself seemed to accelerate time, as new technologies in communication but also in transport and manufacturing changed how Americans consumed, traveled and maintained interpersonal relations. For Americans experiencing this transformation of daily life, their expectations of the future became increasingly insecure as they could no longer rely on their past experiences to help shape these expectations. With all these new inventions, anything seemed possible in the future. Frederick Jackson Turner's theory added an extra dimension to this sense of insecurity, in stating that the very core of American identity was now firmly in the past, and that an alternative should be found. While Turner's theory was not widely known among the American people, it was certainly influential in academic circles and among politicians, like Theodore Roosevelt as we will see in the next chapter.

American economic expansion impacted the experience of time as well for those traveling abroad. Jacobson mentions the factor of temporality in several travelogues by writers traveling to Africa and Latin America, noting that all record in their diaries the sense of going back in time, as they are traveling. Traveling down the Nile, Charles Dudley Warner wrote: 'we have committed ourselves to a stream that will lead us thousands of years backwards into the ages, into the depths of history'.³³ And Theodore Roosevelt, hunting in Africa, noted that the "savages" he met, were leading the lives of 'our own ages dead forebears'.³⁴ So, as increasing progress made it more difficult for Americans to reconcile their experiences with their expectations, they were at the same time confronted with the life of before. It made them see that, while their progress was sometimes daunting, certainly, it had made them more civilized. They had reached a different time, a time that was the future for those other nations that were still stuck in the past. Koselleck calls this the 'contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous, or perhaps, rather, the nonsimultaneous occurring simultaneously'.³⁵ Increasing awareness of their own superiority helped create the idea of civilization and Americanization. Not only was it necessary abroad, but certainly the immigrants pouring in would have to be raised up to American standards. They had now entered civilization, and modernity.

³³ Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, 49.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 49.

³⁵ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 279.

2.1.2 Immigration and urbanization

While economic progress sent Americans overseas, at the same time it served as an attraction for millions of immigrants. As Jacobsen notes, one message that the Philadelphia Exhibition sent to the world was that ‘this rising industrial dynamo was ready to put the world to work’³⁶. Between 1860 and 1900, almost 11 million immigrants came looking for work and better opportunities in America. The largest group were Germans, numbering nearly 3 million. Next came the English, Welsh and Scottish with almost 2 million, and about 1,5 million Irish. Smaller groups were made up of French-Canadians, Scandinavians, and Chinese. From 1890 onwards, there was an increase in the arrival of Italians, Slavs, Greeks and Jews from southern and eastern Europe, as well as Armenians and on the West Coast, Japanese.³⁷ Figure 2.3 shows this increase in immigration from southern and eastern Europeans, which started from the end of the depression years of the 1890s. Notable is also how immigration numbers usually fell in years of depression.

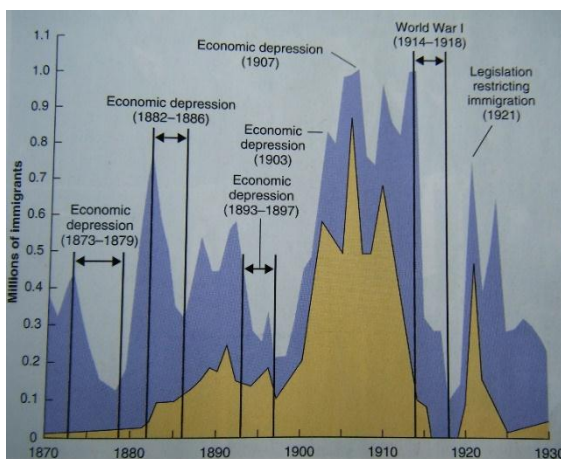


Figure 2.3 *Immigration to the United States, 1870-1930* Purple: Total number of immigrants Yellow: Southern and eastern Europeans.

Source: Paul Boyer ed., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People* (Boston/New York 2008), 641.

The majority of immigrants settled in the cities in the states in the Northeast and the Midwest, with the Irish mostly concentrating in New England and the Germans in the Midwestern

³⁶ Ibidem, 59.

³⁷ Boyer, *Enduring Vision*, 567, 568.

states. In 1920, 78,6 percent of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe lived in urban areas, as did 68,3 percent of immigrants from northern Europe and Great-Britain.³⁸

| | 1870 | 1900 | Percent |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| City | Population | Population | Increase |
| New York | 1.478.103 | 3.437.202 | 132,54 |
| Boston | 250.525 | 560.892 | 123,88 |
| Chicago | 298.977 | 1.698.575 | 468,12 |
| Philadelphia | 647.022 | 1.293.697 | 99,94 |

Table 2.4 *Urban growth in the largest U.S. cities 1870-1900*

Source: Paul Boyer ed., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People* (Boston/New York 2008), 566.

The impact on life in the cities was enormous, and their growth was both rapid and unprecedented. As shown in table 2.4, in 1870, the population of Chicago as recorded in the census of that year was 298.977, and in the 1900 census this figure had grown to 1.698.575. New York's population grew from 1.478.103 people in 1870 to 3.437.202 in 1900.³⁹ Major immigrant cities like Boston and Philadelphia grew with 123 and 99 percent, respectively. In an illustrative aside, Boyer et al sum up that in 1890, 'New York City contained twice as many Irish as Dublin, as many Germans as Hamburg, half as many Italians as Naples and 2,5 times the Jewish population of Warsaw.'⁴⁰ At the same time, as mechanization in farming boosted production and prices dropped, rural Americans moved to the cities as well. Many were African Americans, who moved from the rural south to Northern cities. Other rural immigrants were women, looking for independence and attractions of the city like paid labor and consumer pleasure.⁴¹

Many immigrants planned to work in the United States for a while, and then return home. However, most stayed, either because they settled into their new country, or because they couldn't afford to go back. They settled in the inner cities, where they were closest to job opportunities. They worked in sweatshops, factories, mills, slaughterhouses, construction gangs and dock crews.⁴² Neighborhoods turned into small colonies separated by nationality,

³⁸ Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 106

³⁹ Ibidem, 566.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 568.

⁴¹ Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 111.

⁴² Ibidem, 106.

like Little Italy and Bohemiantown. Divisions by ethnicity permeated all aspects of life: the type of jobs a group could obtain, where they went to church, where they went to drink. Immigrant workers usually had their own social organizations, as the American Federation of Labor, the dominant labor organization at the time, was not interested in organizing unskilled labor. Most immigrants and black Americans were therefore not represented and had to organize their own groups.⁴³ Labor unions also organized protests against immigration, fearing that competition from low-wage workers would put them out of work. In 1877 in San Francisco, twenty-five Chinese-run businesses were destroyed by protesting workers.⁴⁴ In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by Congress, prohibiting the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States. The Act was renewed in 1892 and made permanent in 1902 under Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, only to be repealed in 1943.⁴⁵ The relatively new cities in the West had already received 300,000 Chinese immigrants before the Act took effect.⁴⁶

The incoming immigrants had a profound impact on the development of the American city. As the immigrant population crowded in the inner city in order to remain close to work opportunities and the support provided by their ethnic community, landlords drove up their prices to 'squeeze every penny from their tenants'.⁴⁷ The middle and upper classes, who could afford public transport, moved to the outer circles of the city, where they could find more space for less cost. In New York in the 1860s and 1870s, old houses made room for four- and six story tenements. Families took in lodgers to help pay the rent, so that a single six-story building could have up to 150 inhabitants. As Chudacoff et al describe in *The Evolution of American Urban Society*:

'Living conditions were abominable. Rooms were minuscule, some barely eight feet wide. Only those few rooms facing the front or rear had direct light and ventilation. Indoor plumbing was almost nonexistent; privies were located in cellars or along the alleys.'⁴⁸

In these circumstances, domestic conflict and neighborhood fights were common, according to Chudacoff. With the need for housing growing, often buildings covered their entire build-

⁴³ Ibidem, 107.

⁴⁴ Boyer, *Enduring Vision*, 556.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, 556.

⁴⁶ Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 104.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, 114.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 115.

ing lots, leaving no room for recreational areas. As a result, children played on the roads or roofs, and adults looking for some diversion frequented saloons.⁴⁹

Another effect of this new inner city life, was the arising of a new political system within the larger cities. The Boss system, or machine politics, was dependent on the existence of neighborhoods divided by ethnicity, with their own organizations. As it became clear that traditional municipal politics could not provide a solution for the urgent needs existing in the rapidly growing cities; sewage systems, water, gas, street lighting, police officers, fire fighters, schools and teachers; a new type of politician emerged. These were career politicians, organizing support from their wards and neighborhood organizations. Lacking personal resources, they used public money to help their constituents. As Chudacoff states; by the 1860s and 1870s, ‘the organization’ or ‘the machine’, controlled politics in many of the large cities.⁵⁰ Chudacoff disagrees with the notion that city bosses were inherently corrupt. According to this author, ‘city bosses functioned not as dictators but as executives, chairmen of boards, and brokers who controlled whole hierarchies of smaller bosses.’⁵¹ For immigrants especially, the boss system was their first experience with American politics. It was a type of politics that provided citizens with practical solutions, rather than focusing on abstract political ideas. The bosses provided their constituents with jobs in the public sector, as policemen, firefighters, or street cleaners, and expected their political loyalty in return.⁵²

These were the circumstances that shaped the urban reform movement. Newspapers detailed the crime and violence, the unsanitary conditions, and threats to morality like the drinking habits of the tenement-inhabitants, unnerving the middle class. Muckraking journalists like Lincoln Steffens (*The Shame of the Cities*, 1904) and Jacob Riis (*How the Other Half Lives*, 1889) brought the cities’ corruption and vice into the middle class living rooms. Urban reform focused on three main areas: municipal reformers attempted to remove corruption from city politics; social reformers aimed to educate immigrants and poor Americans alike and shape them into responsible citizens; and spatial reformers focused on the built environment, creating parks and fighting for housing legislation.⁵³

2.2 Historiography

⁴⁹ Ibidem, 119.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 133.

⁵¹ Ibidem, 133.

⁵² Ibidem, 135.

⁵³ Ibidem, 133.

As noted in my introduction, the Progressive Movement or the Progressive Era, is one of the most widely contested topics of American history. Here I will go further into the main developments in the historiographic debate.

During the progressive period, one of the most prominent historians writing on the topic was Charles A. Beard, who collaborated with his wife Mary Beard on some of the most influential historic works of the beginning of the twentieth century. Their sympathy for the progressives came from their core stance on American society and history writing. In his most famous and controversial book *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (1913), Beard proposed that the American Constitution was the result of a class struggle between capitalism and agrarianism.⁵⁴ His critics accused him of being ‘bent on demonstrating the truth of the socialistic theory of economic determinism and class struggle’.⁵⁵ Indeed Beard interpreted American history through an economic and Marxist lens and saw class struggle as the source of differences at the basis of American society. The Beards considered the Progressive Movement to be a movement of the farmers and workers; the common people standing up against capitalism. His placing of the constitution in the capitalist camp made Beard a controversial figure and the book caused considerable discussion in academia and politics.

After some decades of the Progressive Movement being interpreted as a class struggle by historians sympathetic to the movement, change was set in by Richard Hofstadter and his introduction of two important theories: consensus in history, and the status revolution as a causing factor in progressivism. These concepts would remain influential on the evaluation of both the Progressive Movement and Theodore Roosevelt’s place in it, for several decades.

Richard Hofstadter (1916), who was the DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, is well known for a number of books, the most important of which are *Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915* (his 1944 dissertation), *The American Political Tradition* (1948), *The Age of Reform* (1955), *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963) and *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1964). He was twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize. His aim was to focus not on everyday actions of politicians, but to discern the underlying ideologies and motives for their policies, which is why he made extensive use of psychological insights in his historic work.

⁵⁴ Clyde W. Barrow, *More Than a Historian, the Political and Economic Thought of Charles A. Beard* (New Brunswick 2000), 4.

⁵⁵ Barrow, *More Than a Historian*, 5.

When *The American Political Tradition* (1948) was published, it likely would have stirred up controversy with its critical chapters on some of the most revered politicians in American history. Hofstadter wrote chapters on Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, with the intent of debunking the myths surrounding those popular figures. However, as it turned out the most thought-provoking and controversial part was the six-page introduction of which Hofstadter later said:

‘[it] has probably made as much trouble for me as any other passage of comparable length (...) As it turned out, this introduction, which was only an after-thought, proved to be the first statement, at least for my own generation, of a very controversial point of view (...) now generally called consensus history’.⁵⁶

In the book Hofstadter aimed to reinterpret the American political tradition, emphasizing the common climate of American opinion.⁵⁷ Although he noted there had been considerable political struggles, Hofstadter stated that political thought in the United States had

‘always been bounded by the horizons of property and enterprise. However much at odds on specific issues, the major political traditions have shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; they have accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture.’⁵⁸

Hofstadter and his fellow consensus-historians acknowledged that conflict occurred, but in their opinion this was the result of different motivations drawn from an essentially shared ideology, wherein a modern capitalist society was the norm.

The consensus-approach differs markedly from the previously prominent class struggle analysis. In his 1962 article ‘Beyond consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic’, John Higham offers an insightful explanation of the differences in historical analysis produced in the 20th century. He shows how historians have to constantly balance ‘the questions and issues of [their] own age’, while ‘faithful on the other side to the integrity of an age gone by’.⁵⁹ Ac-

⁵⁶ Frederick R. Lynch, ‘Social Theory and the Progressive Era’, *Theory and Society* (2) 1977, 159-210, there 165.

