The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era (2020), **19**, 321–336
doi:10.1017/S1537781419000768

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

REVIEW ESSAY

Our Gilded Age

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Abstract
This essay looks at Richard White's 2017 survey of the Gilded Age, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* in relation to other recent histories of the period. *The Republic* is filled with seemingly endless examples of corruption, personal venality, individual stupidity, ideological rigidity, and even good intentions gone awry. A vast and broad cast of Americans—some well-known, some more obscure—dash across the pages. But in White's republic, the changes are in the details rather than the narrative arc. Consequently, and in marked contrast to the other Gilded Age histories considered here, White's Gilded Age is neither optimistic nor tragic. Instead, it is fatalistic, a Gilded Age for our time.

We get the Gilded Age history we deserve.[1] In the 1960s, technocrats promised knowledge, order, and restriction. In the 1980s, corporations threatened cultural expression, pluralism, and independence. In the 1990s, third-party politics, alternatives to the lumbering mainstream parties, surged forward, struggled, and then largely—but not entirely—slipped away. In the 2000s, we had a brief moment of limited optimism for the period's rather remarkable achievements, even at their very high cost, but then we plunged into a Gilded Age of psychic despair, a despair fueled by corporate capitalism, racism, imperialism, inequality, and persistent, brutal violence against Native peoples, African Americans, immigrants, workers, animals, and the environment.

Now we have Richard White's *The Republic for Which It Stands* (2017), a history of the Gilded Age for our time. This history is neither optimistic nor tragic. It is fatalistic. White-as-narrator adopts the voice of a steely realist with a sharp edge of sarcasm. We read blunt, matter-of-fact descriptions of corruption, personal venality, individual stupidity, ideological rigidity, and, possibly even worse, an occasional good intention. National politics drives much of the corruption, fueled by party and politician ineptitude, disorganization, and infighting. In White's account, there is little evidence of any organized plan or omniscient mastermind.[2] Legislation, enforcement, protest, and revolt often appear more haphazard than systematic, and change seems directionless. By the end of the Gilded Age (or at least of White's *The Republic*) we have a new president, William McKinley, but little else seems new. We are still mired in the corruption of the age. If this book had a theme song, it would be Stealers Wheel's "Stuck in the Middle with You."

The Republic is a very contemporary Gilded Age history precisely because of this "stuckness." White's Gilded Age ticks along for 872 pages; lots happens, but in the end we're pretty much where we started. White will not equate specific events in the

Gilded Age with those today (readers may not be able to resist), but his equally insistent refusal to give us a plot, a narrative that moves us from one historic point to another and different one, mirrors current headlines that rail against America today but despair of any change.[3] This rejection of narrative direction was not characteristic of previous histories of the Gilded Age. Most other histories of the Gilded Age have tended toward a tragic narrative. Their "master plots" look largely the same: the past was hardly perfect but better than what came during the Gilded Age. There were alternatives paths for American development, such as the Populists or the Knights of Labor, untainted by industrialization and incorporation, but they were blocked by capital and finance. White will have none of this tale of paths not taken. There was no out.

Nor does the Progressive Era arrive at the end of the book to offer us something else. White keeps the focus of *The Republic* on the Gilded Age and it alone. Most histories of the post–Civil War era at least gesture toward the twentieth century, what we often call the Progressive Era. These historians, whether they distinguish between the Gilded Age and Progressive Era or argue for one long Gilded Age (or Progressive Era), stress the changes in American life between the 1870s and 1900s, even as they note the many continuities over time.[4] But change—positive and negative—remains the central story of the era. Change, however, is not the engine that drives *The Republic,* the quest for "home" is. Gilded Age Americans, White argues, were compelled by "home" as an ideal, and they relied on that ideal to inspire and justify innovations and reforms of all kinds. In the end, though, they do not find this abstract, tenuous "home." They, like us, remain in the Gilded Age, with no alternative in sight but the make-believe land of Oz.

White's insistence on staying within the Gilded Age makes *The Republic* markedly different from other sweeping histories of the period. These are usually syntheses. They pull together events, people, ideas, and details to create a narrative with a beginning and an ending of some sort (often tenuous). They tell a story—of progress, decline, despair, or hope. They gesture to a past; they propel us as readers into a future. Consider for instance two recent synthetic treatments of the period of 1865 to 1920: Rebecca Edwards's *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865–1905* (2006) and Jackson Lears's *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (2009).[5] Both historians begin by offering us as readers a guide to the period and to their books' narrative arguments. Edwards choses Walt Whitman, irascible poet and fervent democrat. Whitman was an irrepressible optimist. He saw beauty, joy, and pleasure in even the most quotidian, from working butchers to the "ring of alarm bells" and the sweetness of fresh cider.[6] He saw endless possibilities. Whitman's capacious understanding of "democracy" not as an ideal "only for elections, for politics, and for a party name" but as the basis for "all public and private life" shapes Edwards' disposition and her book's narrative.[7] For all his optimism, Whitman was not blind to the horrors of modern life as even a cursory glance at his *Specimen Days* shows,[8] and Edwards too does not ignore the proliferating undemocratic elements of American life from 1865 to 1905. But like Whitman, Edwards does look toward a potentially better future. She sees democratic possibilities even in the chaos of violence and economic collapse: new forms of leisure, new opportunities for women, faster transportation, the growth of national parks, cheap chocolate creams.

