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"Revisiting Progressive Era Lessons for Understanding Today"

Andrew Theising
atheisi@siue.edu

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REVISITING PROGRESSIVE ERA LESSONS FOR UNDERSTANDING TODAY

Daniel Amsterdam (2016). *Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 230 pp., illustrations, epilogue, notes, index, \$45 (cloth).

James J. Connolly (2010). *An Elusive Unity: Urban Democracy and Machine Politics in Industrializing America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, xiv + 264 pp., illustrations, epilogue, notes, bibliography, index, \$39.95 (cloth).

Mordecai Lee (2008). *Bureaus of Efficiency: Reforming Local Government in the Progressive Era*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 292 pp., tables, appendices, bibliography, index, NP (paper).

Daniel O. Prosterman (2013). *Defining Democracy: Electoral Reform and the Struggle for Power in New York City*. New York: Oxford University Press, 276 pp., illustrations, epilogue, notes, bibliography, index, \$49.95 (cloth).

KEYWORDS: Reform, Progressive, Agenda, Efficiency, Corrupt

I have always admired the Progressive Era and the changes to public and private sectors associated with it. While the undeniable threads of racism and xenophobia were prominent and should not be discounted, the rise of science, planning, and reform in urban affairs is noteworthy. Imperfect leaders with bold ideas forever changed the way American cities look and operate. Some interesting developments in the literature over the last decade allow for a creative look at this era, its benefits and limitations. The four volumes reviewed here each examine a different dynamic within the spectrum of Progressive Era reform.

To set the stage for this analysis, consider some political realities in American politics that sound eerily familiar to the Gilded Age. We see a rise of commercial power and the generation of great wealth. We see not just great wealth, but a concentration of wealth at the top of society and a widening gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” We see deep divisions within society, with streaks of racism and xenophobia in the public debate. We see

uncertainty about who wields power in the electorate and who wields power in institutions. It is as if we are walking a path today not trodden since the post-Civil War era

Every good reform needs a villain to confront, and in New York that villain was Tammany Hall. Tammany Hall, in a single descriptor, defined collectively the strong, corrupt, Democratic political machine that governed New York for most of the nineteenth century and decades into the twentieth. One of the prominent bosses was William Magear Tweed and it is with Tweed that James Connolly launches his study of Progressive Era reforms.

The dynamic that proved so powerful in New York was the tremendous mix of people that arrived there. It was a “complex, fragmented social and political order,” notes Connolly, and Tweed rose out of that fragmentation (28). The anti-corruption sentiment that drove reform efforts such as the Tilden Commission also drove them to conceive of some rather radical and un-democratic ideals, such as restricting who could participate electorally (29). It was a backdoor attempt to bring about a unified core. The solution to corruption was to unify a divided electorate. Such unity was, as the title suggests, elusive.

Corruption was no surprise to voters. The Tweed Ring was “tolerated” because it was good for business, but eventually the excesses of officeholders and the unsustainable fiscal arrangements proved too much to ignore (31). What to do about it depended on how one viewed the electorate.

Initially, reformers desired an electorate in homogeneous terms. Backers of the Tilden Commission, such as E. L. Godkin, took the rather Darwinistic view that the problem was not the corruption of elected leaders, but rather “lower sorts who backed Tweed and his ilk” (43).

Thanks to immigration and industrialization, the city's new social order was filled with "a mass of ignorant people lacking the education and intellect necessary for democratic citizenship" (43). The way to build a unified core was to exclude those parts of the electorate that seemed too easy to control and focus on those who had a greater stake in outcomes and the capacity to manage such affairs. The focus shifted to empowering "the respectable elements of this community" while diminishing the power of those that failed to recognize the larger importance of governance (43). Universal suffrage was problematic. Voter restrictions were suggested, where fiscal matters were to be decided only by landowners, in the same way shareholders manage a corporation (51). Disenfranchising people came at a risk, though, and was deemed too extreme. Even Governor Tilden ultimately came out against the idea of his own commission. Homogeneity proved too problematic.

Heterogeneity was problematic too, and posed a significant challenge for building consensus. All of America struggled with the conception of public life with meaningful social and cultural differences. Despite that struggle, selling the idea of unity was useful politically because it "marginalized opposition as illegitimate" (39). New York was such a diverse city it was easy to sew the seeds of division.

New York voters in fall 1871, however, mustered enough moral consensus to defeat the Tammany Hall ticket and, seemingly, set the diverse city on a new political path. The election of Mayor William Havermeier, a "good man" in the eyes of reformers, followed in 1872 (42). People rejoiced with the demonstration that political consensus was possible across the heterogeneous electorate. Reform was easy in good times, though. The Panic of 1873 shook the consensus and Tammany Hall roared back with promises of economic stability, low taxes for

businesses, and symbolic gestures to the working class (42). Though unity was *possible*, it still proved elusive.