⁵⁷ Lynch, ‘Social Theory and the Progressive Era’, 165.

⁵⁸ Hofstadter, Richard, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York 1948) xxii.

⁵⁹ Higham, John, ‘Beyond Consensus, the Historian as Moral Critic’, *the American Historical Review* 67 (1962) 609-625, there 609.

According to Higham, historians in the first half of the 20th century interpreted American history along the lines of two contemporary commitments: first, many historians identified themselves closely with specific sections or social groups. Second, historical thinking was dominated by progressive and pragmatic ideas.⁶⁰ Noted, the term progressive here has nothing to do with the reform movement; Higham's analysis deals with the belief in progress, the idea that humankind is moving in an upward angle. Progressive historians like the Beards share a belief in the progress of American society, which in the case of the Beards went hand in hand with a politically active force of working men and farmers who no longer let the wealthy capitalists rule over them. This was an idealist version of how the Beards saw American society progress.

What Higham noticed is that in more recent years (in the 1950s and 1960s), society became increasingly homogenous. With sectionalism becoming rare, it was more difficult for historians to champion a cause, be it Puritanism, regionalism, et cetera. At the same time, progressive beliefs about American history were breaking down, and with that the tendency of scholars to emphasize group struggles. Instead 'the reaction of progressive historiography has discouraged such emphasis and has undermined the intellectual foundations of a group centered point of view.'⁶¹ In Higham's view, this is the reason that progressive historians made room for the consensus historians.

The underlying assumption that Higham poses of an increasingly homogenous society is in some ways certainly a stretch, especially as he makes this statement in the beginning of the 1960s, a period that saw different groups such as African Americans, Native Americans and women claim their rightful positions in American history writing. However, in what he views as important juxtaposed groups, such as the South versus the Northeast, or regionalists versus nationalists, the opposition did indeed lose some of its urgency. A certain opposition will probably always exist, but with the South having won its confidence back after the Reconstruction, and an unquestionably strong national government along with increasing world power, those opposites that Higham refers to have certainly become less prominent, which makes his assertion of a homogenous society somewhat more comprehensible.

Instead of focusing on group struggles, the consensus historians used the method of collective biography. Among the first to do so were George Mowry and Alfred Chandler, employing biographical information on forty-seven participants of two state-wide progressive

⁶⁰ Higham, 'Beyond Consensus', 610.

⁶¹ Higham, 610.

conferences in California. What they found was ‘a striking picture of similarity in background, economic base, and social attitudes, which furthermore suggests the strongly selective process inherent in such movements’.⁶² Including information on age, place of birth, occupation, ethnic background, religion, education, previous party affiliation and organizational membership, Mowry and Chandler came to a similar conclusion: these progressives were a group of ‘highly literate, independent free enterprisers and professional men; they were fortunate sons of the upper middle class’.⁶³

What was lacking, however, was a causal relationship between their shared characteristics and their progressivism. As Clubb and Allen point out in their 1977 article ‘Collective Biography and the Progressive Movement: the Status Revolution Revisited’, Mowry and Chandler failed to address important questions like: why is not every person who shares these similar characteristics, also a progressive? And does every progressive indeed belong to this same social group? It was Richard Hofstadter who, a few years later, provided the explanation with his concept of the ‘status revolution’.⁶⁴

What Hofstadter saw as most important for the progressive period was a shift in America’s value-system. Frederick Jackson Turner had stated that the existence of the frontier was what defined American identity, but with the turn of the century the values of the stern, independent and individualist farmer - the quintessential American - were suddenly under threat by large scale organizations and a changing and increasingly urban society. Americans were familiar with individual enterprise, independent farming, small business and a life that was not too highly organized by (national) government. In the Progressive Era, industrialization started to demand a higher level of organization of both business and government. According to Hofstadter, the reformers’ protest against this development was essentially a nostalgic attempt to save the values they had known for so long:

‘Most Americans who came from the Yankee-Protestant environment, whether they were reformers or conservatives, wanted economic success to continue to be related to personal character, wanted the economic system not merely to be a system for the production of sufficient goods and services but to be an effectual system of incentives

⁶² George E. Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Chicago, 1963), 87.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 87-88.

⁶⁴ Jerome M. Clubb and Howard W. Allen, ‘Collective Biography and the Progressive Movement: the “Status Revolution” Revisited’, *Social Science History*, 4 (1977) 518-534, there 519.

and rewards. The great corporation, the crass plutocrat, the calculating political boss all seemed to defy these desires.⁶⁵

The people who would become the leaders of the Progressive Movement were the very people who had been successful in the old system: the small business owners, the urban gentry, the established professional men and civic leaders.⁶⁶ Now that their world was changing, power and wealth were distributed in a different manner, and what Hofstadter stated to be the most intolerable for these men, the values, the patterns of deference, and the basis on which to evaluate one's character were changing as well. This brought anxiety about their status, hence the term status revolution. What the reformers were essentially trying according to Hofstadter, was "to keep the benefits of the emerging organization of life and yet to retain the scheme of individualistic values that this organization was destroying."⁶⁷ Hofstadter's progressivism is rooted in nostalgia, and is essentially a conservative movement: rather than start a social revolution, the middle class opted for moderate reform in order to preserve or restore the values from the previous era. This was the root of the problem for the Progressive Movement: they were projecting their obsolete values and personal anxieties into their politics.⁶⁸

It is interesting to see how historians' approach has changed in a relatively short time from interpreting group behavior to analyzing individual motivations and actions. Hofstadter explained his psychological approach as follows: 'it has become increasingly clear that people not only seek their interests but express and even in a measure define themselves in politics; that political life acts as a sounding board for identities, values, fears, and aspirations'.⁶⁹

So far we have seen two of the most important trends in history writing on the Progressive Movement. In the next chapter, I will show how these two were the dominant factors in evaluating President Roosevelt. For Hofstadter, he was the ideal subject on whom to apply his status revolution theory. First, I will briefly sketch the more recent developments in historians' treatment of the Progressive Era.

In the 1960s and 70's, some historians started to feel that the endless attempts to define progressivism were fruitless and pointless. Peter Filene declared the Progressive Era dead: 'the progressive movement never existed'.⁷⁰ He came to this conclusion mostly by fo-

⁶⁵ Lynch, 'Social Theory and the Progressive Era' 162.

⁶⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York 1980), 137.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, 162.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, 162.

⁶⁹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York, 1965), ix-x.

⁷⁰ Filene, 'An Obituary for The Progressive Movement', 20.

ocusing on the word ‘movement’, and, pointing to numerous arguments and disagreements among progressives, he claims that there never was a movement. When many historians have spent decades defining a movement and failing, he argues, perhaps there was no movement in the first place. However, Filene’s article did not put end and to the debate on the Progressive Era, or as Daniel Rodgers put it: ‘Progressivism shuffled through the 1970s as a corpse that would not lie down’.⁷¹ While historians like Filene and Kirby maintained that ‘progressivism cannot withstand rigorous definition’, others still attempted to define it.⁷² One result of this debate was that historians started to focus less on the progressives as a movement, but rather concentrated on separate issues and the context of the Progressive Era: changes in political climate and power as a framework in which several reform-initiatives took place.⁷³

An observation by Roberts about this stage in the progressivism-debate can be viewed as both a concluding statement for the debate so far, as well as an introduction for the stage that followed. In his 1982 historiography on progressivism, Roberts states: ‘What [...] Filene proposed was to accept these apparent anomalies as characteristic: to split the progressive movement not in two but into dozens of pieces, bound only by the rules of competitive, pluralistic politics.’⁷⁴ This has remained the approach towards the progressive movement until today. By the very nature of the lengthy debate, it is hardly possible for any historian to claim a definitive insight into the era. Instead, after evaluating the movement, it becomes obvious that the various interpretations of progressivism are always subject to the relevant issues contemporary to the historian who is writing about it. Therefore new evaluations of the movement are still produced and often add new insights, but it is clear that no definitive conclusion will be provided.

⁷¹ Daniel T. Rogers, ‘In Search of Progressivism’, *Reviews in American History* 4 (1982) 113-132, there 114.

⁷² Rodgers, ‘In Search of Progressivism’, 113.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 114.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 115.

2.3 Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the Progressive Movement was a response to a number of unprecedented changes in American society that directly affected how people lived their lives and, more importantly, viewed their surroundings and their future. As Frederick Jackson Turner declared that with the closing of the frontier the defining era of American history had ended, a new era began. This was an era of progress, of encountering foreign people at home and abroad, and of an emerging working class.

To an increasingly lesser extent could people base their expectations of the future on their experiences in the past. Progress was inevitable but brought with it insecurity, anxiety and numerous changes: inequalities in income became larger as the ways of doing business transformed; an enormous influx of immigrants with different values inhabited the cities and fueled an emerging working class, and to the middle classes society became increasingly unrecognizable. In order to hold on to their values and position, reformers started to weed out political corruption, regulate business, and shape the newcomers into Americans.

Historians have gone from a Marxist interpretation of the Progressive Era as a class struggle, to emphasizing the psychological motives behind the reform movement. New insights and upcoming disciplines have constantly influenced the way the progressives were analyzed. Most recently, the variety among progressive initiatives is accepted as its main characteristic. However, the above described transformation of American society, as well as the way Americans viewed their own changing circumstances, remain as the seeds from which progressivism sprouted.

3: Theodore Roosevelt: Biography and historiography

Theodore Roosevelt in many ways embodies the societal developments that I have discussed so far. As an upper middle class reformer with conservative values, he was uniquely positioned to develop an understanding of American society as it emerged after the Gilded Age. In this chapter, I will show how his political career started and his ideas developed, and I will discuss the historiographic debate on TR.

3.1 Biography

Born October 27, 1858 in Manhattan, New York City, Theodore Roosevelt was certainly not destined to go into politics.⁷⁵ The Roosevelt's of East Twentieth Street were a respected, well-to-do-family, while not belonging to the extremely wealthy class, their regular invitations at the Astor's were a sure sign of their high social position. Hofstadter noticed in the upper and upper middle classes a detachment from politics: with the emergence of what was seen as a coarse, materialistic society in the Gilded Age, the eminent families and the 'native intellectual aristocracy, [...] found themselves unable to participate with any heart in the greedy turmoil of business or to accept without protest boss-ridden politics'.⁷⁶ Politics was seen as dirty and vulgar, and intellectuals like Henry James and Henry Adams either went abroad or 'made a sort of career of bitter detachment'.⁷⁷

Theodore Roosevelt was of a different sort, grouped by Hofstadter with 'the hardier and somewhat younger souls', who worked their way into politics, compromising and bidding their time, until they held a position of power.⁷⁸ Roosevelt never made a secret of his wish to belong to the governing class.⁷⁹ He recalls in his autobiography that the social group he belonged to were 'the men in the clubs of social pretension and the men of cultivated taste and easy life', who laughed at him and warned him when he showed an interest in politics that it was a 'low' affair.⁸⁰ However, TR wanted to see if he could hold his own in the 'rough and tumble'.⁸¹ While he later developed a friendly relationship with Henry Adams when he was working for the Civil Service Commission in Washington, he made no secret of his opinion

⁷⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, *An Autobiography* (New York 1913), 6.

⁷⁶ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 206.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 206.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 207.

⁷⁹ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 63.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 63.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 63.

that men who chose to stand on the sidelines, especially when they moved to Europe, were ‘silly and undesirable citizens’.⁸² These men would become effeminate, the most loathed characteristic one could have in TR’s eyes. ‘Manly’ is one of the most commonly used words in Roosevelt’s writing.⁸³

Theodore Senior was of Dutch Reformed ancestry and had access to a comfortable inheritance thanks to his forefathers who climbed the social ladders from farmers to manufacturers, merchants, engineers, and bankers.⁸⁴ He was a big, powerful man according to his son, and the word most often repeated in biographies to describe him is ‘leonine’.⁸⁵ Senior worked in glass import, but devoted large quantities of his free time to charitable organizations. On Sundays he would teach in mission schools, have dinner in the Newsboys Lodgings House and work for the Children’s Aid Society which he founded.⁸⁶ Theodore Jr. called him ‘the best man I ever knew’.⁸⁷ His father’s attitude in life was of considerable influence on the future president. With almost palpable admiration, Roosevelt writes in his autobiography; ‘He would not tolerate in us children selfishness or cruelty, idleness, cowardice, or untruthfulness. (...) With great love and patience, and the most understanding sympathy and consideration, he combined insistence on discipline’.⁸⁸

Theodore’s mother was a dark-haired Southern belle, suffering from digestive disorders, heart palpitations, and more symptoms that were at the time ascribed to “neuralgia”, a clinical term for nervousness. Biographers like Kathleen Dalton and especially Joshua Hawley link this disease of the nerves to contemporary developments. Hawley calls neuralgia ‘the bane of the upper class’, a type of ‘neurasthenia, the catch-all term to describe the slew of symptoms [...] America’s new industrial age was prompting’.⁸⁹ It served as an explanation for the mental and physical problems that were suddenly ubiquitous in the upper classes. The leading medical examiner on this topic wrote about the illness: ‘American nervousness is the product of American civilization’, and Hawley adds that neurasthenia was seen as a direct result of modernity.⁹⁰ This shows precisely how relevant Koselleck’s theory is to this period. While he acknowledges that it may occur on a subconscious level, what Koselleck argues is that a ‘covert connection of the bygone with the future’ is what occurs when one has learned

⁸² Theodore Roosevelt, *American Ideals* (New York 1904), xi.

⁸³ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 209.

⁸⁴ Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York 2010), 7.

⁸⁵ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 26.