Jackson Lears does not share Edwards's or Whitman's cautious optimism. For him, the long Gilded Age goes from bad to worse. Lears sees little of Edwards's democratic promise. Instead he plots the burgeoning of American imperialism, systemic racism, and cultural shallowness. Lears turns to Harry Houdini to guide us through the postbellum decades, and a more dispiriting guide I cannot imagine. Houdini was wildly

popular, part of the rise of a boisterous mass culture, but here he is the manifestation of a sad, futile "yearning" for escape, from the iron cage of the modern corporation and "the predictable rhythms of the everyday." He always did escape, to the delight of his audiences, but he always had to escape all over again the next day, trapped, like his audiences, "by institutional routine." Houdini does not lead us to possible democratic change, but to war. *Rebirth of a Nation* ends with a novel's recounting of the gruesome death of a soldier during World War I, whispering "it wasn't worth it" as he slowly dies.[9]

In *The Republic,* White also gives his readers a guide to the period and his book: William Dean Howells, novelist, essayist, editor, and keen observer of the American scene. In many ways, Howells is an odd guide. He himself was often perplexed and confused by the America he observed, and he changed his mind and his politics greatly between 1865 and 1896. He began the era as a liberal, convinced that the free labor ideology offered the most useful and just template for American society. After thirty years of careful observation of the United States, he ended the era convinced otherwise, but he was unsure of just what could and should replace liberalism. The only proscription he indulged in was his belief that "if America means anything at all, it means the sufficiency of the common, the insufficiency of the uncommon." For Howells, White tells us, "it was the nation's common people and common traits that mattered." The robber barons grabbed wealth and power, but "they never really mastered the age." Howells saw "the tinkers and mechanics," the "common, the immediate, the familiar and the vulgar" as the Americans who could and did "transform the country," even under circumstances most certainly not of their choosing.[10] But the bankers, the industrialists, the politicians—they wielded real power, as Howells (and White) well knew. Howells (and thus White) tempered his optimistic belief in the sufficiency of the ordinary with a nagging "if": "*if* America means anything at all." Howells may have meant "if" as a question, but White seems to mean "if" as a verdict on the past and present. White does not let us forget the "if."

White does not follow Howells to either chocolate creams or the "slough of despond," but to carefully observed, wonderfully precise descriptions of events, landscapes, characters, and smells. The accretion of detail—a boon for any lecture writer—gives us as readers an almost visceral sense of what decaying piles of buffalo smelled like, or just how cramped tenements were, or the terrifying dangers of electric wires. But the details also serve to obscure long-term trajectories of change, to focus our attention on effects, not explanations. Take for instance White's discussion of the prominence of fee-based governance, a system that used "fees, bounties, subsidies, and contracts with private individuals or corporations to enforce the law and enact public policy."[11] In other words, outsourcing. White illustrates just how fee-based governance worked through the example of Wyatt Earp. Before becoming sheriff of Pima County, Earp had had a varied and variously successful career as a pimp, gambler, thug, and embezzler. But none of these offered him the same financial opportunities as public office did. As sheriff of Pima County, Earp kept 10 percent of any fees and taxes, including those from the Southern Pacific—which must have added up to a very tidy sum. No wonder government jobs were so highly coveted.

The consequences of fee-based governance were numerous and bad. Because the government rewarded prosecutors for initiating legal actions, prosecutors had great incentive to go forward with dubious, even fictitious, charges. The government offered bounties to agents and prosecutors who caught even minor violations of tobacco and liquor laws, sparking, says White, "war between moonshiners and revenuers" and

"mak[ing] federal marshals and prosecutors an intrusive presence" in homes and communities. Federal agents showed especially great enthusiasm in ferreting out crimes among Native peoples. Bounties and other fees encouraged "snitching" on neighbors, friends, and family members who showed reluctance to pay their taxes. Fee-based governance, explains White, "combined great legal authority, limited administrative control, and wondrous corruption" at the local, state, and federal levels, "a profit center even for the honest."[12]

White charts various efforts to reform or eliminate fee-based governance over the course of the late nineteenth century, but he is more interested in it as a defining feature of Gilded Age daily life and politics than as an impetus for (or against) political reform. At first pass, the example of fee-based governance seems less a cause or result of corruption than a confirmation of corruption as the always already existing structure of the era. But White subverts this idea of corruption-as-structural-imperative by making sure we the readers place blame for that corruption where it is deserved: on particular individuals. No system or structure preordains or upholds corruption (or anything else) in *The Republic*—individual people do, acting blindly, willfully, selfishly, selflessly, or just plain bumblingly. Some of these folks are incompetent, like George Armstrong Custer, who combined idiocy and cruelty. Others are consummate politicians—James Blaine and Roscoe Conkling, for example—who snaked so skillfully through Washington's corridors of power. We learn, briefly, that Blaine was appalled at the brutal suppression of African American voters in the 1878 midterms ("a violent perversion of the whole theory of Republican government"), but for White, the more useful, vivid illustration of Blaine is the "relentless" dinner he shared with millionaire backers before the 1884 presidential election. The menu, extravagant and overwhelming, becomes the perfect metaphor for Gilded Age political corruption. In one night, Blaine and company plowed through oysters, "seafood soups, hors d'oeuvres, three kinds of fish, beef, sorbet, fowl," and then, just before dessert, an ortolan, a tiny songbird flambéed and eaten whole. In much the same way, Blaine and other politicians (for Blaine is hardly alone in such behavior) gorged on the benefits of helping railroad and industrial magnates get protection, get subsidies, and devour public land.[13]

Of course, businessmen are busy throughout *The Republic* too, much as we'd expect them to be, but they are not always successful. For every orchid-loving, road-devouring, market-cornering Jay Gould we get a Tom Scott. Scott began working for the Pennsylvania Railroad and then diversified into telegraph, newspapers, and oil. His great initial successes with railroad development in the South depended, like all railroad development, on "subsidies, influence over government policies, and insider information" along with the "corruption of legislatures and judges." Scott, who had served as assistant secretary of war during the Civil War, was also happy to "make peace" with white supremacists of any useful stripe, helping to ensure the Democratic "redemption" of the South. His easy political virtue was matched by imprudent ambition. In 1877, he overreached himself and went to war with Standard Oil to try to protect his ownership of the Texas and Pacific Railroad. He failed to do so, but he did help precipitate the disastrous labor wars of 1877. (The Texas and Pacific was gobbled up by Gould; Scott died a few years later, at age 57.)[14]

To be sure, many more benign people flood the pages of *The Republic*. White has much patience and often, it seems, real affection, for Frances Willard. Though now remembered as leader of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WTCU)—not usually the most beloved of Gilded Age reform societies—Willard emerges here as thoughtful, conflicted, often flexible. Her turn to temperance reform came out of