Connolly has a delightful consideration of the new term “machine” to describe Tammany Hall. Previously, the innocuous term of “ring” was often used in the media to describe the circles of power, but this new complex organization needed a term that better described its engagement of many parts—something right out of the new industrial age (and run by a “boss,” no less). The metaphor implied complexity, potency, permanence and systemic scope, all of which were consistent with the rising role of social scientific analysis (55-56). While many have studied the dynamics, few scholars gave the term a second glance.

The Tammany Hall machine proved quite powerful and effective in retaining power. Reformers longed to bring unity among the diverse groups for social change. Perhaps it was better, Connolly entertains, that there was balance between interests of machine and electorate. Perhaps bossism provided something meaningful where city life was “a polyglot, conflict-ridden setting on the verge of social cataclysm” (163). Competing groups enjoyed recognized legitimacy (as long as they did not challenge basic tenets of capitalism and established political institutions) and ward bosses promised to manage the tensions and keep the peace. Reformers wanted so much more, but the public wanted order more than deliberative democracy (164). Civic idealism was a hard sell.

Great Progressive thinkers such as Edward Ward, Mary Parker Follett, and Jane Addams all viewed a way to “reconfigure big-city public life in ways that better accommodated social heterogeneity” (166-167). Their ideas were imperfect—not good enough to prevail overall, yet

not bad enough to constitute grounds for dismissal. Pragmatism ruled. Still, the concept of a “civic ethos” developed with Jane Addams, who articulated ethical guidelines that balanced diversity with civic unity, at least in concept. The different understandings of how government should run, even if uninformed or narrow, are legitimate. Rather than accommodate, though, Addams sought to incorporate them all into a new civic ethos, “a richer conception of the common good.” (170)

Connolly makes an important point here. Addams advocated interpreting “sympathetically the motives and ideas of those who have acquired rules of conduct in experience widely different from our own” (171). She was speaking to the middle-class elites (who were the real drivers of Progressive reforms) and encouraged them to “reach beyond their comfortable separate existences to encounter the poor and to learn from them” (177). It was not enough to challenge institutions and electorate from afar; rather, it required a challenge to self. In his discussion of Edward Ward, Connolly puts a finer point on it: “social intercourse alone would not forge such unity. That required deliberation...” (180).

How best does this deliberation get accomplished? Muckrakers like Lincoln Steffens were both solution and problem. “His attempt to remake urban public life by emphasizing the pursuit of a singular public good did not simply founder on the shoals of a heterogeneous society. Rather, it fueled political pluralism by encouraging group activities along many different lines...inadvertently promoting the narrow, pressure-group tactics he decried” (191). Consensus is to be built, not asserted.

Connolly provides a distinct and compelling analysis, despite the fact that there is such an abundance of work done on this time period. His keen attention to detail and his intelligent approach to the electorate (homogeneous v. heterogeneous) provide a meaningful understanding of the electoral dynamics of the day. The contemporary criticism of special interests and disdain for the politicians that brokered them speaks to Connolly's key point: there really is a desire for a more inclusive and equitable civic realm, though it is elusive to the institutions that are charged with providing it (223).

One of the general directions of Progressive Era reforms was process change. Many cities at this time introduced new city charters and expanded the roles of citizen commissions, decentralizing power along the way and adding steps to decision-making processes. We will never know the extent to which Progressive ideals would have gone (in both positive and negative directions) had the reforms not been interrupted by the Great Depression. That cataclysmic event changed the power and purpose of government at all levels. The expansion of voting rights challenged the boundaries of who could be elected and the shifting balance of federalism affected what policy possibilities existed for local government. One thing that the Great Depression did not change was New York's struggle with Tammany Hall and its divided electorate.

If Connolly posed the question—how to achieve an elusive unity?—then Daniel Prosterman tests a hypothesis. “Democracity” was the answer, a utopian urban environment as envisioned by planners of the 1939 New York World's Fair. “The seeds of great changes lie

all around us..." in modern planes, trains, and houses, but also in new forms of governance and commerce and new processes like proportional representation (1-3). New York in the 1930s had seemingly achieved a degree of unity and used it to adopt a Progressive Era reform that Europe had embraced long before—proportional representation.

The unity that had eluded New York City in the years leading up to the Progressive Era seemingly happened in 1933, when the City Fusion Party brought together civic activists to elect the formidable Republican Fiorello La Guardia as mayor. Though other cities were electing Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) Democrats to office, FDR himself opposed Tammany and New York City Republicans took full advantage. "Fusion" brought about what the five boroughs' parties could not—the ability to coalesce around an agenda for reform. That agenda advocated a strong mayor and was limited only by La Guardia's personal political objectives (45).

