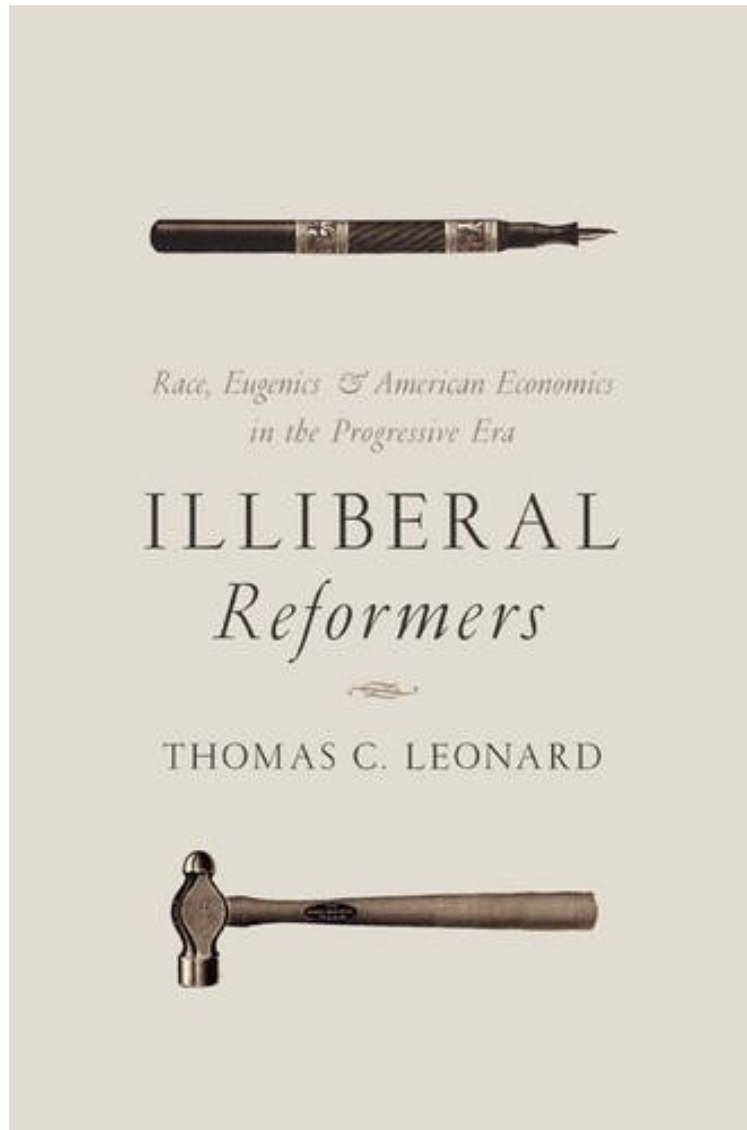


(Download free pdf) Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era

# Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era

Thomas C. Leonard

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**Thomas C. Leonard : Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era:

88 of 90 people found the following review helpful. This book is a mind bender, not only because ...By Jeffrey TuckerThis book is a mind bender, not only because this history is largely unknown but also because it scrambles

everything you think you know about the right, the left, race, gender, regulation, labor law, and much else. My own takeaway concerns new insight into the founding motivation behind the managerial/technocratic/invasive state that was born during the first two decades of the 20th century. It would appear, based on this research, that eugenics -- and the white supremacy that drove this wicked ideology -- had much to do with it. It was even central. It was the scientific consensus. I'm so grateful to Professor Leonard for doing the hard work here. And by the way, I followed up on a number of his sources, reading the original documents against his report. If anything, the author slightly downplays the malice and crankishness of the writers he is exposing here. Just imagine a whole academic class united in a death wish for non-whites, and determined to use the state to carry out its aims: here is what is being exposed in this riveting book.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Timely rebuke of "experts" and government  
By Rosebud  
This history of the Progressive Era aggressively displays how the so-called experts can influence government to make policies that are grave mistakes.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A critical history of Progressivism's complex and troubled past  
By applewood  
Illiberal Reformers gives a wonderfully detailed and engagingly written account of the somewhat convoluted and paradoxical history of the early 20th century American Progressive Movement. It is especially useful given that the movement continues today but with sometimes contradictory ideologies (often in naive self-denial of these roots). Even though it isn't a very flattering picture of Progressivism's roots (with its abundance of elitist notions of overt racism, eugenics, and secular Puritan do-gooderism), I'd think it would be something modern Progressives would want to study too, if only to clarify (and perhaps distance!) their own current positions within the larger umbrella of the historical label.