"her own struggles" over her roles in the world—should she be married? an educator? a dutiful daughter? a loyal friend?—which "brought considerable nuance to her own attitudes." Her commitment to reforms beyond temperance ("Do Everything" was her motto) led her and the WCTU to pursue "a formidable legislative agenda" calling for school reform, the revision of anti-rape laws, stricter divorce laws, Sabbatarian laws, and the eight-hour day. Willard was certainly no pushover (she was "more formidable than Comstock," White tells us, which is saying something), but she also became close friends with women reformers she disagreed with. She was committed but "not a fanatic," high praise indeed from White. And yet, Willard and the WCTU also contribute to the madness of the Gilded Age in White's account. The WCTU, along with other Christian reform groups—including the more rigid, less appealing New York Society for the Suppression of Vice—took on public roles, but without public oversight. Anthony Comstock, for instance, became himself "a special agent to enforce the law," but as a private citizen not as a public servant. Organizations such as the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals were given police powers. As a result of "this expansion of federal, state, and local power, without an expansion of administrative capacity," White argues, individuals and organizations could well end up as "petty tyrants" imposing their moral visions on fellow citizens who might well have different worldviews.[15] Local courts, and local law enforcement, often checked the more enthusiastic efforts of private organizations in practice, but White reminds us that the precedent for state-sanctioned private control of public life was now more firmly, and more bureaucratically, set.

White's depiction of a Gilded Age peopled by the corrupt and the petty, along with the well-intentioned, would be a very cynical portrait of the period indeed except for the peculiarity and complexity of those very same corrupt, petty, and well-intentioned people. Many of the movers and shakers whom White describes come across as pretty awful, and most of what they did was horrible at best. But the outcomes of their actions were not entirely predictable. White leaves room for the unexpected, the accidental, and the just plain strange. So, for instance, we learn that Rutherford B. Hayes was the originator of the federal welfare system via the Arrears of Pension Act of 1879, which provided for pension payments to the dependents of killed Union soldiers as well as to disabled veterans. The Arrears Act was not a reflection of new ideas about federal responsibility for citizens; it was an effort to protect the precious tariff, cornerstone of Republican policy. But, whether or not that was its purpose, it did indeed create a new relationship between government and citizen.[16]

There are myriad similar examples of unintended consequences throughout *The Republic*. The 1878 Bland-Allison Act, for instance, which was supposed to expand the money supply, actually contracted the amount of money in circulation and did little but "subsidize western mines." Midwestern wheat farming, which promised wealth for farmers and food for the world, led to an explosion of cinch bugs that thrived thanks to the almost-exclusive farming of wheat. Anti-monopolist (and arch segregationist) Texas congressman John Reagan pushed, and hard, for federal regulation of railroads—all to help his friend, railroad magnate Tom Scott, who was not generally a fan of railroad regulation. In 1872, anti-monopolists in Congress managed to halt more federal subsidies to railroads, but as a result railroad lobbying "grew in size and sophistication." The profligate destruction of western land and resources (including the grotesque "Great Die-Up" of cattle in 1886–87) encouraged the unthinkable: reform of the notoriously corrupt General Land Office.[17]

The unexpected, the strange, the disturbing, and the sometimes (if rarely) laudable results of people's actions drive change in *The Republic* and distinguish it from similar surveys of the period. "Gen O.O. Howard," White tells us, "did not mean to instigate the Nez Perce War in 1877 when he arbitrarily ignored the Nez Perce claims in Oregon, any more than Tom Scott intended to precipitate the Great [Railroad] Strike of 1877 when he escalated his battle with Standard Oil."[18] And yet of course, Howard did start the disastrous Nez Perce War; Scott's actions, stemming from his earlier financial missteps, plunged the country into crisis, yet again. Many other historians, at least recently, have not taken a similar tack to explain causation. Instead of focusing on specific, even individual, events or actions, they present larger, if often amorphous, social or economic systems or structures. They emphasize structure more than they stress individual agency. Structural forces drive forward the "plot," the narrative arc of each work that gives coherence and argumentative consistency to synthetic studies of the period.

So for instance, in Alan Trachtenberg's lyrical *The Incorporation of America* (2007), there are plenty of people, but the driving force behind social, industrial, and cultural change is "the corporate system" itself. This corporate system, often truncated to "the corporation" or even just "business," acts, oppresses, constrains, and befuddles Americans across the country, whether they are urban elites or rural laborers. Trachtenberg gives us little analysis of the corporate system itself. We see the results of its effective existence, but we rarely see how this corporate system works, nor do we see who exactly makes it, well, systematic. The absence of the who and then the how is no accident, for Trachtenberg sees the corporation or corporate system as almost outside of society, "wrenching" "American society from the moorings of familiar values."[19] But Trachtenberg begs the question: who exactly does the wrenching? "Magicians of money," as Lears puts it—the men who "were creating the foundations of monopoly capitalism" in the 1880s and 1890s even "without consciously setting out to do so"? Or the "behemoths" themselves—the corporations who "bumped about the economic landscape at will, dominating legislatures and local businesses alike"? And *how* exactly did the wizards of Wall Street and giant corporations do everything they did?[20]

White argues that the answer to *how* is politics.[21] The dirty work—and there is a lot of dirty work in his Gilded Age, as there was in his previous *Railroaded* (2011)—happens in formal politics and in the popular debates about legislation. While for Trachtenberg, Gilded Age politics was little more than a black hole of pettiness, where politicians curried favor and votes, studiously ignoring substantive issues, for White that black hole was precisely where substantive issues were hashed out, however badly. Politics shaped the age. So for instance, while Trachtenberg sees the tariff debates as little more than distractions from the pressing problems of war, economic instability, and labor unrest, White argues that those debates were a "discussion of American industrialism and the dangers of concentrated wealth."[22] White does not ignore other places in which Americans argued over what the nation should and could be (reform groups, literature, ideas), but for him politics was what made the Gilded Age. Railroads, western expansion, land subsidies, urban machines, the near extermination of Native Americans, the embrace of "Southern" redeemers, Chinese exclusion, bimetallism—all of these and more were made possible on Capitol Hill and in state houses, even as they happened in the West, the South, Chicago, San Francisco, Boston.[23]

White's focus on politics-as-sausage-making means that familiar legislation looks quite different in *The Republic* than in other histories of the Gilded Age. Take, for

instance, the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890). Most descriptions of its origins and passage paint it as a valiant if ultimately (and inevitably) futile effort to elevate the public good over corporate benefit. The act was, says Steven Hahn in *A Nation Without Borders* (2016), the legislative result of "widespread popular revulsion at the excesses of railroad and mining companies, and at the corrupt practices of manufacturers and financiers." Or, says Sean Cashman in *America in the Gilded Age* (1984), it was "a last opportunity for successful government regulation of monopolies."[24] Sherman's almost exclusive use as an anti-union tool in the following decade only augments the sense that it was a last, desperate attempt to stymie the onslaught of corporate power.