⁸⁶ Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 4.

⁸⁷ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 8.

⁸⁹ Joshua D. Hawley, *Theodore Roosevelt, Preacher of Righteousness* (New Haven 2008) 9,10.

⁹⁰ Hawley, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 10.

to ‘construct history from the modalities of memory and hope’.⁹¹ Memory and hope are the less sufficient terms for what he later calls experience and expectation, ‘for expectation comprehends more than hope, and experience goes deeper than memory’, and the two ‘simultaneously constitute history and its cognition’.⁹² In other words, an awareness and understanding of history occurs when one connects the past to the future and expectations of the future exist when one is aware of past experience. Koselleck also acknowledges that people have learned to be flexible in their expectations; and that one should not presume to be capable of deducing expectations entirely from experience. But on the other hand, ‘whoever fails to base his expectation on experience is likewise in error’.⁹³ While Theodore Roosevelt grew up, his contemporaries expressed the growing uncertainty resulting from their incapability to base their expectations on their experience, in anxiety and nervousness. Koselleck calls what they feared ‘the hazards of an open future’.⁹⁴

Interestingly, Hofstadter’s status revolution has much in common with Koselleck’s theory. While the former’s theory is based on a psychological interpretation of the middle class’s response to their changing circumstances and the latter is a philosophical evaluation of humankind’s understanding of history and its position within it, both deal with a subconscious awareness within a society of rapid changes causing uncertainty about the future. The upper and middle class’s anxiety about their position and the detachment from politics and business that occurred simultaneously in Roosevelt’s immediate surroundings were influential in the shaping of his political ideas.

A sickly and weak child, Theodore was fond of nature and animals and a career as a naturalist seemed respectable indeed.⁹⁵ His passion for this field was evidenced by the frogs, snakes, mice and birds any member of the Roosevelt household could encounter in the house on a daily basis, and only when the domestic staff threatened to quit, the Roosevelt Museum of Natural History was moved out of young Theodore’s bedroom and into the back hall upstairs.⁹⁶ Because he was especially plagued by asthma and was often too weak for any physical activity, he took refuge in reading as many books as he could lay his hands on. His father shaped Theodore’s mental development very deliberately. It was likely that Teedie, as he was

⁹¹ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 270.

⁹² *Ibidem*, 270.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, 274.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 278.

⁹⁵ Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 67.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem* 19.

nicknamed, would one day go to Harvard, so his father had him privately tutored in preparation. In May 1869, the whole family embarked on a yearlong trip through Europe and North Africa, as Theodore Senior wanted his children to have more diverse experiences than what their homeschooling could provide. This would later make Theodore Roosevelt not only the youngest president ever to have entered the White House, but also one of the most traveled.

Theodore's lagging physical development was another source of concern for his father. He had his son thoroughly examined by a doctor, and afterwards told him: 'You have the mind but not the body, and without the help of the body the mind cannot go as far as it should. You must make your body. It is hard drudgery to make one's body, but I know you will do it'.⁹⁷ Senior purchased athletic equipment, and Theodore was encouraged to spend all his free time exercising. It was the beginning of a life crammed with physical activity, wherein TR gradually transformed himself into the broad-shouldered, wide-chested man, 'with the neck of a titan' and full of nervous energy, that the general public came to know and love.⁹⁸ Hofstadter explains the development of Theodore's personality as a constant compensation for his physical inferiority, shaping him into a man who was always active in order to flee from repose and introspection.⁹⁹ TR's own claim that he cured himself of asthma through exercise is often accepted by biographers, but letters from family members tell of asthma attacks later in life, though they were kept concealed from the public.¹⁰⁰

Theodore left for Harvard in 1876, when the college was not yet a selective research university, but instead a regional men's college, filled with young men from the social elite. This period would serve as inspiration for TR's later complaints about his own class: earnest and driven as he was, the 'highbred cynicism and arrogant coolness' of his peers was foreign and objectionable to him.¹⁰¹ Being a man of action, he saw the anxiety and detachment of his peers and those of his parents, and decided that he would rather actively work to change American society. His time at Harvard was also important in shaping his thoughts on race. His natural history teacher was Nathaniel Shaler, who taught a mixture of Darwinism, Christian humanism and Lamarckian theory. He believed that humans evolved from a single common ancestor, but that this was such a long time ago that it was no longer of any consequence. Instead, humanity had developed as humans acquired moral and spiritual capacities. Racial distinction therefore came from differences in the development of these higher characteristics.

⁹⁷ Ibidem, 32.

⁹⁸ Ibidem, 297.

⁹⁹ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 208.

¹⁰⁰ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 52.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem, 61.

Jean Lamarck's theory, often interchanged with Darwin's natural selection, was based on the acquiring of characteristics through change in environment, and his key thesis was that these characteristics were hereditary. In other words, a species was directly shaped by its environment, whereas Darwin argued that species developed because some of them were already better suited to survive an environment, i.e. natural selection.¹⁰² Lamarckian theory helped explain why some races were superior to others: they had been better able to adapt to their circumstances. This proved to be of substantial influence on TR's thinking about race and of his ideas on expansion.

The final major event that shaped TR's life during his Harvard-years was the death of his father. The 'wisest and most loving of men, the type of all that is noble, brave, wise and good', died February 11, 1878.¹⁰³ In typical TR fashion, avoiding introspection he makes no mention of his father's death in his autobiography, just as he neglects to even mention his first wife or her death. However, in his diary he confided that he felt severely depressed and about to go crazy in the months after his father died.¹⁰⁴ After he had composed himself, TR resolved that he should live the rest of his life to be worthy of his father's legacy. As his sister noted later: 'he told me frequently that he never took any serious step or made any vital decision for his country without thinking first what position father would have taken on the question'.¹⁰⁵

With his father gone, TR could no longer consult with anyone about his future career. He no longer wanted to be a scientist, but it was unclear to him what he did want to do. In the end, he studied law, but during these studies he discovered his knack for politics, and it seemed he had found his calling.

As we have seen, both conservative forces and reform ideals were around Theodore as he was growing up. His social circle was conservative, but his father was a reformer, albeit only on social topics. Being one of his greatest examples in life, his father's reform activities were a great inspiration to TR. His Harvard education made it all the more clear to him that he was different from the young men in his social circles: they placed themselves above the daily realities of politics and certainly did not feel any obligation to contribute to society. Theodore himself was more energetic and above all more serious about doing hard work: the beginnings of the life lived strenuously were visible.

¹⁰² Hawley, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 37.

¹⁰³ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 68.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 68.

¹⁰⁵ Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 72.

3.2 Historiography

Greatly admired by the man in the street, hero to the workers; courageous, energetic, and unorthodox. Descriptions like these show the framework for quite a substantial amount of the writing on Theodore Roosevelt. Often portrayed as a larger than life figure, some biographers and historians turned his life into a romantic tale. And indeed it is tempting to do so, as TR's life is packed with interesting stories any historian would like to sink their teeth in. He was a rancher, a cowboy, an adventurer, but also a war hero in Cuba; he was a scholar and a politician; he singlehandedly turned America into an imperial power with an impressive Navy. But perhaps more importantly, he reformed American society when the Gilded Age had turned into the Modern Age, changing the face of the presidency in the process.

The above is more than a little hyperbolic, but still it is a more accurate representation of TR's historic image than any critical historian would think. For a large part Theodore Roosevelt himself crafted his image, working together with journalists and biographers (like fellow reformer Jacob Riis) to present his story the way he liked to see it, and writing about his own adventures for popular magazines. Kathleen Dalton calls him 'a skilled politician who enjoyed playing to the crowd, shrewdly championing themes that evoked warm responses'.¹⁰⁶ She goes on to note that his 'attunement to audience' went so far that even the letters to his children were carefully formulated as to be suitable for eventual publication.¹⁰⁷ According to John Milton Cooper, this is one of the aspects that makes Theodore Roosevelt one of the first "contemporary" presidents, presenting those aspects of himself that fit his goals and ambitions while skimming over the less admirable, or in some cases more humanizing facets of his life.¹⁰⁸ As Dalton aptly summarizes it: 'Roosevelt preferred heroic themes to psychological reality in the stories he told about his life', thus leaving a written record that was 'well suited for use by admirers'.¹⁰⁹

To the public, in his lifetime Roosevelt must have seemed like nothing less than a modern day Robin Hood, a character he was actually once portrayed as in a newspaper cartoon. In his biography, Jacob Riis refers to TR as 'a splendid knight, [...] yet a young man filled with the high courage and the brave ideals that make youth the golden age of the great deeds forever'.¹¹⁰ Another example is Daniel Henderson's fittingly named *Great-Heart, the*

¹⁰⁶ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge 1985) 70.

¹⁰⁹ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 5,6.

¹¹⁰ Riis, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 5.

Life Story of Theodore Roosevelt (1919). Naming his protagonist after the Christian warrior and protector Great Heart, a character from a Kipling poem, Henderson promptly admits to have let go of his objective aims in telling the life story of TR. Reviewing Roosevelt's career, he was 'so moved by its grandeur, that he became impelled to play what part he could in perpetuating the memory of this inspiring American among his people'.¹¹¹ TR's life to him seemed 'a panorama of adventure and climax and achievement'.¹¹²

TR did have some critics in his time, most famously feuding with Mark Twain over America's imperialist ambitions. Twain, an anti-imperialist, in fact called Roosevelt the worst president America ever had.¹¹³ However, this has not prevented the heroic image TR crafted for himself from surviving for some time. The unusual character of the 26th President has never ceased to appeal, and his bespectacled face with the big teeth has been used in television commercials, cartoons and newspaper advertisements, in order to sell such products as computers disks, baking powder, liquor, and even the Bible. Most fittingly, he was used as the representation of Moxie soda, a brand that was advertised so successfully that the term "moxie" became a neologism meaning courage, daring and spirit.¹¹⁴ In a 1984 children's book, the President is presented as the quintessential self-made man: 'how a sickly boy with enormous determination grew up to be one of this country's best-loved presidents'.¹¹⁵

Especially in the years during his life and shortly after his death, there is not as much disparity between the public image of TR and the portrayal by historians as one would expect. Even in the historic field, the popular image of the Boy Scout in the White House has proved hard to eradicate. The 1979 biography by Edmund Morris was promoted by his publisher with the exclamation 'the man who almost singlehandedly won the Spanish-American War', and in the book itself Morris claims that Roosevelt is virtually incapable of telling a lie.¹¹⁶ As Kathleen Dalton states, these 'books that view him as towering in a "class by himself" above other presidents' tell exactly the story Roosevelt would have liked them to tell.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, there are writers who go out of their way to present Roosevelt as 'a juvenile buffoon, a deeply flawed leader ruled primarily by personal ambition and bloodlust'.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Henderson, Daniel, *Great-Heart, the Life Story of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York 1919), 1.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, 1.

¹¹³ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 9.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 3.

¹¹⁵ Robert Quackenbush, *Don't you dare shoot that bear!* (New York 1984), 3.

¹¹⁶ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life*, 528.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 8.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 9.

The change came from the 1930s onwards, when the first debunking biography of Roosevelt appeared: Henry F. Pringle's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Theodore Roosevelt* (1931). It was the first time any historian could persuade TR's widow, Edith Kermit Roosevelt, to cooperate with a biography, and when the result proved to present a nasty and dismissive version of her late husband, she was so embittered that she became even more protective over the papers that her husband left behind.¹¹⁹ Pringle painted a portrait of a man eager to compromise, and often wavering on key issues.¹²⁰ He approached TR psychologically, and found that the president was 'the most adolescent of men'.¹²¹ Dalton finds that 'he unfairly made TR look foolish by trivializing his beliefs and his substantial accomplishments'.¹²²

Pringle had a lasting influence on historians setting out to debunk the myths surrounding TR. Dalton notes that they often made use of the same language that TR's democratic opponents used in his lifetime, repeating a quote by Mark Twain who found Roosevelt 'clearly insane [...] and insanest upon war and its supreme glories'.¹²³ Another often-repeated remark was made by TR's friend Henry Adams, who said that 'Theodore is insane [...] I see nothing for him but the asylum.'¹²⁴ These remarks supported the opinion of some historians that Theodore Roosevelt was in fact a neurotic, in some cases even posthumously diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Pringle's psychological approach certainly influenced Richard Hofstadter, whose chapter on Theodore Roosevelt in *The American Political Tradition* is one of the most critical interpretations of this presidency. Of the historians arguing that Roosevelt was a conservative in disguise, Hofstadter was certainly the most prominent and influential. However, it remains to be seen whether it is fair to classify him as a debunker, as Kathleen Dalton does. In the chapter, Hofstadter sets out to put Roosevelt firmly in the category of upper middle class people that fell victim to his status revolution theory. While TR was not detached from political life as many of his peers, Hofstadter describes his political aspirations almost as a peculiar aristocrat hobby, with Roosevelt using political power in a mildly benevolent way but without any discernable ideological agenda.¹²⁵ Hofstadter's Roosevelt viewed the rich as timid and shortsightedly selfish, and the commercial classes as only interested in making money. The cultured and educated elite showed too little interest in the rougher and manlier virtues, and

¹¹⁹ Ibidem, 517.

¹²⁰ Pringle, Henry F., *Theodore Roosevelt, A Biography* (New York 1931), 291, 292.

¹²¹ Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 4.

¹²² Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 8.

¹²³ Ibidem, 9.

¹²⁴ Ibidem, 9.

¹²⁵ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 208.