For those of us not so enamored with Progressivism's ongoing meddling this book is a delight - well researched, abundantly footnoted and wryly critical from the perspective of 100 years on. It answered many nagging and lingering questions I've had for decades about how such a movement could gain such widespread acceptance and influence (an outgrowth of the late 19th century fascination with social Darwinism and the push to administer society with scientific efficiency) and so drastically change the direction of American politics and culture, as well as explain the variety of contradictory positions held by Progressives then. Most importantly it showed me how the modern Progressive ideas arose and have morphed (while staying in orbit around that core elitist top down ideal of centralized planning) over time.

The book is roughly divided into two parts, the first third being a history of the movement's ascendancy (idealistic secular reformers, beginning with the rebellious children of New England ministers) followed by more detailed discussion of various specific (and now often controversial) policy issues (such as valuing labor, social Darwinism, eugenics, control and limitation of minorities, immigrants and women).

I don't remember the word being used by the author, but what is being described here is fascism (a third way form of socialism with central government's administration of consolidated corporate industries for the greater good), a policy the Americans embraced, but one the Europeans then made infamous, and one which is ubiquitous today in a sanitized friendly smiley-faced form. Apparently hope springs eternal and the excesses of early American Progressives, Italian Fascists and German Nazis are conveniently ignored today as the modern variety maintains devout faith in their ability to manage a mixed economy, achieving the impossible in spite of all evidence to the contrary, and that they are (as the authors say about their predecessors) like "nearly all economic reformers were, supremely confident that Hamiltonian means could be made to serve Jeffersonian ends, so long as the "wise minority" was in the saddle." (p. 60)

One thing I have always wondered is how our classically liberal Constitutional Republic was able to shift so drastically left (resulting in the ascendancy of the Executive Branch), and this book makes that clear; "Administrative government in turn demanded that the divided powers of the US government be consolidated. The Constitution's separation-of-powers doctrine, which decentralized power by design, was as inefficient and obsolete as was the "planless scramble of little profiteers" in the age of consolidated industry. Efficient administration required that government, like industry, be consolidated, centralized, organized and administered." (p.65)

Or as, "Woodrow Wilson, on the campaign trail in 1912, told voters that it was time for the federal government to be liberated from its outmoded eighteenth-century scheme of checks and balance.... The adaptation Wilson had in mind was to neutralize Congress and consolidate power in a vigorous executive.... The president, as the only government official who faced a national election, should be "at liberty, in both law and in conscience, to be as big a man as he can," Wilson wrote. Only "his capacity will set the limit" to his power." (p. 66)

Of course what had to follow first was the 17th amendment, but the thread led on directly to Obama's "I've got a pen and I've got a phone" version of executive action. All rather tame compared to the other "big men" of the 20th century - like Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot - which unfortunately Wilson passed away before getting to witness lead their nations. But life goes on, and I guess to be charitable I'd have to say the American Experiment is ongoing, in ever greater complexity, with ever changing parameters, and so far at least it still continues...