In *The Republic,* the Sherman Antitrust Act is part of a much less laudable, indeed quite unpleasant, legislative compromise, something we can see because White very carefully walks us through the political morass that ultimately produced the McKinley Tariff, the Sherman Antitrust Act, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, and the Lodge Bill. The Republicans' lust for the tariff meant that they had to control the Senate, and to do that they had to bring western voters into the fold. And those voters were largely anti-monopoly. Republicans had to give their western contingency some sign that the party did not merely fulfill the will of corporate powers, and so they coughed up the Sherman Antitrust Act. Sherman, says White, hearkened back to a past "that saw the competitive market as the guarantor of an equitable society," but the act actually "accelerated" the move to a more corporate future, as corporations turned to holding companies as the best and legal means of consolidating market control. (Only one person in both the House and Senate voted against Sherman—clear proof for White that the bill posed no danger to big business).[25]

While the Sherman Antitrust Act was more talk than action (except against labor unions), the second concession to western voters, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890, theoretically provided for real monetary reform. It increased the amount of silver the U.S. Treasury bought and made it possible for the United States to move to a bimetallic standard without further legislation at the behest of the president. But no soft-money president appeared, so the Silver Purchase Act did little except make western mine owners very happy indeed. The 1890 Lodge Bill, however, is what shows, for White, just how political expediency—and not firm principles of any kind—shaped this set of legislation. The Lodge Bill had begun out of "a principled unwillingness to see the gains of the Civil War evaporate with the repression of black voters," though no Republican was insensible to the party's need for those same black voters to counter the Democrats' growing power in the South. Supporters attacked the Mississippi constitution of 1890 as nothing but "a glaring example of Southern repression" of African American civil and political rights, and they vowed to preserve those rights. In the end, though, the bill that passed did nothing to limit the disenfranchisement of black voters through literacy tests and other means. The legislation promised only to protect the increasingly few registered black voters from "fraud and violence during federal elections." And it did not do even that very well. "The Republicans," says White, "had, in effect, traded the West for the South."[26]

Putting the Sherman Antitrust Act into this larger political and specifically legislative context makes it seem much less of a blow, however symbolic, against monopoly, as it does in *A Nation Without Borders,* nor quite like pro-business Republicans "attempt [ing] to quiet the public outcry against the arbitrary power" of big business with as little change as possible, as in Nell Painter's *Standing at Armageddon* (2008).[27] What do we have instead? A law that looks much more like a calculated and quite cynical Republican effort to retain political power in Congress.[28] At the same time, White's detailed, careful

walk through this legislation shows just how powerful anti-monopolists, bimetallists, and regulatory advocates were (and how little white Republicans now cared about African Americans). The concessions the dissidents won were not necessarily great, but they had successfully made themselves impossible to ignore.[29]

Often, surveys put Greenbackers, anti-monopolists, the Farmers' Alliance, the Populists, the Knights of Labor, the United Labor Party, the American Railway Union, and Coxey's Army in their own chapter or at least in a separate part of a larger chapter about resistance to the emerging industrial order. Hahn, Edwards, and Cashman chose separate mplicates hers greatly by includEdwards complicates hers greatly by including Southern white supremacists Edwarm omething to be chapters; Trachtenberg relegates the Populists to the end of the fifth chapter, "The Politics of Culture." they have dreamers not political he Populists to the end of "ly by including Southern white supremacists Edwarm omething to be they have dreamers not political he Populists to the end of "ly by including Southern white supremacists Edwarm omething to be Edwards argues that cooperative dreamers had offered an unrealized (and perhaps unrealizable?) vision of a very different late nineteenth century, an "evolution away from capitalism," before the "core of the utopian projects" underwent a "slow transformation" to something less idealistic. Edwards is very clear that many of "the ideas advanced by utopian colonists, settlement workers, Populists, and many other reformers and dreamers" had "a lasting legacy in American politics" but these legacies were decidedly *less* than the original dreams had been. And how could they not be? They are after all dreams of change, not blueprints for reform. White here differs from many other surveys of the period; he shows that anti-monopolists were able to demand concessions not because they advocated "alternative paths," as Hahn would have it, but because they were a part of mainstream politics. In a rare moment of wistful regret, White qualifies this argument in his discussion of the aftermath of the 1896 election. The defeat of William Jennings Bryan, he argues, was the death of "the transformative dreams of the Knights, the Farmers' Alliance, and the Populists," but he hastens to qualify that statement: "Reform was hardly dead" and anti-monopoly, "bigger and more catholic than Populism or free silver," was still alive.[30]

Consequently White emphasizes political similarities rather than differences between politicians usually seen as diametric opposites. Marcus Hanna and Hazen Pingree are usually not flowers in the same bouquet, for instance, but here White insists that "to understand the Republican Party" after 1892, we must "hold [Hanna] in the same frame as Hazen Pingree, the mayor of Detroit" because, for all their differences, they both came out of the same "resurgent Republican politics." Their differences are indeed considerable in White's telling, and not only because Hanna retained a single-minded, seemingly quite genuine devotion to William McKinley that Pingree never had. Mayor Pingree, himself a very successful manufacturer, "grew critical of the abuses of capitalism" and saw the "need to restrain it." He went after manufacturers who owed taxes; he paved roads; he ended a gas monopoly in Detroit; he put people to work on public projects. His supporters included unlikely fellow travelers: anti-monopolists, organized labor, liberal advocates of good government, Populists, Single Taxers, socialists, and supporters of municipal ownership. None of these flocked to Hanna, who retained a deep "faith in capitalism's expansive possibilities" and did not ever argue that "vast wealth" was "more dangerous to the liberties of our Republic" than anarchism, socialism, or nihilism. And yet, Pingree and Hanna shared "a set of pragmatic beliefs and mutual enemies," "both believed in centralization," and both comfortably operated in the Republican Party. For White, alternatives to Hanna—men like Hazen