From early on, activists saw rewriting the city's charter as key to breaking from New York's unsavory past. La Guardia pressed the state legislature to give the city wide-berth to amend its charter, which was granted by a two-thirds vote. (45) Democrats in the legislature fought the reform and attempted to undermine the resulting commission. In the commission's second iteration, La Guardia took charge and selected members of like mind. "There has been a mistaken idea—an honestly mistaken one—that varying viewpoints should be represented on the commission" he said. "This is erroneous.... The fight should come before the people and not in the ranks of the commission" (50). He chose the new commission in January 1935 and announced that the voters would decide on the commission's proposals that November (which did not really happen).

A reform that rose to the top was proportional representation. Voters would be presented a long list of candidates (anyone gathering 2,000 signatures on a petition), and anyone receiving 75,000 votes in a single borough would automatically be declared a winner (54). Voters could rank-order their top candidates, so that if their #1 vote went for a marginal candidate who lost, then their #2 candidate would receive the vote. The proportional representation would fill a new city council, one with expanded powers over the old Board of Aldermen (54-55). Other reforms were considered, too, such as going to a city manager model of government, and moving service delivery (and the jobs associated with them) from the five boroughs to centralized city hall departments that would serve all boroughs (59, 65)—both consistent with Progressive Era thinking.

The campaign for and against reform was vicious at public hearings held in spring 1935. The Tammany Democrats fought the reforms strongly. It was a loss of their power. Reform advocates likened them to tyrannical fascists, comparing the rebirth of Tammany Democrats to the rise of Hitler and Mussolini in Europe (56, 57). Opponents to reform shot back that proportional representation was a threat to American democracy itself, and that it would destroy the two-party system (59). In short, it contributed to “anti-Americanism” (65). Bronx Borough President James Lyons was direct in his criticism: it was a system “proposed by minorities in our city” to steal power from the citizenry (66). (Prosterman notes that it is unclear what groups Lyons had in mind.)

Only in 1936 did LaGuardia’s commission present the separate questions of charter reform and proportional representation for the voters. Tammany Democrats went into high gear to clog the works—challenging the constitutionality of the commission in one court, filing

suit to block any November vote in another, and engaging in drawn-out battles arguing the powers were too broad and the reforms too vague (70-72). A month before the election, the commission won and the questions were put before voters on the November ballot. The charter changes and proportional representation were both approved, both winning in every borough except Richmond/Staten Island (78).

Tammany Democrats fumed and returned to court. This time, they argued that proportional voting violated the constitutional requirement that voters be able to vote for every elected office, and that the new system impaired the voters (83-84). For instance, when the #1 candidate received enough votes to be declared a winner, what ballots would then be counted for #2? The *order* in which votes were counted mattered then; since no rules supported this ordering, the election became, in essence, a lottery (86-87). The lower courts divided on their rulings, so it went up to higher court. A super majority of justices (all save one) stood by proportional representation (88). Tammany lost again.

Tammany Democrats lost their overwhelming hold on legislative seats under the new system in 1937. Previously, they held 95 percent of the seats; under proportional representation they held only half. The fact that the Tammany Democrats were still so close to a controlling majority bothered many, and the extraordinary amount of time it took to tally the ballots shook the confidence of supporters. *La Guardia* criticized the cumbersome process, and the *New York Daily News* editors were so furious that they withdrew their earlier endorsement of proportional representation. There was a call to purchase special voting machines that could accommodate proportional voting to speed up the process, but the election board refused on

the basis of cost. Voters could use a regular machine to cast all votes except for the city council seats, which would still have to be on paper ballots.

Tammany Democrats figured out how to game the new system to their advantage. They optimized the number of Tammany candidates in each borough and worked a tightly-orchestrated campaign district-by-district, so excess votes for Tammany candidate #1 fell to Tammany candidate #2, and so on. Tammany found itself both strategizing to make the new system work for its candidates and working to abolish the new system altogether. It used the city council's committee system (in which Tammany Democrats held chairmanships) to prevent municipal reforms from making it to the full council for a vote. From a productivity perspective, the new council was only marginally more productive than the old Board of Aldermen. While there were more bills moving through, they were not on substantive issues.

The beginning of the end for proportional representation came in 1940, when Tammany Democrats pushed for a referendum. "PR Unmasked" was the title of leader Louis Cohen's take-down of the system. Drawing on the theme from years earlier, but in a much more favorable news cycle coming out of Europe, he fanned the flames of patriotism by calling proportional representation a "subversive threat," likening it to fascism and communism, and attacking it for misleading poorly-informed and trusting citizens (141). Voters retained proportional representation, but by a much smaller margin. It did not help for voters to see a headline about Soviet dictator Josef Stalin calling for a second front on the same front page as a communist party member winning a seat under proportional representation.

