Early 20th century “populism” and “progressive” movement evolved into “liberal,” which is presently being called “progressive.”

My blog:
War Department/Peace Department
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

Newsletters
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/

Contents Liberal/Progressive Newsletter #1, February 27, 2014
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Alterman and Mattson, The Cause. . .from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama

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Laura Flanders, Bill de Blasio (self-proclaimed Progressive)
Dick, The Progressive Magazine
NationofChange Online on Progressives
Free Speech TV on Progressives
Paul Krugman, Centrists
Z Magazine, Self-described Radical Magazine
Dick, Unitarian Universalist Association Values
We find both comprehensiveness and coherence in chronological histories of liberalism; for example, Eric Alterman’s *The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama*. Or by a historical, topical approach like Patrick Garry’s earlier book, *Liberalism and American Identity*.

*The Kent State University Press*

1992, 232 pp

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**Liberalism and American Identity**

*Patrick M. Garry*

Since, 1968, liberalism as a viable political ideology has been under attack, with the most aggressive assault occurring in the 1988 presidential campaign. While conservatives denounced the “L-word” and proclaimed its death as a political ideology, liberals and Democrats failed to defend America’s proud liberal tradition. Liberals have yet to take the ideological offensive. Indeed, without a clear ideological identity, it is not surprising that the Democratic party appears uncertain as to its future political message, particularly as it
prepares for the 1992 election.

In *Liberalism and American Identity*, Patrick Garry presents a coherent and well-argued thesis of the meaning and importance of liberalism in American politics. His is the first work that attempts to rejuvenate political liberalism since the devastating attack on it during the 1980s. Presenting a workable definition of liberalism, Garry demonstrates the vital role it has played, and can continue to play, in American history. His examination of the liberal ideology and tradition in American politics reveals not only the nation’s liberal identity, but also the conservative tendency to label liberalism “un-American” as a means to circumvent discussion of social problems.

Garry defines liberalism through historical examples and the beliefs and leadership of prominent Americans, namely Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman and John Kennedy. He then applies these principles to a discussion of current politics and the problems of crime, poverty, and national defense. Although arguing that the conservative attack during the 1980s greatly misrepresented the American liberal tradition, Garry also acknowledges that changes within accepted liberal doctrines during the 1960s and 1970s led to a deviation of contemporary liberalism from its roots. This betrayal of liberalism and its degeneration into special interest politics, he asserts, caused an identity crisis among liberals and alienated large segments of the American electorate previously supportive of the politics of Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy.

[This book is very clear, for example full of helpful linkages, such as his transition from his first four chapters to his fifth: “The American liberal tradition reflects a consistent belief in the two basic concepts of liberalism—individual freedom and dignity and democratic rule of society. An outgrowth of these two concepts, a feature of liberalism which has become increasingly apparent in the twentieth century, is the support of a positive or affirmative government. “ p. 81]

In an effort to resolve the recent problems of liberals, Garry outlines a future direction for liberalism in America. For a public uncertain of its political course, and for liberals seeking a reinvigoration of their creed, this is an important and timely book.
THE CAUSE
The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama

KIRKUS REVIEW
A liberal columnist and a professor examine the zigzag route of liberal politics since the New Deal. Before the book was finished, Mattson (Contemporary History/Ohio Univ.; "What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?: Jimmy Carter, America’s "Malaise," and the Speech that Should Have Changed the Country, 2009, etc.) left the partnership with the Nation contributor Alterman (Kabuki Democracy: The System vs. Barack Obama, 2011, etc.), who wrote the final draft. A chronicle of liberalism’s successes and failures, the text travels the labyrinthine road from the New Deal to the rise (and fall) of unionism, the theorists of the 1940s and ’50s (Dean Acheson, George Kennan), the battle against McCarthyism and the failures of Adlai Stevenson, whom Alterman writes helped create the notion of the effete intellectual. The author then charts the rise of the Kennedys, the tragic assassinations of the ’60s, civil rights and Lyndon Johnson, Betty Friedan and the feminist movement, the campaign and electoral failures of Eugene McCarthy, McGovern, Carter, Dukakis, Gore and Kerry. Alterman pauses often to visit relevant cultural history—the emergence of influential journals, Mailer’s writing, DeVoto’s criticism, Elia Kazan’s films, Cheever’s stories, the various liberal contributions of actor Sidney Poitier, novelist William Styron, filmmaker Oliver Stone and—in a long section—rocker Bruce Springsteen. Alterman points out continually how liberals have often been their own worst enemies—failing to stand up to the violence of the far left in the ’60s, fearing being branded “anti-American” in the face of war (Iraq), failing to confront the
Tea Party and the ever-more-rightward GOP. Unfortunately, Alterman too often quotes others and only rarely flashes the scimitar wit he displays in the *Nation*.

Thorough and thoughtful, but with dense scholarly foliage that needs pruning.