Pingree—did not and could not come from outside politics, with all its corruption and inefficiency; they came from within the political morass itself.[31]

For many historians—Hahn, Lears, and Trachtenberg among them—that statement may be the most horrific imaginable: politics all but destroyed the United States during the Gilded Age. But for White, politics qua politics was not the enemy. Liberalism was the enemy. Or rather, dogmatic, inflexible, moralistic, bombastic *liberals,* more out of step with the times each year, were the enemy. Liberalism, White is quick to point out, had begun as a transformative set of ideas and actions, "forged in opposition to a world of slavery, established religion, monarchy, and aristocracy." Through the war, liberalism's adherents "had been active, creative, and progressive." But beginning in the late 1860s, these liberals had "grown sclerotic and rigid," all too often blindly committed to "individual freedom, private property, economic competition, and small government" and, for the strictest of the lot, laissez-faire. Unlike the Whig-Republicans, whom White carefully distinguished from the laissez-faire crowd, liberals moved away from the free labor ideology and producerism. Instead they embraced contract-making as the ultimate signifier of individual freedom, and then they doubled down.[32]

The consequences of these liberals' ironclad commitment to contract freedom were glaringly obvious in the Greater Reconstruction. In both the West and the South, Reconstruction reflected liberal commitment to contract freedom with disastrous results for those whom contract was supposed to make free. In the South, the Freedman's Bureau forced African Americans to sign labor contracts despite the overwhelming evidence that "[a]t their extreme, contracts were little more than slavery under another name," no matter how vigorously African Americans used the language of free labor ideology to argue for proprietorship.[33] Similarly, when liberal statistician and war veteran Francis A. Walker wrangled an appointment as commissioner of Indian affairs, he defined "the modern Indian question" as first how to eliminate the Indian "threat" to railroads and homesteaders as well as how to "civilize" the Indians after they had ceased to be a military threat. His answer was confinement to reservations, enforced by the army, and coercive "training" in contract freedom via "a regimen of industrial education and labor." As secretary of the interior, Carl Schurz pushed Walker's policy to a logical, genocidal conclusion. Determined to "free" Colorado for white development and settlement and teach the Southern Utes and the Uncompahgre to be independent farmers, he "consented to what amounted to the ethnic cleansing of Colorado" in 1876. Schurz called for "eliminating [Indian] language and tradition," compelling assimilation, and seizing (and then selling) all Native land not used by individual farmers. Only after Indians accepted and embraced liberal ideals might they become citizens, insisted Schurz, following Walker's lead again.[34]

Walker and Schurz were so dogged in their enforcement of contract freedom because they "embraced" it "like a secular gospel," no matter how that enforcement harmed others. White will not forgive them, or their fellow travelers, their ideological rigidity.[35] Though White often condemns liberalism for its narrowness and inflexibility, his greatest ire targets not the ideology but the ideologues. Their dogmatic adherence to laissez-faire and contract freedom made practical matters like specie resumption moral—even theological—concerns. Indeed, some liberals were so committed to hard money that they saw fiat money as a more distressing result of the war than death, disability, or destruction.[36] There were, White notes, many economic reasons to support a return to the gold standard, some more persuasive than others, but liberals' primary motivation was not economic ambition but ideological moralism.[37]

Blind commitment to individualism expressed via contract freedom, White argues, meant that liberals would not see—or perhaps refused to acknowledge—how poorly their ideology fit the world around them. Increasingly crowded cities put great strains on haphazard sewer systems. In a "democracy of defecation," individual solutions were not an option. Individual choice, tenement dwellers knew too well, meant not a thing if you had no choice about where to live. And dark, dank tenements spread tuberculosis efficiently enough that death rates among the poor rose dramatically in proportion to the (dropping) death rates among the wealthy. TB showed quite viscerally that "personal choice and the market were not going to solve the urban environmental crisis."[38] Liberals, White argues, did not care. No longer interested in being "advocate[es] of human freedom," as they had been during the Civil War era, they now called for "restraints on collective action." Instead of aspiring to a "homogenous citizenry of rights-bearing individuals," liberals (or at least liberals such as Andrew Carnegie) now feared the people and espoused a small, homogenous elite who would direct and restrain the masses.[39] "The heyday of liberalism was past," says White, as liberalism—and more to the point, liberals—were "metamorphosing into modern conservatism."[40] In one of the rare moments White gestures toward the twentieth century and possibly the present day, he condemns Gilded Age liberals for the sins of conservatism: inattention to the surrounding world, moral absolutes, and a refusal to change with new circumstance, to reassess, to be like William Dean Howells.

White's one-note liberals stand in for all liberals in the Gilded Age, and they were a curiously changeless lot.[41] No matter the contradictory evidence from daily life, they remained blindly committed to individualism and contract. White sees see mid-century liberalism as supple and capacious, but he does not grant post-1860s liberalism that flexibility, and his chief liberal villains are indeed extremely inflexible men. For White, there is no "new liberalism" by century's end, a liberalism flexible enough to accept and even embrace a "regulatory approach" and "acknowledge the interdependence of the functioning of the state and the functioning of the market."[42] But he does find Americans, from all walks of life and regions of the nation, who did not see the world through the moralistic lens. Like Howells, these men and women watched, listened, and changed with the times; other historians have called many of them "new liberals," though White does not.[43] Most of Carnegie's fellow industrialists rejected his stated belief in competition and the free market. Though Rockefeller surpassed Carnegie as a moralizing meddler, he firmly rejected the idea of competition as a good thing.[44] The Granger Cases, especially *Munn v. Illinois* (1877), rejected unfettered individual action in the marketplace when that action challenged a great public good. A new generation of economists rejected classical models and laissez-faire liberalism in favor of historically based analysis and state intervention. By the end of the century, pragmatists like William James, labor leaders such as Samuel Gompers, and reformers such as Ida Wells and Jane Addams had joined the economists in rejecting liberal proscription and contract freedom alike in favor of learning from experience, of "pursu[ing] the relations and connections between things" and then going from there.[45]