Tammany Democrats, led by Louis Cohen and supported by the legendary Robert Moses, pushed for another referendum in 1942. Moses, speaking on December 4, 1941, poured on the patriotic pressure. Proportional representation was responsible for World War II, he said. “It was precisely this device...that caused most of the troubles that have brought about the present war” and referred to the reformers who were behind it as “the most fanatical people in the world” (152-153). The attack on Pearl Harbor later that week tabled Cohen’s proposed referendum for the duration of the war, but his opposition did not go away.

By 1947, it was time to try again. Roosevelt was dead, La Guardia was not seeking reelection, and the world was entering a Cold War with the Soviets. Robert Moses continued his push to end proportional representation, believing the same arguments he made in 1941. In an effort to save proportional representation, Liberal Party chairman Adolf Berle suggested that there was Russian interference in New York—to the amusement of his audience. “The Russian agents...know that New York wants liberal, forward thinking measures; and equally wants American, not Russian, leadership. ...Your vote is your protection” (190). He truly believed that liberal anti-communist municipal leadership was crucial to American security and that proportional representation kept pro-American parties like his in power.

Establishment Democrats and Republicans joined together in an anti-communist position and labeled proportional representation a communist tool. They were backed by veterans’ groups and New York’s financial elite. The two parties, which had often worked together privately, were open in their unity, castigating Communists, proportional representation, and anyone connected to either one. The anti-Communist rhetoric worked and played right into the fears of voters. Voters abolished proportional representation by large

numbers in all boroughs, and did so with margins similar to those which approved proportional representation a decade earlier.

Proportional representation brought a diversity of ideologies, party, and gender to the city council. It reflected the true heterogeneity of the city's electorate. Laborers, communists, independents, and nonpartisans were all elected under the system. Women represented about 1/8 of the council seats. After proportional representation's repeal in 1947, the council never seated another woman until 1965 (201). Proportional representation worked for New York during the Great Depression and World War II years, notes Prosterman. It was defeated by fueling Cold War tensions and a fear of diversity in representation.

Those very tensions and fears are seen in today's society. Calls for process change grow ever-louder— abolish the Electoral College, end political gerrymandering, address issues of disenfranchisement among groups of voters, modify the way the American electorate is heard and counted. These calls are not coming proactively from an embrace of democratic values; rather, they are coming reactively from seeing a brokenness that reformers feel must be fixed. Prosterman raises important questions and provides an interesting case study for one kind of solution and it gives contemporary analysts food for thought in deciphering the meaning of today's politics.

Prosterman has explored a grand attempt at a Progressive Era idea (though happening years after the Era had closed). He pays close attention to detail in what is a very complex and evolved policy environment and his analysis is spot-on. Overall, reforms worked as intended, but the politics of the time demanded new outcomes and PR proved to be intolerable.

Prosterman's work is a well-fitting answer to the queries raised by Connolly, but these are largely issues of process. What about structure?

Some reformers certainly pushed for structural change, above and/or beyond process change. One of the classic ideals that came out of the Progressive Era was using science to improve existing conditions. Sometimes, state and municipal governments simply did not have the capacity for such things. Implementing a scientific approach required data, methods, and scientists. Governments across the United States at all levels were swept up with the scientific approach and began creating research bureaus to develop measures, capture data, and identify pinch-points that held back progress. Some governments went further than research by creating specific bureaus designed to study work and suggest changes that would help maximize service delivery and make the best use of scarce resources.

There is a wonderful line in Mordecai Lee's *Bureaus of Efficiency* that is telling of today's world as much as a century ago: for some reformers, government was a solution; for others, government was the problem (16). First, that means government is a dichotomy. Second, so are reformers. The urbanist Lana Stein at the University of Missouri was always quick to point out in her classroom lectures that reform is only as good as the reformers. Lee, in a sense, builds on this notion, noting that a definition of efficiency could vary reformer to reformer and therefore so could the impact of the reformer's work.

The notion of efficiency had broad importance because it bridged the public and private sectors. Lee acknowledges Samuel Haber's typology that defined efficiency in four terms:

mechanical, commercial, personal, and social. Efficiency could apply to individual and institution, to public and private, and even to the middle ground of nonprofits.

Frederick Winslow Taylor is to blame. He delivered a paper to an engineering conference in 1895 and became a pillar of Progressive thought! Obviously, it was not that simple but Taylor took his early notions of efficiency in private sector production and developed it over the next decade. Taylor's quest to find the one-best-way to do anything morphed into "scientific management" and highlights the Progressive Era thinking in the private sector.