[The description of Garry’s book is his own, the publisher’s blurb; the commentary on Alterman’s is independent criticism. I couldn’t find Alterman’s/Viking’s blurb, and I haven’t read it, so try both with an open mind. –Dick]

SOME ARTICLES. These fragments might be more or less helpful depending upon one’s knowledge of the history of US liberalism.

**What is a “Progressive” Cluster of Values or Politics? An Empirical Approach**

One way to define “progressive” is to compare examples. John Nichols does just that in his “2013 Progressive Honor Roll.” *The Nation* (Jan. 6, 2014). Nichols provides neither introduction nor conclusion but describes 17 heroes--people, groups, organizations- for an empirical, accumulative understanding of the meaning of “progressive.” Several familiar examples, several not; here are a few of the latter:

- **Most Valuable Newspaper:** *The Stranger in Seattle* that worked all-out in support of a Socialist candidate for City Council, and the candidate won.
- **Most valuable TV Coverage:** *Amy Goodman’s Democracy Now* on Syria.
- **Most Valuable Radio Program:** The Peabody Award-winning *Mark Steiner Show* in Baltimore offers interviews of people on democracy and justice with depth and nuance.
- **Most Valuable Education of Congress:** *Progressive Democrats of America* has organized monthly “educated Congress”: visits to Congressional offices.

Comparing several individuals’ choices of “progressive” examples might be confusing; I’d like to see an analysis comparing one self-proclaimed liberal’s anthology of fellow liberals to another’s.

**Laura Flanders, Bill de Blasio: A Mayor for the New Economy**

*NationofChange*, (Nov. 12, 2013): After twenty years of rule by Republicans, and three terms with a businessman mayor who referred to billionaires like himself as a “godsend,” New Yorkers this Tuesday elected Bill de Blasio, a self described “unapologetic progressive” who ran on a simple message of confronting inequality. “For all those who had their doubts about the ability of such a campaign to win a broad swath of support, just look at the numbers,” City
Council member Brad Lander, a de Blasio ally, told Commonomics shortly before the election.

Or Analyze a Magazine Named “Progressive”

Study THE PROGRESSIVE Magazine

Dick Bennett

Recently some self-identified liberals have begun to refer to themselves as progressives because of the relentless attacks on “liberals” and “liberalism” especially by right-wing Republicans. This attempt to exclude “liberals” from influence is part of the long and largely successful effort (following campaigns to destroy communist and socialist parties in the US) to reverse social and economic justice gains made under the Roosevelt administration.

Fortunately we can be specific about the meaning of the ideas of “progressive” in politics, since for over a hundred years The Progressive Magazine (founded in 1909 by Bob La Follette) has projected those values (and rejected their opposites) explicitly. I have subscribed to this magazine for some fifty years, and when asked about its contents I always said it promoted world peace and social and economic justice. Let me take its latest no., Nov. 2013, to test my generalization.

Editor’s Note by Ruth Conniff gives a summary of the contents. She praises “the incomparable Bernie Sanders,” who is interviewed later, and compares him to Wisconsin’s “Fighting Bob La Follette” (for progressive values). She summarizes the article by Scot Ross and Mike Browne, who “press for a remedy to crushing student loan debt.” She emphasizes the magazine’s political independence. They and Sanders, she emphasizes, attack both Tea Partiers and “the corporate consensus that has taken over much of the Democratic Party.”

But, upbeat, this consensus (“tax cuts and subsidies for the rich, shrinking support for the poor and middle class, receding access to education opportunity, and yawning inequality”) “is currently in a state of collapse” (the subject of her later Comment). Then she launches into a claim that “There are signs of hope all over America for resurgent progressive politics”: the recent Fighting Bob Fest in Wisconsin; Chris Taylor, Wisconsin state legislator who investigated ALEC; the continuing leaders of the Occupy movement who “expose the injustice of a government that kowtows to the banks”; opposition to the Keystone pipeline; fight against mining on Native lands; organizing by fast food workers and others for fair wages and working conditions; immigration reform campaigns. In summary, The Progressive, Sanders, progressive politics are driven mainly by “a coalition of grassroots groups representing low-income, working people, unions, women’s groups, and environmentalists.” Finally, she emphasizes that The Progressive promotes “citizen activism,” change “from below,” individuals and groups “who are driving the progressive movement,” and she announces “our upcoming double issue on do-it-yourself social change.”

As her one-page summary reveals, the no. is mainly about social and economic justice, and many more items than she mentions (de Blasio’s victory for NYC mayor, overcoming the NRA, Visa’s conspiracy case, US sports, Waltons’ inordinate wealth). But it includes a review of a book about US war-making, and a rejection of “US exceptionalism” as sung by Pres. Obama. And while she discusses only contents about domestic problems, several articles assess matters abroad (a quest for justice in Colombia, filmmaker Margarethe von Trotta’s film about Hannah Arendt, US self-promoting myths), reminding us of the international perspective included in a progressive stance. And as always a poem worth reading.
In one part, my generalization is resoundingly affirmed: the magazine is devoted to justice, especially as equity, fairness for the people, focusing on the US but never forgetting the other people of the world. Another no. of the magazine has emphasized foreign affairs, and US wars and empire. These are a progressive's guides: world peace and social and economic justice, which includes rights. “Liberal” (or “liberalism”) is seldom if at all mentioned, so the terms progressive and liberal are generally interchangeable. Or it’s a matter of degrees: centrists (neo-liberals): liberals: progressives.