For White, the most important and admirable rejecters of liberalism were Henry George and the ever-shifting consortium of anti-monopolists who emerged forcefully in the 1870s. George was of course not always admirable—White points to George's Sinophobia, for instance, as well as his perplexingly consistent support of Grover Cleveland—and pinning down just what he thought is not always easy.[46] Nor is White especially interested in situating George within larger intellectual traditions. George is appealing to White because he observed the problems around him and

then asked questions—new questions—about how to resolve the growing dichotomy between progress and abundance on the one hand and growing poverty and despair on the other. Here George is like Howells, if somewhat less eloquent. As James Garfield discovered to his dismay after he was shot, "new knowledge and new inventions were not enough to change the world," White says, nor to save his life; entire new ways of thinking were necessary. George, unlike Garfield's outdated surgeon, embraced new ways of thinking. Instead of arguing, as he saw most Americans doing, either that capital exploited labor or that capital aided labor, he "changed the debate" entirely. He did not ask how to get rid of capital or labor, but rather how to redistribute wealth fairly under present conditions—and, in fact, it is his acceptance of current conditions that White lauds.[47]

The anti-monopolists sometimes shared with George a certain nostalgia for the "disappearing" "old American conditions" and the consequent loss of "the best of American society," but like George, they too asked new questions, says White. Moving away from liberal questions of contract, markets, and free labor, anti-monopolists, whether nominally Republican or Democrat, "signaled that many Americans [now] regarded monopoly and privilege, rather than competition and general equality, as defining the new economy." Though held in check by liberal powers within the Senate, anti-monopolists often had a majority in the House and aggressively pushed for the federal regulation of interstate commerce. The astuteness of their observations of contemporary American economic life was confirmed by the very targets of their ire: railroad men. "The most honest among them," White claims, admitted the truth of what much of what anti-monopolists said." There were financiers who "did loot and pillage" and they needed to be restrained, for the good of all.[48]

Asking questions based on careful observation of the world as it is: that is what White perhaps most admires and is a central reason he makes William Dean Howells our guide to the Gilded Age. Howell may have begun as a liberal, and become an unpleasantly conservative one after the Great Uprising of 1877, but as he observed the world around him in the 1880s, a world liberalism could no longer explain, he changed his mind. His changeability makes Howells, for White at least, truly admirable. But for every Howell or William James or Henry George who looked at the Gilded Age and asked a new question, there were those who sought refuge in ossified liberalism. Many Republican politicians used liberal commitment to property, order, contract, and the market to justify profoundly anti-democratic policies. Democrats were no better; they were just the "Party of No." Even under Bryan they had trouble generating the same enthusiasm nationally that George did. But for White, the worst offenders of all were the justices of the Supreme Court. Out-of-touch, conservative, stubborn, and just plain stupid, justices in the 1890s dangerously "applied the doctrine of substantive due process to enshrine a set of economic laws that no democratic government could overturn; they transformed metaphorical natural law into a body of actual law created by the judiciary." The resulting naturalization of nineteenth-century liberalism in constitutional law, unchecked by the questions of Howells or George or anyone else, had devastating consequences for labor in the 1890s and early 1900s. And for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well, for even though "the old liberals and classical economists had lost the intellectual battle" of the Gilded Age, "the courts opened the gates of the judicial fortress [and] beckoned the politically defeated in," and there they have stayed protected by a "judicial authority" willfully stuck in a dangerously irrelevant past.[49]

Read in 2019, the Gilded Age in *The Republic for Which It Stands* is especially grim. The book ends in 1896 with the election of William McKinley. For White, as for many

previous historians, that election marked the end of an era. What will come next? In the synthetic histories, we already know what the future looks like. Their narratives, whether cautiously optimistic or reluctantly pessimistic, have already laid out the trajectories of the twentieth century. White, as always, eschews such master narrative. He refuses, pointedly, to pronounce McKinley's victory a tragedy, though he hardly celebrates it. The election of 1896, like so many other events in White's Gilded Age, is ambiguous and contradictory. Who knows what unintended consequences may arise in the 1900s?[50]

White may not tell us the future, but in his eighteen-page conclusion he gives a definitive assessment of the United States in 1896. Given his focus throughout the book on the ongoing muddlings of individuals, on contingency, on the unexpected but welcome "sufficiency of the everyday," his turn to forthright judgment now comes as a surprise—and the verdict is overwhelmingly negative. Lincoln's "memory and legacy [may have] dominated the Gilded Age," but by the late 1890s, he was "a strangely diminished figure." And so too was the United States. Americans, White tells us, were now "less democratic," "less egalitarian, and less a country of independent producers" than they had been in 1865. The United States had prospered and grown economically, thanks to a dizzying mix of government aid (economic and military) and the work of unnamed millions. But in that expansive growth, the nation had become narrower, restrictive, less generous. By the 1890s, "Americans lived in a transnational world," and yet, or rather, consequently, they doubled down on commitments to the Lost Cause, "nativism, tariffs, and immigration restriction."[51] Howells reappears briefly in the conclusion, but he is no longer our guide. White reminds of us of Howells's capacity for intellectual change, of his move from "critic of the common" in the 1870s to a supporter of the "striving world that produced and nurtured American mechanics, evangelicals, Masons, and vernacular intellectuals." "The important things," Howells had come to believe, "bubbled up rather than trickled down." But by the 1890s, that world of Howells was, like the ideals of Lincoln, diminishing and disappearing. If home was Kansas in Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1899), White argues, then by the second half of the 1890s, home was "both longed for and insufficient." So much so, White continues, that in a later, even stranger Oz book, *The Emerald City of Oz* (1910), Dorothy takes her Auntie Em and Uncle Hank to live in Oz because it is much nicer than Kansas. Kansas, for Dorothy, was dreariness and hard work; Oz "was like living in a department store." White does not seem entirely at ease in the department store, with its emphasis on "consumption and desire" rather than "production and thrift," but he has no nostalgia for Auntie Em and Uncle Hank's dismal lives in Kansas either.[52] Woodrow Wilson appears briefly to insist that "the university"—and we as readers—cannot "stand apart from society." We "must turn back once more to the region of practicable ideals," Wilson declares, for "[t]here is laid upon us the compulsion of the national life."[53]

Wilson may exhort us to action, but White does not tell us how we might turn back once more to practicable ideals. He merely catalogs the changes, the shifts from the Gilded Age to whatever unnamed era will come next:

> The Gilded Age currents still ran strong, but they had begun to shift direction. A country that imagined its natural endowment in terms of abundance had begun to think in terms of scarcity and conservation even as it paradoxically began to stress consumption over production in its economy. A country that had always thought of itself as thinly peopled began to worry about immigration.