Though these bureaus of efficiency were true structural change, they took on different forms—some as government agencies and some as publicly-affiliated nonprofits. Cities creating these structures chose one or the other, or in the case of Chicago and Milwaukee, both! It is the performance of these two types of structures—side-by-side in a single city—that captures Lee's attention and provide the cases for his study.

In 1910, Milwaukee elected the Socialist candidate for mayor, Emil Seidel. Seidel was a reformer, though he did not have a sympathetic majority on the Common Council. He made a speech to the council called "Sound Economics" in which he called for the establishment of a bureau to guide the various reforms of municipal government (43). One of the socialist aldermen quickly put forth a bill to create a Bureau of Municipal Research, but the Finance Committee sought to have a survey of the matter first and the council agreed. The council approach John Commons, a professor at University of Wisconsin, for assistance. Commons, an academic with a bent toward real-world applied research, happily obliged.

Commons envisioned his municipal investigation for something more than collecting data. He recalled the goal of the project to be “reorganizing [city government] on an *efficiency* basis” (emphasis his, 44). The survey he presented to the Milwaukee council had 11 key points and from that the Milwaukee Bureau of Economy and Efficiency was born. Commons himself was named its first director.

The work of the bureau was threefold. First was a survey arm to gather measures of various social programs. Second was a survey arm to measure municipal economic performance. Third was the creation of a city-wide accounting system that could operate across departments. Taken together, the arms of this bureau would touch every segment of the city’s operation. The agency’s budget increased threefold as well—starting with an initial \$5,000 allocation in late 1910 to \$18,000 in 1911. After an initial six-month lag, the agency proved highly productive, releasing a new report about every three weeks. The reach of such a department was far, covering topics such as sidewalk repair, plumbing inspection, worker efficiency, and public health. Obviously, with far reach and still lacking a reform majority on the council, the bureau became a political target.

In the municipal election of 1912, the bureau itself was a campaign issue. Lee described the 1912 election as a “grudge match” stemming from the 1910 vote —(another Progressive Era theme that sounds familiar in today’s election cycles). Critics claimed that the bureau’s work on social conditions had gone beyond the kind of work a government should do. Further, the bureau was blasted for the fact that it was not created by ordinance (it had been created by a resolution) and was therefore illegally established. The socialist mayor was not retained, and

the reformist faction on the Common Council, already a minority, was further diminished. One of the first actions of the new council and administration was to close the bureau permanently.

Despite its brief existence, the bureau had impact. Lee cites contemporary reviews of the day, worker statements, and outside professional analyses to conclude that the bureau did contribute substantively to policy change in the city and that it played an important role in the day-to-day decision-making of Milwaukee government. However, just because certain political leaders closed down the bureau did not mean that the work of reformers was over. It was, in fact, just starting.

Those who supported and advocated for the bureau in 1912 and earlier pressed for the rebirth of the effort, but this time outside of the control of politicians. The City Club of Milwaukee (long a supporter of the bureau) invited William Allen to speak late in 1912. Allen addressed the room full of business and civic leaders on the topic of “Progress of Efficiency in Public Business” (68). He stirred up interest in creating a bureau of research funded by the private sector, as Allen had done in his home city of New York. Business leaders had a different take on what the word “efficiency” meant than Commons and the socialists, and to them it was reducing the size/expense of government and keeping government from the unnecessary regulation of commerce —yet another theme that resonates with the modern political scene.

The business elite of Milwaukee took of their own initiative a survey of their own. They invited three of Allen’s colleagues from the New York Bureau of Municipal Research to come to Milwaukee and prepare an organizational and financial audit of the city. By April 1913, the staffers had completed a 135-page report that essentially backed the creation of a replacement

to the bureau under the auspices of the business community. The Citizens' Bureau of Municipal Efficiency was chartered that summer; sixteen months after the government bureau was abolished a nonprofit bureau had replaced it.

The goals of the nonprofit were different than the government agency that it replaced, though still within the same realm. First, it embraced the principles of scientific management that Frederick Taylor had been espousing through his work at Bethlehem Steel, only applying it to municipal affairs. Second, it cooperated with and facilitated the work of public officials. Finally, it collected and publicized data regarding municipal government and schools. All of these tasks could be completed at arm's-length from city government. A governing board of six trustees was created and over three-dozen "associate members" paid the dues that provided operating funds for the nonprofit (71).

