

tion. In an era defined by McCarthy and the Soviet adversary, liberal scholars believed that intellectual and pragmatic values were under attack. They feared that departure from interest politics and mainstream beliefs signaled triumph on the mindless mob.

Such sentiments were to be expected in the tense global climate of the Cold War. But they made for uneven history. Despite energizing minds and a broad scope, Hofstadter and the social scientists rarely portrayed "extremist" subjects as complex human beings. "Restraining myths," political scientist Richard Hamilton wrote in 1975, prevented a full view of the goals and anxieties of ordinary citizens. By emphasizing public limitations, social scientists legitimized a political system that shied away from substantial participation by grassroots Americans.

By the 1980s, a minority of historians had come to portray the manner in which legitimate economic grievances and key cultural perceptions figured into the dissident politics of their subject matters. In "The American Style of Foreign Policy: Cultural Politics and Foreign Affairs" (1983), Robert Dallek showed how the currency obsession of 1890s Populists traced back to the way midwestern farmers associated banks with imperialist Europe and the aristocratic culture of America's eastern upper class.

Liberal historians have missed the irony presented in Jackson Lears' "No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture" (1981). Lears simply stated that "the most radical critics of capitalist culture were at bottom the most conservative." His work revealed how the disintegrating effects of turn-of-the-century modernization brought extreme reactions by the affluent classes to the nation's corporate culture. These varied from the revival of arts and crafts and back-to-nature movements to the rekindling of the martial spirit and chivalric ethic.

Both Dallek and Lears focused upon moral anxieties dismissed or ridiculed by the liberal pragmatists of the Cold War era. So did Robert A. Goldberg's "Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado" (1981). Instead of clinging to Hofstadter's portrait of the 1920s Klan as a vestige of rural provincialism, Goldberg mounted a complex assessment of the movement that stressed its varied responses to community morality and politics.

In "Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression" (1982), Alan Brinkley described two charismatic leaders of the 1930s as men who spoke to real fears of powerlessness among their mass followers. And in "The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War" (1983), Leo Ribuffo insisted that rejection of scientific rationalism, liberal religion and reformed capitalism was not limited to a few "backward-looking" elements.

Ribuffo's portrait of the Right held out the possibility that large numbers of Americans could abandon the modern mainstream. But he charged that scholars hesitated to take seriously those who questioned progress and the precepts of liberal pragmatism. This analysis also permeated Wayne S. Cole's "Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932-45" (1983) and Justus D. Doenecke's "Not to the Swift: The Old Isolationists in the Cold War Era (1979). Both books professed to see elements of democratic and

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anti-imperialist thought among those bitterly attacked by consensus social scientists.

Although the scholars cited here do not comprise a single school of historical interpretation, their works point to new directions in recounting America's past. Certainly, academic historians must come to grips with the enormous legacy of populism on the nation's culture and politics. We must move beyond sterile assumptions that dictate that mass movements can only be analyzed in terms of irrationality and intolerance.

Historians must also reject the notion that radicalism was confined to either the left or the working class. In the context of American society, radical critics were those who rejected the mainstays of the corporate order, no matter what their political orientation.

There is a rich history of American anti-corporate agitation. It begins with the Populists of the 1890s and Insurgent Progressives of the 1910s like Robert LaFollette. It goes on to the purity and Prohibition crusades of the 1920s and even embraces some of the cultural criti-

ques of the Ku Klux Klan. It continues with small people who crusaded against chain stores and chainbanks in the Great Depression. Huey Long and Father Coughlin embodied the concerns of many of these beleaguered Americans of the middle class.

Although the electorate continued to vote for New Deal leaders like President Franklin D. Roosevelt, large pockets of the country remained suspicious of concentrations of power in either the corporations or the government. Many of these people would participate in the massive noninterventionist movement that dominated American politics before entry into World War II. And their remnants and successors often followed Joe McCarthy in the 1950s and identified with the movement against national civil rights legislation in the 1960s. The residue of these political attitudes surfaced in the New Christian Right of the 1980s and the symbolic "insurgence" of the era's Republican presidents.

Clearly, a new history of American political culture is in order. It must be broad and synthetic but based upon the experiences and perceptions of ordinary people. Its chroniclers must reject elitism and abandon careerist obsessions with specialization. But most important of all, historians of the 1990s must realize that the nation's twentieth century history goes beyond Left and Right. We need to harness creativity and courage to redefine the categories that have characterized American political and cultural life. If not, we may be only talking to ourselves at century's end.

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