> A country that had worked to keep foreign manufactures out while attracting capital began to think in terms of foreign investments and exports. Strands such as conservation and imperialism, which seemed unconnected, began to intertwine.[54]

The conclusion, though filled with people assaying the state of the nation, has almost no one blundering, wheedling, striving, organizing, failing, bribing, or joining. The many actors—some despicable, some admirable—that had driven the Gilded Age are suddenly gone. We are left with a list of changes, all bad, and then White's final line: "It was time to begin again." Is this optimism? (America began again? We can begin again?) Or pessimism? Americans did not do well in the Gilded Age, bumbling along driven often by shortsighted greed. What suggests they would do better in the next forty years? What suggests that we will do better now? White again does not say. After all the nuance, all the detail, all the people in *The Republic for Which It Stands,* the final line seems inadequate. But perhaps the choice between comfortable fatalism and unlikely possibility is the most our Gilded Age can offer. Clowns to the left, jokers to the right.

Notes

1 For comments and suggestions, thanks to Peter Blodgett, Matthew Guterl, Robert Johnston, and Christopher Warley.

2 Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865–1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). See for instance White's discussion of the merger movement: "The movement toward centralization and consolidation was not an inevitable development, part of the natural order of things; it was historical, the result of accumulating human actions, networks, laws, and institutions. It was the work of the courts, the work of markets shaped by human hands, the work of corporations, the work of government, and the work of the networks that tied them together" (793).

3 A quick glance at any editorial page shows countless articles like Anne Applebaum, "Are You Still Sure There's No Need to Worry?" *Washington Post,* Aug. 10, 2018.

4 Historians of the period 1865–1920 debate, frequently in this very journal, whether it is useful to see the Gilded Age and Progressive Era as separate periods. Some push for one long Gilded Age or one long Progressive Era; they emphasize the continuities from the end of the Civil War to the end of World War I. Others hold that there are significant distinctions in ideology, politics, business, and culture between the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. But for all these historians, whether they push for the long Gilded Age or Progressive Era or distinguish between the two, the early twentieth century looks quite different. On the problem of periodization for this period, see Richard Schneirov, "Thoughts on Periodizing the Gilded Age: Capital Accumulation, Society, and Politics, 1873–1898," *Journal of Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 5 (July 2006): 189–224, with responses by Rebecca Edwards and James Huston; Rebecca Edwards, "Politics, Social Movements, and the Periodization of U.S. History," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 8 (Oct. 2009): 463–73; Richard R. John, "Who Were the Gilders? And Other Seldom-Asked Questions about Business, Technology, and Political Economy in the United States, 1877–1900," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 8 (Oct. 2009): 474–80; and Richard Bensel, "Comments," in "Forum: Should We Abolish the 'Gilded Age'?," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 8 (Oct. 2009): 481–85. Steven Hahn also considers periodization at some length in *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830–1910* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016). On periodization more generally, see Martin J. Sklar, "Periodization and Historiography: Studying American Political Development in the Progressive Era, 1890s–1916," *Studies in American Political Development* 5 (Fall 1991): 172–213.

5 Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

6 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose,* ed. Laurence Buell (New York: The Modern Library, 1981), 32, 46, 52.
7 Edwards, *New Spirits,* 4–5.
8 Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days & Collect* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1882).
9 Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation,* 1, 227, 355.
10 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 6, 857, 475. Howell's phrase "the sufficiency of the common" comes from one of his "Editor's Study" columns for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in which he reviews John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (New York: The Century Co., 1886 and 1890). Howells admired Lincoln without reservation, and he explains Lincoln's greatness not as the result of Lincoln's exceptional qualities but as the result of his perfect ordinariness. Lincoln, says Howells, "was so like all other men, was so essentially human, that if any honest man conceives clearly of himself he cannot altogether misconceive Lincoln." William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine,* Feb. 1891, 481. White juxtaposes Howells's cautious optimism with Henry Adams's "pessimistic and cynical" response to the election of 1896.
11 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 357.
12 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 359, 360. There were available alternatives to the wild west of fee-based governance. The 1877 Granger Cases, for example, proposed a broader understanding of the public good that could be ensured by a fledgling administrative state rather than self-interested bounty hunters (363). Though anti-monopoly in particular (as here in the Granger Cases) formed an important and continuing alternative throughout the period, it did not dominate in politics, popular thought, or business.
13 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 108, 361, 473. Though White is merciless in his depiction of the Republicans (for good reason), he is no fan of the Democratic Party either. It became, he quips, nothing but "the party of 'No,'" and, as a party, offered little else (253, 337, 881).
14 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 246, 276, 355.
15 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 391, 389, 394.
16 It was "one of the more unheralded pieces of legislation in American history," says White in a rare moment of understatement. White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 373–74.
17 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 371, 428, 578, 259, 600. There are many, many more such examples in White.
18 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 337.
19 Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 7. Trachtenberg's sympathetic discussion of the Populists' so-called conspiracy theories describes them as lucid assessments of contemporary society's growing inequalities. Hardly irrational, he argues, these were built on "at least a generation of political experience," and, while drawing on messianic language, they "called Satan by his modern name: monopolies and corporations" as well as political corruption (174–175).
20 Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation,* 88–89. Lears hews to a similar line as Trachtenberg in *Rebirth of a Nation,* although Lears is even less interested in formal politics than is Trachtenberg.
21 I do not mean to suggest that White has many laudatory comments for politics, politicians, or (especially) political parties. He praises neither the Republicans nor the Democrats. He has little good to say about any of the presidents. But politics and parties shaped the parameters of the Gilded Age more than technology, finance, industry, or transportation.
22 Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America,* 168, 165; White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 588.
23 For example, the Gilded Age West, a West defined by violent dispossession of Native peoples, railroads, land speculation, monoculture, homesteading, bankruptcy, irrigation, and mining, was created in Congress through what White calls "some of the most consequential legislation in American history"—the Pacific Railway Acts (1862, 1864), the Homestead Act (1862), and the Morrill Act (1862). All three "sought to create basic infrastructure over roughly two-thirds of the nation's territory." The actual infrastructure did not appear quickly, but the legislation created the need and eventually the means. White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 117.
24 Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders,* 455; Sean Dennis Cashman, *Americans in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt,* third ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 360.
25 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 633.
26 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 634–35.