One key element to the nonprofit's mission showed the bias of the business community that created it. A goal was to gather and publicize information. This concept of publicity came directly from the New York bureau that has crafted this one. In New York, aggressive publicity was embraced, since it both educated the public to be better voters and applied pressure to elected officials. In Milwaukee, business leaders pressed to have publicity come only through the board president or secretary, not from the staff. In fact, Thomas Hinckley, the newly-appointed director, recounted that he learned from one of his earliest meetings that there should be cooperation with elected officials, not adversary. The business leaders wanted honest government and reform, but had clear ideas on how to achieve it. In a meeting two years later, Hinckley, who complained about the lack of cooperation by a public official, was

told by the trustees “to enable us to accomplish matters *we must retain the good-will of the men in office*” (emphasis his, 73). Milwaukee was not unique in this respect.

At nearly the same time in New York, where William Allen’s organization enjoyed the public’s attention, the business community pushed back. John D. Rockefeller approached the organization in 1914 with a proposal. He would provide major ongoing financial support for the organization, but wanted it to lower its profile, be less contentious and controversial, and adopt a new “quiet” approach to its work (74). Allen was furious and protested. His governing board was not and gratefully accepted Rockefeller’s offer. In a moment that rings true today, corporate donations come with strings and recipients oblige.

The oft-restrained Hinckley did not stay long in the organization that had more board members than staff. The nonprofit changed its name in 1921 and removed “efficiency” from its official title, taking on more of a research focus. This change was enough for Lee to consider this the end point of his research with the group. The organization has changed names twice since then, and is still in existence as the Milwaukee Public Policy Forum.

It makes sense logically that efficiency would be a Progressive Era concern. If Progressive Era reformers were to add structure and process to already-complex social systems in the name of making them better, then there should be some expectation that these changes would be beneficial. The bureaus of efficiency were kin to the bureaus of research that set out on a similar (yet distinct) path. (Lee excludes research bureaus from his study). However, the term efficiency became so elastic that the name was applied confusingly across purposes.

These bureaus made a difference. Lee finds in his Chicago example that a good number of the bureau's ideas were implemented and that it played an instrumental part in municipal service delivery in the 1910s and 1920s. Similarly, he notes that Milwaukee's nonprofit played an active role at times in governance and policy-making. These units were effective indeed.

The sectoral form (nonprofit or government) did not make a significant difference in their success. There were strengths and weaknesses of each. Lee makes an important observation about these bureaus—that nearly all of them had interdepartmental jurisdiction. Their ability to do work across bureaucracies may have been the true source of their success, and I wish Lee had dug into this idea more. Unchained from departmental hierarchy and politics, these bureaus were in a fine position to suggest improvements and force change.

Lee's appendices are delightful to read and show the high caliber of this research. He faithfully reproduces efficiency reports from the day, and then examines them with great care. Though this volume may be difficult to locate today, it is worth finding.

Though bureaus of efficiency are long gone (except in Rochester, which has kept it at least in name), the "cult of efficiency" is still quite strong (198). Since the 1980s, and ever more so since then, private sector measures have been used to examine the public sector. Lee notes that modern desires to "privatize" services really raise the old point of efficiency (205). In this sense, Lee finds comfort that the work of those old bureaus did not end with the Progressive Era as the structures tended to do. The business community will always pressure government to behave in certain ways and it is not shy in asserting its wants. At the end of the day, though, government's purpose is to protect rights and provide what the marketplace will not—and the

reason is because certain functions are simply too inefficient or inappropriate to be profitable for the private sector. Lee does not go so far in his conclusions, but I will: while there may be one-best-way to accomplish anything, it also may be foolish to try to measure a public-sector product with a private-sector yardstick.

So what is the role of business in a democratic capitalist society? For much of the nineteenth century, laissez-faire was the policy—and the Gilded Age was the result. Public office for private gain was commonplace. The Progressive Era arose in part as a response to those excesses, both public and private. Where previous authors can point to private sector interests replacing the public agenda, Daniel Amsterdam shows how the private sector pressed for a public agenda.

The private sector's motivation was rooted in thinking that is very familiar in today's political dialogue. "Fears of working-class radicalism, worries over the foreign born, and the conviction that city services were insufficient or ill designed to prevent problems like crime and vice all persisted throughout the 1920s" (51). If the private sector's desired outcome was to maintain a stable environment in which business can be conducted, then good public policy meant good business.

Daniel Amsterdam points out that it was the business community that pressed for change, not parties or political structures. He takes on a gargantuan task to examine the role of business leaders in urban Progressive reform, and smartly chooses to limit his study to three cities: Detroit, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. These cities represented three types of municipal

operations that existed—the machine city (Philadelphia), the non-machine city (Detroit), and the city of disenfranchisement (Atlanta).

The protagonists of the Progressive Era were “successful men of industry and commerce, including a subset of wealthy lawyers and other high-end professionals” with sufficient political and economic clout to win public office or the other levers of power in chambers of commerce and the like (2). This has been long-established in the literature, and is consistent with other volumes reviewed here.