TR found that their intellectuality classified them with the effeminate of character.¹²⁶ On the other hand, ‘he feared the mob’ as well.¹²⁷ He was as bitter towards the labor movement as he was to the most aggressive middle class reformers, who annoyed him, as he thought them too radical and fanatic. In Hofstadter’s opinion, Roosevelt ultimately stands for ‘the aggressive, masterful, fighting virtues of the soldier.’ The people he admired were hunters, cowboys, frontiersmen and soldiers.

Moving quickly through TR’s pre-presidential career, Hofstadter arrives at the conclusion that ‘it is hard to understand how Roosevelt managed to keep his reputation as a strenuous reformer.’ In Hofstadter’s analysis, Roosevelt was by no means an idealistic reformer as he had no humane goals, and no deliberate plan for social betterment. In short, Hofstadter finds no relevant ideological conviction in Roosevelt that would make him a plausible reformer. He summarizes it clearly: ‘there was a hundred times more noise than accomplishment.’¹²⁸ In his later book, *The Age of Reform*, he repeats his conclusion:

‘A conservative politician –Theodore Roosevelt is the best example- can in fact enjoy both respectability and the financial support of the great interests and all the satisfactions of the conservative role in public affairs and yet exert his maximal influence by using the rhetoric of progressivism and winning the plaudits of reformers.’¹²⁹

In other words, Hofstadter sees Roosevelt without question as a conservative in disguise. He uses progressive rhetoric only to secure the support from his electorate, while on the other hand receiving respect and financial support from precisely those he claims to regulate.

Those reform measures that TR did take, such as regulating big business, Hofstadter explains as an outlet for his penchant for aggression, which he had to curtail as an ambitious politician. In the end, Hofstadter finds that TR’s reform ambitions were mere rhetoric. As Daniel David Signal summarizes: “[TR’s] historic function (...) had been to comfort anxious members of the middle class in an age of unparalleled corporate growth”.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Ibidem, 208.

¹²⁷ Ibidem, 208.

¹²⁸ Ibidem, 207.

¹²⁹ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.*, 13.

¹³⁰ Daniel Joseph Signal, ‘Beyond Consensus: Richard Hofstadter and American Historiography’, *The American Historical Review* 4 (1984) 976-1004, there 985.

While Hofstadter goes very far in his psychological analysis of Roosevelt, his analysis is not a character assassination as Dalton suggests. He arrives at his conclusion by considering Roosevelt's writing and political actions. He does not gloss over the reform measures that TR did take. In the end, Hofstadter's analysis is lacking mostly because he emphasizes his psycho-analysis of TR instead of his political and historical analysis. Finding that reform-ideology is absent in TR, Hofstadter does not attempt to explore whether Roosevelt's ideas are to be found in another area. Hofstadter is so focused on the supposed lack of ideas he finds in TR, that he ignores the political thought that most certainly can be found in Roosevelt's many writings on his ideal America.

Hofstadter set the tone for subsequent writing on Theodore Roosevelt. Historians like George Mowry and Daniel Aaron follow the general outlines of his analysis. While more sympathetic to TR, Mowry's analysis of the progressives' motivation is much the same as Hofstadter's, focusing on changing societal structures and subsequent anxiety among the middle class.¹³¹ Hofstadter and his colleagues to a large extent determined along which lines the debate about progressivism was held. Historians tried to find the progressives' true underlying ideas and motivation, and scrutinized them in trying to determine how progressive they really were. This has shaped the debate on Roosevelt in the same period. When finally the differences within progressivism were accepted as one of its main characteristics, so did the debate on the most important individuals in progressivism undergo a change. No longer did historians necessarily try to determine whether people like Roosevelt were progressive, but instead they focused their attention more on several specific issues. In the case of TR there was more attention for his racism towards both immigrants and African Americans. In 'President Theodore Roosevelt and the Negro, 1901-1908', Seth M. Schneider took a closer look at TR's views on African Americans, quoting him:

"I would not be willing to die for what I regard as the untrue abstract statement that all men are in all respects equal, and are all alike entitled to the same power; but I would be quite willing to die (...) for the proposition that each man has certain rights which no other man should be allowed to take away from him."¹³²

¹³¹ William G. Anderson, 'Progressivism, An Historical Essay', *The History Teacher* 3 (1973) 427-452, there 432.

¹³² Seth M. Schneider, 'President Theodore Roosevelt and the Negro, 1901-1908', *The Journal of Negro History* 3 (1962) 169-182, there 178.

Roosevelt's ideas on natural rights are a direct result of his natural history education at Harvard that I reviewed above. As Schneider goes on, he shows that it was TR's political pragmatism that motivated him to take any positive action on the position of African Americans, and that certainly no ideological stance on the issue could redeem him to any historian in the 1960s and '70's who was sensitive to civil rights issues. Not only TR, but other progressives such as Jacob Riis and Jane Addams were in this period more closely scrutinized: their notion of noblesse oblige toward the lower classes and immigrants was now viewed more as patronizing than benevolent.

The most recent stage in the historiography on Theodore Roosevelt sees him approached on a more personal level. Historians from the 1980s onwards often detail his childhood, his parents, his upbringing, and from then on focus very much on his actions. This approach led George Ruiz to claim in 1989 that 'Theodore Roosevelt was consistent in his life-long attachment to a liberal political philosophy'.¹³³ He even goes so far as to claim that there is consensus among historians on this topic: 'that the Roosevelt reform package was indeed progressive is an issue on which there is an unusual degree of consensus among historians'.¹³⁴

To arrive at this conclusion, Ruiz had to completely omit Hofstadter from his analysis. Similarly, Dalton describes TR in her 2002 biography as a liberal on social issues. She too focuses on TR's personal history, and interestingly is the first biographer to detail the important role that TR's wife Edith Carow played in shaping his development as a person and politician. Dalton does mention Hofstadter as we have seen, but puts him firmly in the category of debunker, which is diminishing of the important role Hofstadter has had in evaluating Roosevelt's presidency. Moreover, calling Roosevelt a liberal on social issues is oversimplifying his true political ideas, and neglecting those instances in which TR was clearly not liberal on social issues. A similar personal approach can be seen in Edmund Morris's three-part biography, which, while very well and enthrallingly written, neglects to address any historiographical element and in doing so avoids any judgment on TR's value as a president.

3.3 Conclusion

Growing up, Theodore Roosevelt was surrounded by the symptoms of a society undergoing rapid transformation. His upper class contemporaries turned their backs to politics and business, feeling that it was a vulgar affair. Theodore's mother suffered from the anxiety and

¹³³ Ruiz, 'The Ideological Convergence of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson', 159.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, 165.

nervousness that came with the era, with both upper and middle class becoming increasingly insecure about their position in society as well as their future. Hofstadter's theory of status anxiety seems to have been expressed in a real, physical phenomenon. While it is a subconscious process, up until then society had been able to connect its past to its present, basing their expectations of the future on previous experience. This formed American's understanding of their history, and also of their identity. Roosevelt had come to the conclusion early on that he wished to participate in society, and that those who placed themselves outside of society were of no real value to it. His own father had always worked to better the world around him, and he had motivated TR himself to deliberately shape his future.

While Hofstadter went very far with his psychological analysis of Theodore Roosevelt, dismissing any sense of an ideal behind Roosevelt's actions, it would be too easy to classify him with the debunking historians such as Pringle. Hofstadter certainly has reviewed Roosevelt's writing and describes any action Roosevelt took that can be seen as progressive. In the end, Hofstadter loses credibility mostly because he lets his psycho-analysis overshadow his political and historical analysis. What is more, in finding that reform-ideology is absent in TR, Hofstadter neglects to find what ideology is there. His supposed lack of ideas fits so well within the psychological profile of an overactive cowboy adventurer, that Hofstadter neglects to interpret TR's many writings on his ideal America, in which his domestic political convictions certainly can be found as we will see in the next chapter.

In historic work that interprets TR as a progressive reformer, dissenting opinions of well-respected historians are either completely omitted, or glossed over as deliberate attempts at character assassination. We see this in Ruiz and Dalton, who praise TR as a progressive liberal. As we will see in the following chapters, neither analysis contributes to a better understanding of Roosevelt's presidency, but rather diffuses it.

4. The Rough and Tumble: Roosevelt as Reformer

As Roosevelt embarked on his political career, he was certainly not heading straight for the White House. When he first entered the room above a store, furnished with spittoons and rough benches, where the political leaders of his district held their meetings, he was not very welcome. With his side-whiskers and smart clothes, he stood out among the cheap lawyers, saloonkeepers and horsecar-conductors who told dirty stories in between the topics on the agenda. Edmund Morris notes that their ‘Celtic eloquence’ and regular squirting of plug-juice must have made the prudish Theodore wince.¹³⁵ But he kept frequenting the meetings, and after some time he was accepted for membership in the Republican Association of the twenty-first district. No matter how much his relatives and social circle disapproved, TR was glad he could start ‘on the shop floor’.¹³⁶

To analyze Theodore Roosevelt’s political ideology, the importance of his political career pre-presidency cannot be overstated. From the start of his political career in this crowded room full of foul-mouthed Irishmen, the central theme to his political ideas becomes visible. In this chapter I will analyze those aspects of TR’s career that are usually classified as his progressive actions. What I will show is that the two main themes in Roosevelt’s reform work, merit and morals, form the core part of his political ideology: responsible citizenship. This central theme to Theodore Roosevelt’s political agenda is present from his first speeches as New York State Assemblyman, to the final speech just after his last presidential term. Next to his political speeches, in his historic writing and other topical essays and books, this same recurring theme is visible.

In the first paragraph of this chapter, I will focus on TR’s pre-presidential career, and the second will detail the most important facets of his presidential career. At the end of this chapter, I will have shown why TR has been classified as a progressive reformer, but more importantly I will be able to show what the true core of his political beliefs is.

4.1 Merit and morals

Theodore Roosevelt’s first elected position was that of New York State Assemblyman, a position he held from 1882-1884. Looking at his speeches from this period, we can see that immediately, TR was introduced to the close relationship between business and politics that was

¹³⁵ Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 123.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, 124.

inherent to the system of political machines. The very first time that he opposed this relationship was when he discovered that a State Supreme Justice named Westbrook was involved in a corrupt transaction with financier Jay Gould, helping him acquire the Manhattan Elevated Railroad. TR called for an investigation of the affair by an Assembly Committee. After announcing his resolution, several people including his uncle James Roosevelt warned him, saying that the inner circle of politics, corporations and the legal system was a fact of life, and would always be there. TR recalls the conversation in his autobiography: ‘He explained that I had done well in the Legislature, that it was a good thing to have made the “reform play”, that I had shown that I possessed ability such as would make me useful in the right kind of law office or business concern’.¹³⁷ Just a year out of college, Roosevelt’s first venture into political reform came with an immediate reminder of his class and the responsibilities that came with it. Moreover, as he recorded in his autobiography: ‘it made such an impression on me that I always remembered it, for it was the first glimpse I had of that combination between business and politics which I was in after years so often to oppose’.¹³⁸ While his resolution for an investigation of Judge Westbrook was passed, the incident served as a lasting reminder of the main challenge of both political and economic reform, that was the close intertwining of business and politics.

His time in the New York Assembly also first introduced TR to the problems in the cities. After TR was appointed to a commission investigating the tenement sweatshops in New York City, he let a labor leader take him on a tour of the tenement sweatshops. The women and children working in unhealthy circumstances must have reminded him of his father’s reform work with children, and more so of Senior’s advocating of public rather than private solutions. It prompted him to support a bill that prohibited the manufacturing of cigars in tenement houses, a bill that by his own admission, he would not have voted for had he not seen the tenements with his own eyes: ‘I had supposed I would be against the legislation, and I rather think I was put on the committee with that idea, for the respectable people I knew were against it; it was contrary to the principles of political economy of the laissez-faire kind’.¹³⁹ However, after he visited the tenement houses he

‘could not conscientiously vote for the continuance of the conditions which I saw.

These conditions rendered it impossible for the families of the tenement-house work-

¹³⁷ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 86

¹³⁸ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 86.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*, 88.

ers to live so that the children might grow up fitted for the exacting duties of American citizenship.’¹⁴⁰

Already it becomes apparent that the fitness for American citizenship is what TR considers to be most important: this is the reason for his support of the bill. Rather than condemning the tenement conditions on humane grounds, he does so emphasizing what is necessary for a well-functioning democracy. Another relevant aspect of this case is that, when the Cigar Bill was finally repealed by the Court of Appeals, who declared it unconstitutional, Roosevelt recalls that this case ‘first waked me to a dim and partial understanding of the fact that the courts were not necessarily the best judges of what should be done to better social and industrial conditions’.¹⁴¹ This realization is important for the rest of TR’s career, because it gives him a sense of justification for the reform measures he took as a politician: here he first realizes that to improve social and industrial conditions is a politician’s responsibility.

One of the most important speeches of Roosevelt’s career as Assemblyman, is a speech he made in 1883 in Buffalo titled ‘Duties of American Citizenship’. In this speech he lays out some of his key ideas on politics and citizenship: ‘The first duty of an American citizen then, is that he shall work in politics; his second duty is that he shall do that work in a practical manner; and his third is that it shall be done in accord with the highest principles of honor and justice’.¹⁴² This is one of the first clear formulations of TR’s core values: participation of citizens in their society and active work by citizens to improve not only their own lives, but the whole of society; the recurring themes in TR’s writing. In this same speech, he addresses the most important wrong of politics: ‘Against nothing is fearless and specific criticism more needed than against the “spoils system”, which is the degradation of American politics’.¹⁴³ The spoils system refers to the practice of employing or promoting men, specifically in this case in the Civil Service, based on their loyalty, good relations with people in power, and also family-ties. What TR fought for, especially in his time in the Civil Service Commission in Washington, was to replace this system with one based on merit. Candidates for jobs would have to pass examinations and be proven fit for the job. It is a topic on which TR was unambiguously a reformer, and he often spoke about his reform efforts in this field:

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem, 88.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem, 89.