27 Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), 90.

28 For instance, Hahn sees the Bland-Allison Act as "a moderate silver policy" that "won out," while Painter argues that it was a response to "tremendous [and external] popular pressure on Congress in 1877 and 1878 to restore the unlimited coinage of silver"—but that "conservative forces controlling the Senate watered it down." In the end it was not nothing, but hardly what the many silverites had called for. White, on the other hand, sees the Bland-Allison Act as a sign of silverites' presence within the legislature and a sign of legislative bungling: everyone wanted something out of it, and no one got anything, except Western mine owners, who profited handsomely. Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders,* 407; Painter, *Standing at Armageddon,* 86–87; White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 371.

29 White points out that through the 1880s there was usually an anti-monopoly majority in the House, and he carefully notes that even after the defeat of the Populists/Democrats in 1896, anti-monopoly reform persisted (579, 849).

30 Edwards, *New Spirits,* 249–50; Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders,* 402–47; White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 849, 852. White usually scrupulously eschews such separation.

31 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 795–97.

32 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 856, 3, 44, 3, 581, 58, 241.

33 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 113, 46–47.

34 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 113, 293–94, 365.

35 Perhaps if White looked ahead a few years from the early 1870s, when Francis A. Walker became commissioner of Indian affairs (1871) and published "The Indian Question" (1874), he might have revised his opinion of Walker's ideas slightly. For by 1876, when Walker turned his attention to the labor question, he began moving away from doctrinaire liberalism toward something closer to twentieth-century liberalism. In *The Wages Question* (1888), Walker explored the possibility of government intervention to stabilize the economy and society. Stephen Robert Lecesse, "The Discovery of the Consumer: Economy Reform and Social Regulation, 1865–1904" (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2019), 76–85.

36 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 181.

37 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 118.

38 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 485, 515.

39 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 485, 445, 673, 685, 56, 202, 551. Carnegie may be White's extended example of liberalism gone amuck, but he was hardly the only one to embrace a narrow vision of nation and citizenship. By 1877, when Hayes became president, "homogenous" had ceased to mean "inclusion" and had come either to mean the exclusion of undesirables or the coercive inclusion into the polity under very strict requirements, as with Native people (367).

40 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 444.

41 White's liberalism mirrors that described by Nancy Cohen in *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865–1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

42 Laura Phillips Sawyer, *American Fair Trade: Proprietary Capitalism, Corporatism, and the "New Competition," 1890–1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 88. For more on new liberalism, see Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890–1916: The Marketplace, the Law, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 33–42; Mary O. Furner, "The Republican Tradition and the New Liberalism," in *The State and Social Investigation in the United States*, eds. Michael J. Lacey and Mary O. Furner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 171–241; Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Liberalism in Chicago, 1864–1897* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 260–91, 370–71.

43 White's argument is in notable contrast to Nell Painter in *Standing at Armageddon* and to Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967). For new liberalism and reformers, see in particular Furner, "The Republican Tradition" and Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*

44 Even as Carnegie insisted on its necessity and naturalness, in his own business practice he perhaps unsurprisingly did not embrace competition; he preferred to eliminate it.

45 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 579–80, 363, 451, 447, 689.

46 It is notable that White's discussion of Henry George's *Poverty and Progress* (1886) is one of the few parts of *The Republic* that is not immediately crystal clear.

47 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 441, 452. White does not talk at length about George's natural rights republicanism nor consider him as looking forward to a new intellectual tradition. It is George's

insistence on new questions—and general refusal to be dogmatic (or consistent) about his prescriptions—that White approves of, as seen in what he calls George's "turn east" to seek "an alliance with workers and immigrants." White favorably contrasts George with Josiah Strong, clergyman, lecturer, and author of the wildly popular *Our Country* (1885). George and Strong "shared many of the same evangelical and free-labor impulses: both rooted their anti-monopolism in an older liberalism even as they moved away from many individualist assumptions." But Strong called for "the Anglo-Saxon race" to realize its God-given gift for "creating wealth" and "its genius for colonizing" in order to propel the United States into a better future. Progress, for Strong, meant narrowing the United States to Protestant Anglo-Saxons and excluding the "European peasant[s]" whose "ideas of life are low." George, instead, strove to expand the meaning of America and looked for new ways to tackle existing problems, forging alliances with the working class and recent immigrants. White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 571–73; Strong quoted on 573.

48 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 367, 579.

49 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 198, 201, 206, 848, 815, 822.

50 White reminds us that Republican consolidation of power cannot be seen as "synonymous with corporate dominance or the defeat of anti-monopoly." Even as the Republican Party was most certainly "the party of subsidies, of the tariff, and increasingly of an expanded military," it was also "the party of the pension, of federal protection of civil rights against state attempts to limit them," and it had long been "the party of government intervention and welfare." White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 852, 854. In other words, there is no easy analysis of McKinley's win. Similarly, though Bryan lost decisively, he greatly changed how Americans thought of governance.

51 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 6, 855, 857, 867.

52 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 863, 871.

53 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 871.

54 White, *The Republic for Which It Stands,* 872.

Cite this article: Currarino R (2020) Our Gilded Age. *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* **19**, 321–336. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781419000768