Cities suffered from complex problems by 1900. The economy built great wealth in the decades after the Civil War and, at the same time, an “almost chronic state of crisis” for urban centers (3). Overcrowding, squalor, and great poverty were found everywhere. In response to these problems, activists created “a stunning array of policy proposals” designed to address the crisis (3). The public sector had to act and it was the private sector that was pushing for action.

The arguments put forth by the elite businessmen for action were congruent and reinforcing. First, the path to make local residents into good citizens was through social policy, and good citizens would make good workers. This path included dispersing settlement patterns away from crowded slums and into working class neighborhoods, constructing infrastructure that promoted health and safety, and providing the preparatory institutions like schools, libraries, and museums. Second, such investments and developments would be attractive to new businesses and the economic well-being of the city. Some even saw an opportunity for additional benefit: the ability to regulate various kinds of personal behavior—especially the consumption of alcohol.

Though the Progressive Era had its roots in the nineteenth century, the business-driven civic welfare state did not take hold until the late 1910s and into the 1920s. It was a massive spending plan. Detroit's budget in 1929, Amsterdam notes, was 340 percent larger than when the US entered World War I. Municipal spending per-capita in cities over 300,000 was declining to 1916. However, the demands from this rising class of business leaders catapulted municipal spending in the post-World War I years. Los Angeles's budget tripled, New York's doubled, and Chicago's grew 85 percent. On a per-person basis, Philadelphia's spending increased 51 percent and Atlanta's increased 60 percent.

The "city beautiful" movement took shape at Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1839. Daniel Burnham's masterpiece of design excited urban planners and municipal reformers. It exhibited the dreamy ideals of what a city could be if principles of planning were applied artfully and with care. Cities across the country began designing municipal centers, green spaces, and eventually comprehensive city-wide plans in the subsequent decades. Business elites saw potential in the movement, but there were roadblocks to participation. In Detroit, leaders began seeking a library built from the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie in 1901. It took nearly a decade to solidify the local commitments to match the donation (including winning over a labor movement that detested Carnegie's work practices), and then another decade actually to construct it.

Philadelphia had its own barriers to the rise of the city beautiful. Municipal reformers were stuck with an age-old political machine that was strong at winning votes and reticent to give up lining its pockets with public funds. Lincoln Steffens highlighted Philadelphia's machine in his famous *Shame of the Cities*, calling Philadelphia "corrupt and contended" with its position

(27). (My hometown of St. Louis struggled so with corruption that it was the only city to warrant TWO chapters in Steffens' book.) The Republican machine brought together multiple factions that were held tightly thanks to the organizing of Israel "Iz" Durham. Only when a group of moderate Republicans broke from the established party machine did business elites from the city's diversified economy join in the anti-machine movement. When reformers started to gain the upper hand with charter reform in 1919, even more members of the business community (and their institutions like the chamber of commerce) joined in. Though not always united, leaders did agree on some city beautiful concepts—such as the downtown parkway concept that was to rival the Champs-Élysées and join together the grand elements of Progressivism: the museum, the library, and the city hall.

Atlanta's challenges were apart from its industrial neighbors up north. The "Gate City" was on the rise during the Progressive Era, largely due to its function as a rail hub for raw materials and hosting the South's large financial and insurance firms, but the city was experiencing social upheaval. It projected boosterism externally while collapsing internally from unprecedented migration. Atlanta's population was under 90,000 in 1900, but due to the collapse of sharecropping in the rural South, its population reached 150,000 by 1910 and exceeded 200,000 by 1920. Most of these were unskilled migrants who "traded rural poverty for urban poverty" (39). It was a great culture shift from rural to urban and all persons—black and white—struggled with the transition. Here, the xenophobia of the Progressive Era reared its ugly head in the form of a race riot in 1906 and strict segregation laws thereafter. Municipal government failed to protect the vulnerable, prosecute the guilty, and meet the challenge of governing.

Atlanta Mayor James Woodward was controversial to say the least: he cavorted with prostitutes and appeared publicly drunk, yet managed to win nomination for a third term in 1908. Woodward reported his doctor prescribed the corn whiskey he drank “to stave off pneumonia” (42). Municipal reformers were livid and claimed that it would be a national embarrassment to have such a man serve (again) in the city’s highest office. Asa Griggs Candler, founder of the Coca-Cola Company and president of the Chamber of Commerce, stepped in just weeks before the election. He convened a committee of twenty-five that quickly put up former chamber president Robert Maddox as a reform candidate for mayor. Maddox won handily against Woodward, and set out with a reform agenda—starting with a massive \$3 million bond issue (over \$825 million in 2017 dollars). The issue was vital for change and required a supermajority to pass.