¹⁴² Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Duties of American Citizenship’, speech at Buffalo, Jan. 26, 1883

<http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/speeches/trdoac.pdf>, (accessed June 5, 2014).

¹⁴³ Ibidem.

‘To be sure, practical politicians sneer at it. One of them even went so far as to say that civil-service reform is asking a man irrelevant questions. What more irrelevant question could there be than that of the practical politician who asks the aspirant for his political favor - Whom did you vote for in the last election?’¹⁴⁴

His opposing of the spoils system fit seamlessly in his ideas on citizenship: a man must be judged on his own merit, because he has the responsibility to contribute to society and this alone is what should be factored in.

Another interesting element from his speech in Buffalo, is a recurring theme as well: ‘[a politician] has got to preserve his independence on the one hand; and on the other, unless he wishes to be a wholly ineffective crank, he has got to have some sense of party allegiance.’¹⁴⁵ He goes on to say that it is difficult, if not ineffective, to formulate an abstract ideal for party action, let alone to formulate a practical common goal. Instead, any effective politician with honorable intentions, can be of service in different ways and working with different organizations.¹⁴⁶ While there is certainly a moral standpoint to be found in TR’s ideals on what a good politician is, he also shows how much he values the practical: a politician must learn to compromise.

After his time in the New York State Assembly, TR was appointed to the Civil Service Commission in Washington. In between these two positions, a personal tragedy and a number of years in the West, had influenced TR considerably. His first wife Alice had died in 1884, just two days after giving birth to their first child, a daughter. To make matters worse, Roosevelt’s mother died on the same day. After this tragedy, Roosevelt had retired from politics to start a ranch in the Dakotas. His time as a rancher and the hunting adventures he had in this period, would become one of the main sources of his personal development and influenced his thinking about the position of America in the world, and more importantly of the history of America and her citizens. Examining a list of TR’s writings in this period, one can see articles about municipal government and the state of America, along with articles on hunting big game, ranching, and encountering Indians.

In an article titled ‘Machine Politics in New York City’ (1896) Roosevelt analyzes the system of machine politics, and concludes that the machine can only be beaten if enough responsible citizens take an interest in participating in politics. Again it is striking to see that

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem.

while participation of citizens is a moral issue to him, he does know how to take a realist approach to the subject: ‘Average citizens do take a spasmodic interest in public affairs; and we should therefore so shape our governmental system that the action taken by voters should be as simple and direct as possible, and should not need to be taken any more than is necessary.’¹⁴⁷ To this he adds: ‘Not one decent voter in ten will take the trouble to inform themselves as to the character of the host of petty candidates to be balloted for, but he will be sure to know everything about the mayor, comptroller, etc.’¹⁴⁸ While he goes on to note his regret of the disinterest in politics among average citizens, TR acknowledges that it will be easier to take this into account when organizing political elections, than it would be to change the people’s sentiment towards politics. Again we see that while TR has an idealistic take on politics, he acknowledges that the reality is often different. Possibly, he can see the realities of the lives of ordinary citizens more clearly in this period, when he is himself detached from politics and is living as a “civilian” rancher.

Both Morris and Dalton ascribe TR’s productivity in writing books and articles while living in the Bad Lands to his ambition to return to politics after his break. When indeed he did return, members of the Republican Convention asked him to run for Mayor of New York. Flattered, TR to accept this very unexpected honor. He did not expect to win at first, but he did like a challenge, and so he entered into the race, hoping that at least he would come second, and not third.¹⁴⁹ One of the most striking aspects of the campaign for the Mayoral election, is his exclamation to a crowd on a campaign stop: ‘Do you want a radical reformer?’ ‘Yes we do!’¹⁵⁰ answered the crowd. When he was badly beaten by both candidates, TR did not expect to be in politics again. He wrote to a friend: ‘My literary work occupies a good deal of my time, and I have on the whole done fairly well at it; I should like to write some book that would really take rank in the very first class, but I suppose it is a mere dream.’¹⁵¹ It is the first time he alludes to the writing of what he calls his magnum opus: what would become the four volumes of *The Winning of The West* (1889-1896). In his history of the civilization of the English speaking people, TR presents America and the Americans as the high point of civilization. I will elaborate on this book in the next chapter, as it serves to explain TR’s ideas on race and imperialism.

¹⁴⁷ Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Machine Politics in New York City’, *Century* November 11 1886, <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/treditorials/c3.pdf> (accessed June 4 2014).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁹ Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 343.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 351.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 391.

In the meantime TR's friend Henry Cabot Lodge negotiated with the new President Benjamin Harrison to appoint Roosevelt to any federal position, to thank him for campaigning on behalf of the President. Interestingly, neither in his autobiography nor in his letters, TR shows any awareness that Cabot's constant lobbying on his behalf was in itself part of the spoils system. Harrison was reluctant to give TR a position, as Roosevelt already had the reputation of a troublemaker. However, as Morris describes it: 'Eventually he thought of a dusty sinecure that paid little, and promised less in terms of real political power.'¹⁵² In a footnote to *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (1951), Morison added: 'It was a politically undesirable post, Roosevelt later said he gave up all idea of a political career when he accepted the position.'¹⁵³ Perhaps it was precisely this that made him feel free to pursue his reform agenda while working in the Civil Service Commission. The Commission was set up under President Grant in 1871 specifically to reform the Civil Service and get rid of the spoils system, however, it was never very effective.¹⁵⁴ As Congress relied on the spoils system, it withdrew funding for the Commission. Since then, it had been re-established and suspended several times. As Morris notes: 'the work was bound to make [TR] unpopular, for everybody in Washington was heartily sick of the subject of Civil Service Reform.'¹⁵⁵ Everybody but Theodore Roosevelt, as it would turn out.

As Civil Service Commissioner, TR worked with two colleagues to ensure that a quarter of the Federal Civil Service jobs were equally accessible to all citizens, that these citizens would be tested on their merit before being appointed, and that they would keep their jobs regardless of changes in the administration.¹⁵⁶ The mandate of the Commission only covered 28.000 Civil Service jobs, which were all subordinate positions in the departmental, customs, postal, railway mail, and Indian Services. The other 112.000 jobs in the Civil Service did not fall under Roosevelt's authority, and therefore often were still subject to the patronage system. The goals of the Civil Service Commission had always met with great resistance in Washington, and things were no different now: Morris notes that it worried the Harrison Administration that the three Civil Service Commissioners got along well, because 'the last thing they needed as they began to hand out appointments for services rendered, was an active Civil Ser-

¹⁵² Ibidem, 398.

¹⁵³ Elting E. Morison ed., *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt, Vol.I: The Years of Preparation 1868-1898* (Cambridge 1951), 161.

¹⁵⁴ Henry W. Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union: Ulysses S. Grant in War and Peace* (New York 2012), 144.

¹⁵⁵ Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 398.

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem, 405.

vice Commission'.¹⁵⁷ And active Roosevelt was, as can be inferred from his letter to Cabot Lodge one month after his appointment:

‘About the matter of removals, we are rather in a quandary; Wanamaker (the United States Postmaster General, EP) has laid before us the case of Brown of Baltimore. He has discharged 356 men out of 367; of course they have been replaced by democrats. Now, such a state of things is an outrage; a man acting in that way can pretty well nullify the whole Civil Service Law, for none but favorites will come forward to take the examinations in such an office.’¹⁵⁸

This excerpt shows well the intricacies of TR’s daily work. He found that the same people who gave him a case to investigate, like Wanamaker in this instance, would work against him when he found something objectionable. He also needed the support of President Harrison in such cases, because if the President would not follow TR’s suggestion to dismiss a corrupt Civil Servant, soon the Commission would have no authority left. The Commission itself did not have the power to fire anyone.

Roosevelt kept his position in the Civil Service Commission for six years, from 1889 until 1895. During this time he often struggled with his limited mandate, and made plenty of enemies among Senators and Congressmen. Other times, Roosevelt had to battle indifference to the reform cause. In his autobiography, he gives a telling insight into his thought on the place of Civil Service Reform among other reform initiatives. The title of the chapter on the Civil Service Commission is “Applied Idealism”, again giving an indication that Roosevelt realized that there was a difference between idealism in theory, and the practical execution of those ideals. However, in his autobiography he shows that he considered political reform a moral issue that was connected to his ideas on citizenship: ‘Civil Service Reform is designed primarily to give the average American citizen a fair chance in politics’.¹⁵⁹ For Roosevelt, fighting the spoils system was clearing the way for citizens to participate in a well-functioning democracy. Moreover, TR saw a connection between political reform and social and industrial, or economic, reform. He accuses fellow political reformers of not supporting those social reform initiatives ‘for the improvement of the conditions of toil and life among men and

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem, 404.

¹⁵⁸ Elting E. Morison ed., *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt, Vol.I: The Years of Preparation 1868-1898* (Cambridge 1951), 163.

¹⁵⁹ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 147.

women who labor under hard surroundings’, and of being ‘positively hostile to movements which curbed the power of the great corporation magnates’.¹⁶⁰ Again this underscores how TR thought about reform initiatives: together, reformers in all areas could create a fair chance for any civilian, be it a child in the tenements or a secretary in the Civil Service, to participate in society and contribute to the functioning of the democratic system. This is precisely what he emphasized in his numerous speeches on the topic during his time in the Civil Service Commission. In speeches titled ‘The Spoils System in Operation’ (1889) and ‘The Merit System versus the Patronage System’ (1889), he praises the merit system and calls the spoils system ‘precisely that which is most evil and most degrading in our politics’.¹⁶¹ The merit system on the other hand he calls ‘essentially democratic and essentially American, and in line with the utterances and deeds of our forefathers of the days of Washington and Madison’.¹⁶² In an open letter to Century Magazine, TR reassures those hoping to qualify for a job in the Baltimore Post-Office, that it does not matter whether they are Democrats or Republicans. He promises that the Commission will see to it that the postmaster only looks at their merit, in the form of a written examination, and disregard their political affiliation.¹⁶³ His speeches and letters form TR’s endless PR-campaign on behalf of his cause, teaching American citizens how to be responsible and to contribute to their society.

Roosevelt’s next position was as New York City Police Commissioner. It was a job thought to be rather more glamorous than his last: ‘one I could perhaps afford to be identified with’, as TR noted.¹⁶⁴ In his letter of resignation from the Civil Service Commission to President Grover Cleveland, Roosevelt summed up his accomplishments of the past six years: ‘Year by year the law has been better executed’, and he has seen the ‘classified service grow to more than double the size that it was six years ago.’¹⁶⁵ To a reporter who praised his work in the Commission, writing that ‘Senators and representatives went staggering from a contact with the Commission’¹⁶⁶, he wrote ‘I can honestly say that I think I have accomplished something, and that the cause has made more progress from the moral than even from the material side

¹⁶⁰ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 162.

¹⁶¹ Theodore Roosevelt, ‘The Spoils System in Operation’, Speech in Baltimore, February 23, 1889, <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/txtspeches/576.pdf> (accessed June 28, 2014).

¹⁶² *Ibidem*.

¹⁶³ Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Fair Play in the Civil Service’, open letter to Century Magazine, July 7 1890, <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/txtspeches/579.pdf> (accessed June 28, 2014).

¹⁶⁴ Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 492.

¹⁶⁵ Morison ed., *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 444.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 444.

(...)'.¹⁶⁷ About his upcoming task he added: 'As for what I can do in New York I confess feel rather doubtful [...] I haven't any certain knowledge of how much power I will have.'¹⁶⁸

Among those who were glad that Roosevelt returned to New York, were the press. Especially Jacob Riis, the progressive reformer and journalist who had already become well acquainted with TR when he had published his book *How The Other Half Lives* (1890) in which he had documented the tenement houses and living situations of the immigrants. As Riis writes in his biography of TR: 'Now had come the time when he could help indeed'.¹⁶⁹ Also working in New York was Lincoln Steffens, journalist for the Evening Post, who specialized in covering corrupt city politics. Steffens later said of TR's arrival in New York: 'It was all breathless and sudden, but Riis and I soon described the situation to him, [...] it was just as if we three were the Police Board, TR, Riis, and I, and as we got TR calmed down we made him promise to go a bit slow, to consult with his colleagues also.'¹⁷⁰

Working for the Police Department, TR again focused on morals and merit by introducing a merit system in the police force, and enforcing the unpopular Excise Laws, which prohibited the sale of alcohol on Sundays. In his first statement in his new position, he promised that 'there will be no politics in the department,' and that 'we are all activated by the desire to so regulate this department that it will earn the respect and confidence of the community [...] all appointments and promotions will be made for merit only, and without regard to political or religious considerations.'¹⁷¹

TR's enforcement of the Excise Laws is significant for a number of reasons. For one, it reinforced his image of a moralist reformer, because it were the most moralist, often religious reformers who saw prohibition as a way to diminish the vice of New York. Second, it made him a popular subject of newspaper articles, editorials, cartoons and angry letters. Reporters loved him because he guaranteed action, and therefore sold newspapers. In her recent *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism* (2013), Doris Kearns Goodwin describes how reporters were instrumental for Roosevelt in getting his message across. He had the habit of keeping the press close, calling them by their first names, inviting them to dinner, asking for their opinion on his decisions.¹⁷² This also partly explains his close relationship with Riis and Steffens: they were excellent for PR.

