

Note from the Editor

Robert Johnston will confirm that when he first proposed that the journal commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*, my initial reaction was to hem and haw. By comparison to Hofstadter's other writings, I had always—and mistakenly, as Johnston and Gillis Harp stress—regarded *The Age of Reform* as having passed into the Hades of mere historiography. When I first encountered progressivism in a systematic way in the early 1980s, the organizational synthesis was at the height of its influence and the new institutionalism was picking up steam. Both of these approaches, with their stress on the modernization of state institutions, public administration, and policy formation, made Hofstadter's concern with the political psychology and sociology of populism and progressivism seem irrelevant or wrong. In those days, for me at least, the living Hofstadter was the darkly impious sophisticate of *The American Political Tradition* and *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (which in the late 1970s and early 1980s I read several times with glee), as well as the thoughtful historiographer of *The Progressive Historians*.

I was thus a little surprised that Professors Johnston and Harp produced essays that treat *The Age of Reform* as a living book worth engaging. Perhaps the renewed relevance of this no-longer-antiquated book arises from the revival of interest over the last fifteen years in the intellectual history of the pre-World War I decades and in the ways that populists and progressives wrestled with the content and processes of democracy in a complex society (to use one of Hofstadter's favorite adjectives). Twenty-five years ago, even sympathetic historians tended to treat populism as folk culture, not as politics or thought. And the tendency was to dismiss progressive thought as a collection of reassuring platitudes. This wrong-headed dismissal, however, probably gained some of its impetus several decades earlier from those passages of *The Age of Reform* that Hofstadter—whose fluidity as a writer could be a weakness as well as a strength—worded too loosely and left open to the superficial interpretation that Johnston and Harp expose.

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