This forced Atlanta to confront its treatment of African American and their inability to access the proposed services and improvements. “The disease germ knows no color or race line,” stated the editorial page of the *Atlanta Constitution*, and the African American parts of town needed to be included in municipal improvements (44). The bond issue passed in 1910 and, for the first time, sizeable portions of these neighborhoods had sewers and running water. Despite this initial success, Atlanta struggled to unite voters, institutions, and leaders for Progressive ideals. Attempts at even larger bond issues and charter reform struggled to gain support. Political infighting meant that the city lost the early momentum it had gained under Maddox’s early leadership.

In all three cities, it would not be until the 1920s that business and civic elites truly achieved many of their policy goals. Social spending was vital to the Progressive agenda, but the process of policymaking was not always smooth and required continuous attention. The looming financial disaster of the Great Depression and the response of the New Deal wiped away the municipal Progressive policy path. Cities that had racked up debt in the 1920s found themselves facing an all-new reality under economic collapse.

Progressive concepts did help position local populations to fare better. Consolidation of charities into community funds, provision of some kind of unemployment compensation, and the general mix of public and private interests that became “welfare capitalism” all were real demonstrations of the power of the Progressive movement. There was a recognition that balance was needed and from this everyone would benefit, but participants may do so for different reasons.

Business leaders had high expectations of this work, and did not view their involvement necessarily as charitable. One Philadelphia executive said that he wanted to make his city attractive to people “for a very selfish reason” (158). Charles Schwab of Bethlehem Steel (no relation to the financial firm of the same name) was more charitable. “Our primary job is to make steel,” he said, but it must be done so “under a system which must be justified” from a quality-of-life perspective (158).

Business elites were limited in their desire to support public assistance. Leaders and firms contributed to charities, “but not with newfound generosity or enthusiasm” (163). Jobless benefits were provided only after investigation. Detroit’s department of public welfare

dug into the personal lives of recipients to root out workers who may have “a natural disinclination for work” or misplaced priorities (165). This was certainly only a small number of cases, but the fear of these cases warranted an investigation of all. Philadelphia’s new charter (drafted by business leaders) created a department of public welfare also, but it was not designed to offer financial aid to the indigent; rather, it acted more as a clearinghouse that directed the needy to the care of others.

Amsterdam’s analysis of three distinct cities is wonderfully detailed. He makes a strong evidentiary case that business leaders were the ones calling for many Progressive reforms in cities, frequently taking the helm of government institutions. However, he rightly notes that their involvement was infused with self-interest and an invisible line existed that they would not cross. They all valued public benefit to some degree, but universally stopped when it started to threaten private benefit. This book explains a valuable segment of urban history from three very interesting and appropriate cases. It adds an important component to the literature by bridging the City Beautiful era with the New Deal.

All four of these authors have gone into a time period about which much is written, however each makes a special contribution to our understanding. Each has chosen a narrow focus that individually explores an interesting component of history previously under-explored. Taken together, they add a large understanding to the changes experienced by urban areas during what was probably the most transformative time in their existence. Revisiting the projects and ideals of the Progressive Era may prove to be good preparation for the next phase of national politics today.

Today we are experiencing several of the dynamics that appeared in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The concentration of wealth, newfound concerns over immigration, a rise in public xenophobia, and questions about the use of science and data in decision-making are all part of the contemporary political dialogue. The ideological divisions between parties and people may be great enough to cause split and realignment. In the last decade persons who were on the edges of political discourse are now moving to the core of the conversation. Whether one is pleased or displeased by the current state of affairs in government, one cannot deny that the level of energy being expended is unusually high and that the outcomes pursued at both ends of the spectrum are large shifts from long-established patterns—which is not that different from where Progressive reformers found themselves just over a century ago.

At the turn of the last century, the “chamber of commerce” crowd stepped forward with scholars and professionals to transform the public agenda and usher in a new age at all levels of government. It was an unprecedented time of partnership, professionalism, and service delivery. Perhaps the tense times that we see today will usher in a new era of reform and responsiveness. Self-interest will always be present. Coalitions will always have limits. Service delivery will always raise questions of cost and benefit. Decades later, though, we do not remember the struggles as much as we remember the outcomes and we build a new “normal” for society. The four authors reviewed here lay important groundwork for that new understanding.

Andrew J. Theising, Ph.D.
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Andrew J. Theising, Ph.D., is Associate Professor and Chair of Political Science at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, where he teaches courses in Urban Politics and Public Administration. His most recent work is an edited volume (with Terry Jones of the University of Missouri-St. Louis), *St. Louis Currents: The Fifth Edition*, a collection of essays examining the social, economic, and political dynamics of the St. Louis MO-IL region (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2016). A significant study of mid-century mayoral leadership is forthcoming.