¹⁶⁷ Morison ed., *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 447.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 447.

¹⁶⁹ Riis, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 132.

¹⁷⁰ Steffens, Lincoln, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York 1931), 258.

¹⁷¹ Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 497.

¹⁷² Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft and the Golden Age of Journalism* (New York 2013), xii.

Third, TR's dealing with the Excise Laws provides us with a valuable insight in his political ideals. Did he really act on progressive motives?

The Excise Laws and the merit system were closely intertwined in the case of the New York Police Department. The Police Department was corrupt to its core: the Chief of Police made deals with bankers for the protection of their property, and with criminal gangs for their promise that they would stick to a certain area. Police Captains who controlled precincts, made money off their constituents, making them pay for protection and favors. Saloons paid large sums of money for their liquor licenses, and madams of brothels would pay even more. Within the Police Department itself, titles were sold: 10.000 dollars was the fare for a captaincy, becoming a patrolman would cost around 300 dollars.¹⁷³ In turn, the Police Department would pay a monthly contribution to Tammany Hall, home of the New York political machine. In this network, saloon-keepers could become so powerful that they controlled policemen and politicians, while the police would sometimes turn around to blackmail saloon-owners into owing even larger sums of money.¹⁷⁴

According to Riis, Roosevelt decided 'with characteristic directness' that the 'saloon was the tap-root of mischief'.¹⁷⁵ Consequently, while at the same time introducing a system of examinations for police officers, and making nightly rounds to check whether the patrolmen were doing their jobs, he announced that he would enforce the Sunday closing laws. The first actions made him popular, with newspaper headlines reading 'Can You Swim? A question soon to be asked of policeman', detailing how Roosevelt would see to it that any policeman working on the "steamboat squad" or on the shore knew how to swim, or be fired.¹⁷⁶ TR's nightly patrols provided even more entertainment: 'Roosevelt on Post: The President of the Police Board does a Roundsman's work – Caught the force napping', was the start of a newspaper article detailing Roosevelt's nightly route and the shock of the policemen when they realized it was TR's 'round gold glasses beaming upon them'.¹⁷⁷

However, the Sunday closing laws were a measure that would not make TR popular with the citizens of New York, which he realized. Announcing his plans to the press, he stated: 'I do not deal with public sentiment. I deal with the law.'¹⁷⁸ Saloons were to be closed on

¹⁷³ Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 501.

¹⁷⁴ Riis, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 136.

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem, 138.

¹⁷⁶ 'Can You Swim?' *Journal*, June 6 1895, RSC.

¹⁷⁷ 'Roosevelt on Post', *Evening Sun*, June 7 1895, RSC.

¹⁷⁸ Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 513.

Sundays, or else lose their license. It was ‘a declaration of war’, Morris notes.¹⁷⁹ The first Sunday after this declaration was ‘the Dryest Sunday in Seven Years’, as a newspaper headlined.¹⁸⁰ A storm of criticism followed: newspapers recounted the negative impact on the economy; Senator Hill, a Tammany politician, called Roosevelt a busybody and accused him of seeking fame; and New Yorkers organized a parade in protest to the Excise Law.¹⁸¹

Roosevelt set in a counter-campaign: he gave a public answer to Hill in a speech at the Good Government Club, saying that it were democrats like Hill who had legislated the Excise law in the first place, apparently not intending to enforce it. ‘Senator Hill’s assault upon the enforcement is tantamount to the admission, in the first place, that it never had been honestly enforced before’.¹⁸² He also gave an interview with several journalists, explaining his reasoning behind enforcing the Excise law: ‘I should never have framed the Excise Law which I am now enforcing’, but ‘I had to choose between closing all the saloons and violating my oath of office’, and ‘I would rather see this administration turned out for enforcing laws, than see it succeed by violating them’.¹⁸³ TR further worked on his public image by appearing at a parade organized to protest against him. ‘Away with Blue Laws: Forty thousand men in line to demand personal liberty for all’, was how the World newspaper phrased it.¹⁸⁴ The paraders, mostly German-Americans, had draped buildings and wagons in funeral attire, to symbolize the ‘death of the Continental Sunday’.¹⁸⁵ Roosevelt stood on the most prominent part of the reviewing platform to watch the parade go by; making it seem almost like the protest was held in his honor. Having heard the rumor that TR was watching the parade, one protester yelled, ‘Wo ist der Roosevelt?’, upon which Roosevelt answered, ‘Hier bin ich’, taking off his hat and causing the spectators to erupt in laughter.¹⁸⁶ To a wagon carrying a banner saying ‘Send the Police Czar back to Russia’, Roosevelt sent a policeman to ask for the banner, so he could hang it on his office walls.¹⁸⁷

The message was clear. Roosevelt was no prohibitionist, he openly called the law ‘too strict’, and even promised New Yorkers that he would try to make it more liberal.¹⁸⁸ As it was, however, he would strictly enforce it, because that was what made democracy work.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem, 514.

¹⁸⁰ Ibidem, 517.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, 519.

¹⁸² ‘Roosevelt answers Hill’, *Tribune*, July 17 1895, RSC.

¹⁸³ ‘Roosevelt tells why’, *Evening Sun*, July 6th 1895, RSC.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Away with blue laws’, *World* 26 sept 1895, RSC.

¹⁸⁵ Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 526.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Away with blue laws’, *World* 26 sept 1895, RSC.

¹⁸⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁸ Morris, *Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 513.

Why have a law if it is not enforced? It would make him no better than the corrupt bosses he was battling against. This shows again Roosevelt's underlying ideas: what mattered most was the protection of democracy. Just as the merit system gave citizens a chance to participate in politics, so did the enforcement of laws, whether he agreed with them or not, guarantee to these same citizens that democracy would be protected, and that law was law, no matter who you were.

4.2 Trust-busting and public health

As we have seen in paragraph 2.1.1, one of the major changes that came with industrialization was the advance of big corporations. In the railroad and steel industries among others, corporate mergers had created the first giant corporations worth over a billion dollars. The monopolies that were consequently formed, often had a negative impact on the average American, as prices were fixed and consumers' rights were disregarded. It became increasingly clear that legislation was needed to rein in the power of big business. In 1890, the Sherman Anti-Trust Law was enacted after the formation of the Tobacco Trust and the Sugar Trust had heightened public demand for measures to be taken.¹⁸⁹ However, as TR notes in his autobiography, the Sherman Act proved insufficient when the Supreme Court ruled against the government in the case of the *United States v. E. C. Knight Co.* in 1895, in what is commonly known as the Sugar Trust Case.¹⁹⁰ When the American Sugar Refining Company had gained control over the E.C. Knight Company, they had an almost total monopoly (98%) over all sugar refining in the United States. President Grover Cleveland invoked the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to prevent this merger, but the Supreme Court ruled that the refining of sugar was a local activity, therefore falling under state jurisdiction, and that national government could not prevent the merger under the provisions of the Sherman Act.¹⁹¹ As a result, the debate on trust-busting as this activity came to be known, was essentially a debate on states' rights versus national government power, reminiscent of the Jefferson vs. Hamilton debate. Historically, Jefferson is associated with states' rights, or as TR calls it when describing the debate: 'a belief in the people as the ultimate authority'. Roosevelt himself was firmly on the side of what he called the 'Lincoln school of American political thought, [who] are necessarily Hamiltonian in their

¹⁸⁹ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 465.

¹⁹⁰ <http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/156/1/case.html> (accessed June 28 2014).

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

belief in a strong and efficient National Government.¹⁹² TR realized that further legislation was necessary for the national government to be able to regulate big business.

During his presidency, Roosevelt started fifty-four anti-trust proceedings in seven years, while his successor William H. Taft brought ninety anti-trust proceedings in four years.¹⁹³ Still, it is Roosevelt who is remembered as the trust-busting president, as can be seen in the information on his presidency on the White House website.¹⁹⁴ This is mainly because of the first and most prominent case that TR brought to justice: the Northern Securities Company. When Great Northern Railway-owner James Jerome Hill joined forces with John Pierpont Morgan's Northern Pacific Railway in order to buy the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad (CB&Q), a bidding war broke out between the two investors and E.H. Harriman of the Union Pacific Railroad, who also planned to buy CB&Q. Each party started to buy large amounts of stock in the Northern Pacific, trying to force the other's hand. The artificially high stock prices almost caused a crash on the New York Stock Exchange.¹⁹⁵ J.P. Morgan stated to be completely indifferent to the larger economic consequences he caused: 'I owe the public nothing', he said.¹⁹⁶ Finally, Hill attempted to solve the crisis by forming a holding company, the Northern Securities Company, to manage all three of the railroads, which meant that some of America's most powerful men now controlled the railroads from Seattle and San Francisco to Duluth and Chicago.¹⁹⁷

In January 1902, Roosevelt's government announced that it was bringing an anti-trust suit against the Northern Securities Company. Rather than wait for a new law to pass through Congress, Roosevelt used the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890. Dalton explains the importance of TR's announcement as follows: 'This bolt of news overshadowed in historic importance all other anti-trust prosecutions of the next three decades because it was the first time a president dared to stand up to the biggest corporations.'¹⁹⁸ While J.P. Morgan's side planned to fight all the way to the Supreme Court, meaning it would take years for a final verdict to be made, the publicity following Roosevelt's announcement alone already had a positive effect, with other companies dropping their merger-plans to avoid prosecution and bad publicity.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 462.

¹⁹³ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 228.

¹⁹⁴ Theodore Roosevelt 1901-1909, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/theodoreroosevelt> (accessed May 20, 2014).

¹⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 224.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 224.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, 225.

¹⁹⁸ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 225.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, 226.

Roosevelt himself presents his action as a moral necessity. He realized that the Northern Securities Case paralleled the E.C. Knight case, and hoped that the Supreme Court would reverse its decision: ‘It was necessary to reverse the Knight case in the interests of the people against monopoly and privilege just as it had been necessary to reverse the Dred Scott case in the interest of the people against slavery and privilege’.²⁰⁰ Dalton adds that Roosevelt ‘believed he had to stand up on behalf of the nation-state to defy men of great wealth’.²⁰¹ It is Roosevelt’s answer to the privileged, detached class he came from: rather than join them in a respectable position as they had wished when he first started in politics, he showed his engagement and dedication to bettering society as he had planned to do all along. Again, he kept in check what he saw as the evils threatening democracy, disadvantaging ordinary citizens trying to be respectable democrats.

When the Supreme Court reversed its decision in the Knight case, voting five to four in the Northern Securities case, it sustained the power of national government. In TR’s words, ‘the power to deal with industrial monopoly and suppress it and to control and regulate combinations, of which the Knight case had deprived the Federal Government, was thus restored to it.’²⁰² Roosevelt, while elated over this triumph, took great care to speak about this case and subsequent trust-busting as moderately as possible. Whenever he touched upon the topic in a speech, he addressed the necessity for the measures he took, while constantly emphasizing that big corporations were not evil, and that they had contributed greatly to the prosperity of America. In a 1902 speech in Ohio, he emphasized to his audience that economic progress had certainly brought more good than evil. While ‘many admirable qualities which were developed in the older, simpler, less progressive life have tended to atrophy under our rather feverish, high-pressure, complex life of today,’ his audience must accept that progress only knows one direction, and that the time of the canal boat and stagecoach will not come back.²⁰³ He went on to argue that either an amendment to the constitution or new legislation was needed, to demarcate the power of states and national government in dealing with this relatively new type of business that was the giant corporation. Here again, he takes care to emphasize that the president in cases like these would only have an advising role, and would not have the power to break up a corporation directly. Next, he takes great pains in repeating a few times that this power would have to be used with the utmost restraint and wisdom, be-

²⁰⁰ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 469.

²⁰¹ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 226.

²⁰² Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 469.

²⁰³ Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Speech or Address in the Afternoon’, Cincinnati, Ohio, September 20, 1902 <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/txtspeches/28.txt> (accessed June 6, 2014).

cause ‘the marvelous prosperity we have been enjoying for the past few years has been due primarily to the high average of honesty, thrift, and business capacity among our people as a whole, but some of it has also been due to the ability of the men who are the industrial leaders to the nation.’²⁰⁴ As I will discuss in the next chapter, it is precisely this moderate message that Hofstadter uses to demonstrate how Roosevelt was merely a conservative disguising himself as a reformer. Certainly, TR knew not to alienate the rich businessmen whose support he would likely need in the future.

A final example of TR’s specific approach to Progressive reform can be seen in his Public Health bills. While this topic is not as significant when analyzing Roosevelt’s progressivism as the above detailed political reform and economic measures, it is interesting to mention because it demonstrates TR’s willingness to use the power of national government in areas where this was previously unheard of. In 1906 a young, socialist progressive named Upton Sinclair published his book *The Jungle*, detailing the unsanitary and dangerous practices in Chicago’s meatpacking industry. Reportedly, it both fascinated and repulsed Roosevelt, and he followed up the suggestions that Sinclair had enclosed when he had sent the book to the White House. Roosevelt wanted a government official to meet Sinclair, investigate the industry, and propose improvements. He appointed Congressman James Wadsworth to lead the investigation.