In *Illiberal Reformers*, Thomas Leonard reexamines the economic progressives whose ideas and reform agenda underwrote the Progressive Era dismantling of laissez-faire and the creation of the regulatory welfare state, which, they believed, would humanize and rationalize industrial capitalism. But not for all. Academic social scientists such as Richard T. Ely, John R. Commons, and Edward A. Ross, together with their reform allies in social work, charity, journalism, and law, played a pivotal role in establishing minimum-wage and maximum-hours laws, workmen's

compensation, antitrust regulation, and other hallmarks of the regulatory welfare state. But even as they offered uplift to some, economic progressives advocated exclusion for others, and did both in the name of progress. Leonard meticulously reconstructs the influence of Darwinism, racial science, and eugenics on scholars and activists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, revealing a reform community deeply ambivalent about America's poor. *Illiberal Reformers* shows that the intellectual champions of the regulatory welfare state proposed using it not to help those they portrayed as hereditary inferiors but to exclude them.

Winner of the 2017 Joseph J. Spengler Best Book Prize, History of Economics Society Finalist for the 2017 Hayek Prize, The Manhattan Institute One of Bloomberg View's Great History Books of 2016 "*Illiberal Reformers* is the perfect title for this slim but vital account of the perils of intellectual arrogance in dealing with explosive social issues."--David Oshinsky, *New York Times Book Review* "A deft analysis. . . . [I]nsightful."--Amity Shlaes, *Wall Street Journal* "Particularly timely . . . a superlative narrative about a pivotal era of American history."--*American Thinker* "Compelling. . . . Leonard reveals the largely forgotten intellectual origins of many current controversies."--Virginia Postrel, *Bloomberg View* "Excellent."--Tyler Cowen, *Marginal Revolution* "Explosively brilliant."--Jeffrey Tucker, *Foundation for Economic Education* "[A] brief, well written book."--Herbert Hovenkamp, *The New Rambler* "Elegant and persuasive. . . . Read Leonard."--Deirdre Nansen McCloskey, *Reason* "Those puzzled by the ease with which contemporary progressive political movements have turned against liberal values such as free speech will find much material for reflection in Leonard's lucid intellectual history of early twentieth-century progressivism. . . . [*Illiberal Reformers*] illuminates one phase in the centuries-long American struggle between the quest for liberal values and the impulse to build a godly commonwealth on the back of a strong state."--Walter Russell Mead, *Foreign Affairs* From the Back Cover "Mythologies that arise around individuals, groups, and ideas of the past tend to mask many warts. Thomas Leonard's excellent book about American economics during the Progressive Era shows how progressives' efforts to champion reform drew on a vision of scientific development that would institutionalize the eugenic creed and, in the process, do great violence to the liberal project that had been at the heart of the American system. *Illiberal Reformers* provides a powerful lesson in the tensions that surround ideals of social progress, scientific expertise, and the democratic system."--Steven G. Medema, *University of Colorado, Denver* "Economists like to think of their ancestors as heroic seekers of truth, each generation, as Newton suggested, standing on the shoulders of the giants who came before. Thomas Leonard demonstrates clearly that the story of economics in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America was far more complex--and more interesting. He shows how the economists of that era combined their passion for social reform with religion, eugenics, and evolution theory in ways that seem incredible today. This book is an eye-opener."--Craufurd Goodwin, *James B. Duke Professor of Economics Emeritus, Duke University* "This untold story of how Progressive Era activists helped construct the extensive role of government in the economy sheds light on today's technocratic dilemmas. Which decisions need to be left to experts, the 'social engineers,' and which require democratic participation? Thomas Leonard's book demonstrates that during the Progressive Era this question was resolved only by combining democratic reform with the exclusion of women, African Americans, immigrants, and disabled people as full members of society. It underlines the fact that the tension between 'expert' economic administration and individual liberties remains at the heart of current political debates."--Diane Coyle, author of *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History* "*Illiberal Reformers* makes a substantial contribution to the much contested history of U.S. progressivism by providing fascinating new evidence of what Leonard terms its 'dark side.' This book's rich narrative will amply reward readers interested in the discrete histories of social science, science, politics, culture, industrial relations, and general U.S. history, and offers a wealth of new material on discrimination based on gender, race, and class."--Mary O. Furner, *University of California, Santa Barbara* About the Author Thomas C. Leonard is research scholar in the Council of the Humanities at Princeton University, where he is also lecturer in the Department of Economics.