The investigation was to be kept secret, as TR feared opposition from anyone with interests in the meat-industry. Wadsworth produced a report that completely corroborated all of Sinclair’s accusations, and was so full of nauseating detail that Roosevelt did not want to publish it.²⁰⁵ It detailed the soaked and slimy wooden floors in the stock yards, the lack of ventilation, the complete lack of hygiene and the deplorable working conditions: ‘workers toil without relief in a humid atmosphere heavy with the odors of rotten wood, decayed meats, stinking offal, and entrails.’²⁰⁶

Dalton and Morris differ in opinion on the reasons for the introduction of the Pure Food and Drug Act; according to Morris, TR took action almost completely due to the shocking details in the report, which made him favor regulation. Dalton however, states that the Act had been on TR’s agenda for a while, and that Sinclair’s book conveniently coincided with his

²⁰⁴ Ibidem.

²⁰⁵ Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (2001), 447.

²⁰⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Message to Congress: Conditions in Chicago Stock Yards, June 4 1906, <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/txtspeeches/963.pdf> (accessed June 7, 2014).

efforts to regulate the meat-industry. In his autobiography, Roosevelt does not shed light on the chronology of the matter, or even mention *The Jungle*. He does emphasize the importance of the Pure Food and Drug Act as one of the regulating bills that reined in big corporations, with regulation coming from the national government proving effective.²⁰⁷ Interestingly, he uses the same moderate language here as in defending his trust-busting measures:

‘three or four years after these laws had been put on the statute books every honest man both in the beef business and in the railway business came to the conclusion that they worked good and not harm to the decent business concerns. They hurt only those who were not acting as they should have acted.’²⁰⁸

This first consumer protecting law in America, regulating business just as the trust-busting measures did, was not intended to put the whole industry under government control, but instead, TR emphasized, only served to weed out the bad seeds of the industry. Again, Roosevelt had implemented regulation, using government power to protect ordinary citizens.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen the main reasons for historians to conclude that Theodore Roosevelt was a progressive, not only as president, but from the earliest start of his career. As New York Assemblyman, he first became acquainted with the close relationship between business and politics, and in trying to confront this, he was duly reminded of his background and the proper behavior that was expected of him. But as had already become clear in Chapter 3 of this thesis, TR was not the man to stand on the sidelines. He wanted to right the wrongs in society as he saw them, just as his father had done before him.

The main recurring theme in Roosevelt’s speaking and writing about his reform initiatives, is making it possible for anyone to participate as a responsible citizen in a well-functioning democracy. For any citizen it should be possible to find a job based on their merit, and without regard for their political convictions. For every citizen, it should be clear that laws are there to be enforced by government, no matter who they were. This is what keeps a democracy healthy. For big business, the same rules apply as to private citizens: if they break the law, or negatively impact society, they will be regulated by the same national government.

²⁰⁷ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 483.

²⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 483.

It is striking just how often TR emphasized that government would not abuse its power, and that not every corporation was suspect. No, only those who were violating the rules would find out just how powerful national government was. It was a message that Roosevelt had to repeat over and over in an America that had always been notoriously individualistic. Business had brought progress in part because of the laissez-faire philosophy that had been dominant in American government. Regulation was not popular in an environment like this. This is one of the main reasons for TR's crafting of his moderate message. He shaped his own PR-campaign, and he knew that to use the government's power, he had to convince the people that he would not abuse it, and that it was only necessary in some cases.

Having reviewed the most important of his reform actions, it is striking to see that Roosevelt never claimed to follow any political ideology. To a casual observer, it might even seem that TR was acting haphazardly, implementing reform here and there while never alluding to any plan or political idea. It is only when closely reviewing his writing and his speaking on reform, that the central theme of participatory citizenship is visible.

5: The Unstable Jingo: Roosevelt as Conservative

In the previous chapter, we have seen the main elements of Roosevelt's progressive reforms. Historians have used those elements to argue that Roosevelt was a progressive president. In Chapter 3, I detailed the historiographic debate that this thesis aims to revive and we saw that for some historians, Roosevelt's progressivism is the disguise for his essentially conservative political thought. In this chapter, I will highlight two main factors that have contributed to this interpretation. In the first paragraph I will discuss how Roosevelt's trust-busting has also provided fuel for this conservative interpretation. In the second paragraph I will elaborate on TR's opinion on Americanism, specifically in relation to race. This is a topic on which Roosevelt's ideas are at their most conservative.

5.1 Labor and trust-busting

Richard Hofstadter is the historian who was most influential in his arguing that Theodore Roosevelt was a conservative disguised as a reformer. His main argument in support of this characterization is the lack of any political ideology he finds in Roosevelt, as well as his selective implementation of reform measures. 'In internal affairs', Hofstadter quotes Roosevelt's autobiography, 'I cannot say that I entered the presidency with any deliberately planned and far-reaching scheme of social betterment.'²⁰⁹ What Hofstadter seems to ask is: how could this man without ideological convictions be a progressive? If we go back to an article from 1897, written as Roosevelt was just about to start his new appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, we find Roosevelt making the same statement: 'It is but rarely that great advances in general social well-being can be made by the adoption of some far-reaching scheme, legislative or otherwise; normally they come only by gradual growth.'²¹⁰ It seems indeed the case that Roosevelt had no ideological political conviction.

In *The American Political Tradition* (1948), Hofstadter reviews Roosevelt's political career from before to during his presidency and finds nothing that points to progressive ideals. Starting with TR's time in the New York State Assembly, he points out that TR indeed took some reform measures, but neglected to take any more action. He supported the Cigar Bill and backed a measure that would increase the fee for a liquor license, but he would not support a bill restricting work-days to eight hours, or a bill that prohibited prisons from selling the

²⁰⁹ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 225.

²¹⁰ Theodore Roosevelt, 'How Not To Help Our Poorer Brother', Speech January 1887, <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/speeches/trhnthopb.pdf> (accessed June 8 2014).

forced labor of their inmates.²¹¹ Moreover, he opposed a measure that would require the cities of New York, Brooklyn and Buffalo to pay their employees at least two dollars a day or twenty-five cents an hour. In fact TR called this a ‘demagogic measure in the interest of the laboring classes’.²¹² Roosevelt’s attitude to organized labor is further proof to Hofstadter that TR was a conservative. Indeed, Roosevelt sometimes used harsh language when talking about labor: during a labor strike in his time as Police Commissioner in New York, he stated that ‘the mob takes its own chance. Order will be kept at whatever cost. If it comes to shooting we shall shoot to hit. No blank cartridges or firing over the head of anybody.’²¹³ By the time he was Governor of New York, TR spoke more moderately on the topic. In his gubernatorial campaign, he stated in a speech:

‘While we must always insist that the working man, whether he work with head or hands, must keep steadily in view the fact that he must rely upon himself, upon his own thrift, energy, and honesty, rather than upon the State; yet we must also remember that very much can be done by working men acting in groups, and that the State, too, in some cases, can do a great deal.’²¹⁴

Once again we see how much Roosevelt valued responsible citizenship: the working man must rely first on himself. The state also had responsibility, but if the organization of labor would make it less necessary for the state to step in, this would be all the better. In characteristic Hofstadter fashion, he would regard TR’s more moderate opinion merely as proof of his hypocrisy: needing the labor vote to become Governor would have prompted the turnaround in Roosevelt’s rhetoric.²¹⁵

Finally, Hofstadter arrives at TR’s trust-busting reputation. Even here, he finds only evidence of TR’s conservatism. The fact that Roosevelt proposed regulation of big corporations, rather than the more radical dissolution that was favored by some progressives, is proof to Hofstadter that TR in fact wanted to meddle with trusts as little as possible. The prominent case of the Northern Securities Company was a ‘cleverly chosen prosecution which gave substance to his talk’, and ‘a brilliant stroke of publicity that could hardly have been resisted even

²¹¹ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 83.

²¹² Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 217.

²¹³ *Ibidem*, 218.

²¹⁴ Theodore Roosevelt, ‘The Interests of labor’, Campaign Address, Rochester, NY, October 27 1898, <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/txtspeeches/606.pdf> (accessed June 8 2014).

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 218.

by a more conservative politician.’²¹⁶ After this case, according to Hofstadter, ‘Roosevelt suffered attacks of anxiety for fear that some of his policies had offended the interests [of big business], and late in 1903 he did his best to assure them that his intentions were honorable’. As a result, campaigning for his second term, ‘donations poured into the treasure chest of the Republican National Committee from Morgan and Rockefeller corporations, from Harriman (...) and George J. Gould.’²¹⁷ This must mean, concludes Hofstadter, that ‘Roosevelt had convinced the people that he was a reformer and businessmen that he was sound.’²¹⁸ After his re-election, ‘a few outstanding cases were tried [...], but even such obvious subjects of anti-trust action as Standard Oil and the American Tobacco Company were left untouched’, Hofstadter adds.

Looking at Roosevelt’s own writing on the subject, we can see that already in 1895 in his important article for *The Forum* titled ‘American Ideals’, there is an interesting passage devoted to the evil of the ‘dangerous criminals of the wealthy classes’.²¹⁹ Here Roosevelt points out the negative influence of those who inhabit the wealthiest classes: ‘the consciousnessless stock speculator who acquires wealth by swindling his fellows, debauching judges and corrupting legislatures, [...] exerts over the minds of the rising generation an influence worse than that of the average murderer or bandit.’²²⁰ But even more dangerous is ‘the reckless labor agitator who arouses the mob to riot and bloodshed. [...] This man is a real peril, and so is his sympathizer, the legislator, who to catch votes denounces the judiciary and the military because they put down mobs.’²²¹ Just as in the previous chapter, what we see here is Roosevelt’s dislike of the extremes. He certainly does not oppose business on principle, but he does hold corporations to the law, and if they are corrupt, indeed he would compare them to murderers and bandits. The same goes for the organization of labor, which has definite benefits to society, but when a strike turns violent, TR wouldn’t hesitate to shoot. In his autobiography, TR elaborates on his attitude to labor:

‘While we must repress all illegalities and discourage all immoralities, whether of labor organizations or corporations, we must recognize the fact that today the organization of labor into trade unions and federations is necessary, is beneficent, and is one of

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 227.

²¹⁷ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 222.

²¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 222.

²¹⁹ Roosevelt, *American Ideals*, xi.

²²⁰ *Ibidem*, 6.

²²¹ *Ibidem*, 7.

the greatest possible agencies in the attainment of a true industrial, as well as a true political, democracy in the United States.’²²²

Roosevelt positions himself as the great moderate mediator, securing the balance between either extreme. He emphasizes the benefits of both labor and big business, while warning that he will not tolerate any immoral or violent practices. The way he carries out this mission of moderateness, is exactly the basis on which historians have judged him: either he has leaned too far to the left, or too far to the right of the balance. Hofstadter seems determined to interpret Roosevelt’s moderateness as a lack of conviction, or even as hypocrisy.

5.2 Race and imperialism

If there is one final topic that has greatly contributed to the interpretation of Roosevelt as a conservative, it is his love for adventure in the form of war, as well as his imperialist ambitions. This is mainly because both of those sentiments came with a strong conviction of American racial superiority. Especially with those historians who approached Roosevelt psychologically, like Pringle and Hofstadter, this greatly contributed to their reading of Roosevelt as an unstable, hyperactive jingo, meaning he was patriotic to the extreme and expressing this in an aggressive foreign policy.

Looking at Roosevelt’s own writing on the subject, we can see that there is plenty of substance to this accusation. On the topic of Native Americans, Roosevelt shows his cowboy perspective: ‘I don’t go so far as to say think that the only good Indians are the dead Indians, but I believe nine out of ten are, and I shouldn’t like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth.’²²³ In an 1886 article from his period as a rancher, Roosevelt elaborates on the rights of Indians to their land. Titled ‘Red and White on the Border’ (1886), the article explores the rights of Indians to territory. TR denies them any claim on American land: ‘for the cattlemen have at least put on stock, expanded labor on improvements, etc. while the Indians have done nothing whatever’.²²⁴ It is clear that Roosevelt has no sentimental feelings towards Indians. He calls them ‘a set of treacherous, revengeful and fiendishly cruel savages’, with the excep-

²²² Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 519.

²²³ Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, 212.

²²⁴ Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Red and White at the Border’, *Lend a Hand* February 2 1886, <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/treditorials/lend1.pdf> (accessed June 4 2014).

tion of the ‘almost civilized tribes like the Cherokees, who are quite as straight in their conduct as are the good whites.’²²⁵

His thinking about Indians and their rights fits within his larger idea on the civilization of America. Starting from 1888, he set out to research and write the first volume of what would become the four-volume *The Winning of The West* (1889-1896), which would be one of his best-received historic works, together with *The Naval War of 1812* (1882). His *Winning of the West* is Roosevelt’s history of American civilization. In it, he presented manifest destiny, the belief that it was America’s natural destiny to expand over the whole of the continent, as an epic battle of the races. Already in his first sentence, TR makes it clear what he is about to do: show how American superiority is the climax of history so far, and how it was inevitable that this ultimate point in civilization was reached.

‘During the past three centuries the spread of the English speaking peoples over the world’s waste spaces has been not only the most striking feature in the world’s history, but also the event of all others most far-reaching in its effects and its importance.’²²⁶

It is a book dominated by blood: following the bloodlines from the Teutonic race to the English, and from the English to the American, where it was mixed with more Dutch and German blood, Roosevelt certainly shows an obsession with race. He approaches the history of America like he approached the birds he caught as a child with an interest in biology, and like the student learning Lamarckian theory. This was in itself a contradictory approach, as Dalton notes. Lamarckian theory holds that any organism can adapt to its environment, so the conclusion should follow that every immigrant can assimilate to his new surroundings and become a responsible American citizen. The fixation on bloodlines and race that TR shows in his historic work, opposes this argument. For many immigrants he saw the possibility of becoming a true American, but in some cases, their race would hold them back: ‘poor Asians, European paupers, and foreign radicals’ would be ‘toxic stew meat for the melting pot’, as Dalton formulates it.²²⁷

In *Barbarian Virtues*, Jacobsen points to another interesting paradox in Roosevelt’s thinking. Classifying the non-industrialized parts of the world as waste spaces, TR thought the idea ridiculous that ‘these continents should be reserved for the use of scattered savage tribes,

²²⁵ Ibidem.

²²⁶ Roosevelt, *Man in the Arena, Selected Writings*, 19.

²²⁷ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 127.

whose life was but a few degrees less meaningless, squalid, and ferocious than that of the wild beasts with whom they held joint ownership.’²²⁸ America was clearly superior. On the other hand, Roosevelt would like to see a little more ferociousness in American society. He feared that the economic progress would eventually lead to ‘over-sentimentality, over-softness’, and he stated that ‘in fact washiness and mushiness are the great dangers of this age and of this people’.²²⁹ Society could reach a point of over-civilization, in which the ‘primitive traits of vigor, manliness, and audacity,’ would give way to an effete new type of Anglo-Saxon.²³⁰

He had seen the reality of this danger with his own eyes: his mother and many of her contemporaries could not face a new type of society and succumbed to their nerves and anxiety. During his period in Dakota, Roosevelt wrote *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885) and *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1888), and first declared his love for the rugged life on the frontier. As Dalton summarizes, in these books TR is telling the East that what America needs is more West: ‘Americanness was a fierce frontier spirit more alive when plain folk fought their way west than when they settled into industrialized life in the East’.²³¹ The life on the frontier would bring out the best and manliest qualities in men. The disappearance of Turner’s frontier, and Koselleck’s rupture in the continuity of history that essentially disconnected the past from the present, would result in a society that was too soft and intellectual. To prevent this, Roosevelt and Turner both saw the same solution: the frontier must be maintained, if not on the American continent, the new frontier must be the sea. For Roosevelt’s *The Winning of the West* to come full circle, the last stage of civilization would be the expansion of the English-speaking peoples over the world’s waste spaces. The world would be the new frontier, and it would end the last phase of the great race-migration that started with the movement of German barbarians into the Roman Empire.²³²

This is the source for Roosevelt’s imperialist stance before his presidency, in which he was a staunch advocate for the invasion of both Cuba and the Philippines in 1898. In a speech at the Lincoln Club in 1899, TR defends his stance brilliantly, saying that ‘We now have duties in the West and East Indies’, and while he understands that most Americans would rather see the Philippines be made fit for self-government,

²²⁸ Jacobsen, *Barbarian Virtues*, 3.

²²⁹ *Ibidem*, 3.

²³⁰ *Ibidem*, 3.

²³¹ Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 98.

²³² Richard Slotkin, ‘Nostalgia and Progress, Theodore Roosevelt’s the Myth of the Frontier’, *American Quarterly* 33 (1981) 608-637, there 621.

‘it would be criminal folly to sacrifice the real welfare of the islands, and fail to do our own manifest duty, under the plea of carrying out some doctrinaire idea which, if it had been lived up to, would have made the entire North-American continent, as now found, the happy hunting ground of savages.’²³³

In other words, if North-America had not been colonized, it would now be part of the uncivilized world just like the Philippines, and therefore it would be better for most of the waste spaces to be colonized for some time, preferably by America. Notable is that Roosevelt calls this a manifest duty: with civilization came responsibility. For Roosevelt, governing the Philippines and Cuba is part of the white man’s burden.²³⁴

Roosevelt’s ideas about race and the superiority of the civilized not only fueled his foreign policy, but it also informed how he thought about immigration and American citizenship. As I already mentioned above, TR loved the idea of America as a melting pot, believing that the mixing of blood would produce a pure and strong race. But this did not include every type of immigrant, and certainly not blacks.²³⁵ Lamarckian theory was applicable only to white Europeans who were already familiar with a degree of civilization. For those immigrants, TR saw the need for and benefit of assimilation. In a speech for the Holland Society in 1896, he said to an enraptured audience: ‘The primary virtue of the Hollander here in America and the way in which he had done most credit to his stock as a Hollander, is that he has ceased to be a Hollander and has become an American, absolutely. We are not Dutch-Americans. We are not “Americans” with a hyphen before it. We are Americans pure and simple, and we have a right to demand that the other people whose stocks go to compose our great nation, like ourselves, shall cease to be aught else and shall become Americans.’ This American society would, ideally, be ‘a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values’.²³⁶ For blacks and Chinese, as well as Southern and Eastern Europeans, the American civilization in which they lived could only serve as the goal to strive towards, just as the uncivilized nations could look to America as their shining example.

²³³ Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Response to the toast ‘The State of New York’, Speech at New York City February 13, 1899. <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/txtspeeches/648.txt> (accessed June 3 2014).

²³⁴ Ibidem.

²³⁵ Gary Gerstle, ‘Theodore Roosevelt and the Divided Character of American Nationalism’, *The Journal of American History* 86 (1999), 1280-1307, there 1296.

²³⁶ Gerstle, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 1296.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen the main reasons for Roosevelt to be classified as a conservative in disguise. Historians who came to this conclusion, argued that Roosevelt took as little progressive action as possible, but just enough to convince the American people that he was a reformer. Whenever he spoke moderately about the topics of labor and big business, he did so only because he realized he needed their votes and financial support. His lack of political ideas shows in his reform record, and also in his personal character. A cowboy adventurer who loved war, openly admitting that he had no political plan when he moved into the White House, his aggressive foreign policy served to express his superiority-complex. His ideas on race and assimilation show his true colors.

Hofstadter's influential analysis of Roosevelt's presidency is supported mainly by his use of psychology. Having asserted Roosevelt's character first, and looking at the historical facts second, has diffused Hofstadter's perception of him. Every time Roosevelt stated his moderate ideas on social reform, on political reform and on economic reform, Hofstadter can only interpret this as TR catering to votes and financial support. And it is true that a personality like Roosevelt's does not seem to be compatible to a moderate political message, where the central theme is responsibility of citizens to their society, and responsibility of government to its citizens. A personality like Roosevelt's; always active, living the life of a cowboy adventurer, a boxer, a hunter, a conservationist, but also an intellectual, devouring books, writing historical works in an inhumane tempo; almost has to be just as extreme in politics. This is what fueled Hofstadter's analysis, and this is what has added to the diffusing of Theodore Roosevelt's legacy.

6: Conclusion

The main goal of this thesis has been to revive the debate on Theodore Roosevelt's legacy, to show how the image of this presidency had become so diffuse, and finally, to reinterpret what Roosevelt's legacy should be. To do so, I have shown the most important facets of either side of this presidency as it has appeared in the literature. Reviewing the historical debate, it has become clear that many historians have focused on a binary within Roosevelt's presidency, as if his political thought was composed of two opposing elements. For some writers, the progressive side of TR was the dominant side, and this is what fueled their interpretation of him. For others, it was the conservative side that carried more weight, and this is what supported their classification of Roosevelt as a conservative. By analyzing both sides and reviewing what TR himself wrote and said about both elements, I have uncovered the underlying thread running through Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. This will enable me to answer my main question, which is:

How progressive was America's first Progressive president?

First of all in Chapter 2 I have provided the context in which the Progressive Movement originated. We saw that it was a reaction to the unprecedented changes happening in American society at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Society was changing so rapidly and American's daily lives were impacted so severely, that Koselleck's theory of a rupture in the continuity of time became applicable. As Americans were confronted with new ways of doing business, with a growing working class, with an enormous influx of immigrants and with America's new position in the world, exploring this world outside their borders; their society became increasingly unrecognizable to them. Hofstadter added a psychological component, arguing that for the middle class, their position in society became insecure. This is what prompted the progressives to address the negative consequences of prosperity, and reform political systems to weed out corruption, improve living and working conditions for immigrants, and propose measures to curb criminality in the rapidly growing cities.

In Chapter 3 I showed what Roosevelt's place was in these circumstances. We saw that in his parents, he had two examples of different ways to deal with the unfamiliar state of affairs. His father, a wealthy, upper class businessman, was involved in reform motivated by his *noblesse oblige*. It did not befit his class to make reform into a profession, but what help

he could offer from his privileged position, he would. Roosevelt's mother on the other hand, was almost paralyzed by the new set of conditions she was confronted with. Just like many of her peers, she suffered from nervousness and anxiousness, a subconscious realization of the irreversible transformations around her causing her to withdraw from any involvement in society. Starting his education at Harvard, Roosevelt saw in his own peers the same detachment from and disdain for participation in society. This is when Roosevelt realized that he would not join their ranks, he would instead follow in his father's footsteps, but take those a significant step further. He wanted to be part of the governing class, because he wanted to be as involved in society as possible.

In the historiography I showed how the analysis of Roosevelt's presidency has evolved over time, from early historians presenting TR as a heroic, benevolent character, to the following critical interpretations of him as an unstable adventurer lacking ideals. The most prominent historian with a negative judgment was clearly Richard Hofstadter, who focused on the psychology of Roosevelt's character and stated that there was no basis whatsoever to classify Roosevelt as a progressive. Next, we saw how more recently, historians have either quickly skimmed over the question of TR's political ideas, or neglected to mention them at all. Ruiz and Dalton fall into the first category, with Ruiz claiming a consensus on TR as a reformer, and Dalton only briefly noting that Roosevelt was a liberal on social issues. Both statements can only be made if one either neglects to fully research the evolving historical opinion on TR, or if one doesn't dig too deeply to find what Roosevelt himself had stated about his political convictions. The term "liberal" would certainly reek of ideology to him.

In Chapter 4, I analyzed the arguments for Roosevelt as a progressive. I emphasized what he emphasized himself: that any reform should be, above all, moderate. When looking at his political reform as Civil Service Commissioner, we already saw the first hint of Roosevelt's central political idea, which is that any and every civilian should be able to participate in society, and preferably also in politics. And moreover: that government has a responsibility to ensure this opportunity. As Police Commissioner in New York, Roosevelt repeated the same theme: jobs and titles should not be bought but they should be earned, and laws that are in place should be upheld. He saw the neglect of the Excise Laws as the government giving a wrong example to the people. If he expected citizens to participate, the least he should do was ensure fair treatment, and execute the law, even if it was a law he did not fully agree with.

This moderate Roosevelt is also visible when looking at the case of the Northern Securities Company. Again and again, he reassured businessmen and the American people that he

did not set out to destroy big business, and that he only regulated corporations that were corrupt and detrimental to society. He emphasized how America owed its prosperity to the industry. By endlessly repeating that he was not an ideological reformer, Roosevelt showed the electorate and his financial supporters that he was not a radical progressive. Hofstadter sees only hypocrisy here; accusing TR of making this claim solely to keep the voters and the money on his side. While it is true that an element of Roosevelt's message is intended as a PR-campaign, this does not mean that what he says is disingenuous. Instead, Roosevelt realized that he had to tread carefully to even implement the moderate reform that he favored. For government to assume as much power as TR did, and interfere with business and politics as he did, impacting people's lives directly, was bound to be unpopular in the individualist society that was America, where the personal right to property was valued above all else. Had Roosevelt seemed even slightly to be a true, ideological progressive, he certainly would not have been able to implement those reform measures he did take.

In Chapter 5 I finally showed the main arguments for the interpretation of TR as a conservative. Again we saw how Hofstadter found only examples of conservatism. He presented TR's admission to not having a political plan or ideology as proof that he was lacking any political conviction. He does not see this statement for what it truly is: Roosevelt showing that he is not a threat, to either business or labor. To Hofstadter, any indication of TR's moderateness is proof of something lacking: political conviction and ideas. For an author focusing so heavily on psychology, this conclusion follows from a focus on an extreme personality, making moderate politics seem disingenuous. However, as we have seen Roosevelt has been repeating his message of participatory democracy, with excesses on either the side of business or labor reined in by a responsible and active government, from the start of his political career to the end of his presidency. It is a mistake to dismiss this outright as hypocrisy.

Finally, we touched upon Roosevelt's conservative ideas on race. It is not necessary to take this element as proof that there are two opposing sides to Roosevelt, thereby contributing to an unclear image of his presidency. When we look at what we have concluded so far, we see that Roosevelt is above all a believer in participation by both civilians and government to ensure a well-functioning democracy. Civilians rely first upon themselves and are involved in improving their circumstances and contributing to society. Government ensures that civilians are protected from the extremes of society, like monopolies from big corporations and violence from labor. Moreover, government ensures that laws are properly executed. Combined, this would result in a society that would be superior to any other form of government, and it is

America's duty to make this system available to the rest of the world. Immigrants coming to America, as long as they adapt themselves and participate in the system, are welcome. And uncivilized nations can look up to this America as an example.

This conclusion clarifies two things; one, Roosevelt's ideas on civilization and foreign policy are an extension of his domestic policy, not an opposition. And two; for a president who repeated so often that his politics were not ideological, the core element of his policy certainly sounds like an ideal. Now that we have found the common denominator to the seemingly opposing sides of Roosevelt's presidency, we can see what the true legacy of Theodore Roosevelt is. He shaped the modern presidency in acknowledging the national government's responsibility to help create the ideal circumstances for citizens to participate in a democracy.

For further study, it would be very interesting to see how Roosevelt's political thought evolved from this point. After his presidency, his political career was by no means over. He left the Republican Party and started his own Progressive Party, which means that a significant change must have occurred in his political thought. No longer focusing on the binary element in his presidency, but instead seeing him for the moderate idealist that he is, additional study could provide insight into the development of his more radical progressive side.

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