PROGRESSIVES ONLINE:
NationofChange calls itself “progressive.” Note its values.

Friends,
The confetti has been painstakingly collected and the holiday leftovers have been consumed. "I think NationofChange is doing a great and badly needed job. This is what inspired me to support it." --Noam Chomsky. How do we step up our game? At NationofChange we have one overarching question on our minds: how do we step up our game to speak truth to power this year? As readers of NoC you know that we offer some of the best progressive news and views, 365 days a year, at no charge to the public. . . . Stand with us and help NationofChange continue to fight on behalf of our health, the exploited, the overlooked, our environment and the animals that inhabit it against the treads of the Machine of the Corporate State. . . .
Donate to NationofChange
Thank you for all that you do.
Respectfully Yours,
Donna Luca, Board President, and the NationofChange Team

News Analysis: In states where the corporate right did not control the agenda, some landmark legislation passed that may point the way forward for future years in other states—when they will surely find themselves out of power once again. In no particular order, here are 13 positive, progressive pieces of legislation from around the states that advanced in 2011, and that represent some of the key policy solutions featured in the Progressive States Network’s Blueprint For Economic Security. Some are more prominent, others less so—but all advanced policies that promise to continue gaining momentum across the nation in the years to come.

Dear Friend of FSTV,

Welcome to Free Speech TV's bi-weekly newsletter, with news and updates on our programming and tips and information for how to make the most of Free Speech TV, your 24/7 progressive television news platform. This newsletter is for July 8-July 21, 2011.

Handy Utensil in the Progressive Toolkit

Laura Flanders interviews Van Jones at Netroots Nation 2011. Thanks to your generous support, FSTV was the only national news network to cover the event.

Honestly, I did not know what a progressive really was until working the camera for Free Speech TV at the 2011 Netroots Nation in Minneapolis last month. I thought a progressive was just another name for a Democrat or a liberal. I was wrong.

Progressive philosophy is aligned with the base theory of cultural anthropology: Culture is not a static or conservative thing that we need to stabilize at some nostalgic and unrealistic moment but rather a dynamic process. Progressives want to direct that process toward a more inclusive future. Progressives are not hung up on retaining or reverting to an antique sense of ethnic, gendered or national purity. They don't romanticize some false sense of the securities of 1950s Americana. However, the American Dream as a concept was a focal point for progressives at Netroots Nation this year.

More pragmatically, progressives believe in labor unions and environmental justice over corporate profits, equality in free speech and education and valuing the dignity of all human beings. Although in the preceding years, Netroots Nation events have attracted Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Al Gore and other stalwarts of the Democratic Party, the perspective one gets from Free Speech TV’s makeshift studio in the lobby of the conference is one in which the Democratic Party is centrist, more aligned with the corporate and Republican agenda, more beholden to Washington lobbyists, more entrenched in political melodrama than progressives who, though technologically savvy, informed and vocal, are true outsiders.

There is the Congressional Progressive Caucus, with one senator, Bernie Sanders, and 70 or so representatives, but the view you get of progressives from Netroots is something closer
to the ground and grass than the overpasses of the Beltway. Here, real issues -- economic justice, the expiration of the Bush tax cuts and the Patriot Act, resistance to corporate consolidation of the media, the elimination of all types of discrimination, the end of troop deployments to the Middle East and healing the relationship between energy independence and ecology security -- are addressed at the time they need addressing.

Since progressives are rarely represented in Congress, they form a grassroots movement, hence the "roots" of Netroots Nation. But what about the "Net"? The progressive brand "Netroots," a conflation of internet and grassroots, describes a politically coordinated and technology-enabled public. It can be considered synonymous with the progressive blogosphere, the internet-activated public sphere. Netroots expressed the value of technoprogressivism - a promotion of the positive role of technology in achieving progressive political objectives that has its historic roots in 1960s computer and countercultural notions of techno-cultural change. Netroots activists believe in the power of networked technologies to bring together people in a space of reasoned, passionate public discourse that can lead to coordinated social change. Because of the disenfranchisement experienced by progressives, the internet and cable television outlets like Free Speech TV constitute the technological grounds for community and cultural change.

Despite progressive resistance to the neverlands of Americana and Manifest Destiny, they were openly engaging in a rebranding exercise of that most debatable of notions from our history -- the American Dream. In probably the most thrilling talk of the conference, Van Jones, Obama's onetime green jobs czar who was hunted down by the right-wing noise machine until he was forced to resign, re-introduced the slogan "Rebuild the Dream," that is, the American Dream: "I'm not talking about killing the American 'Fantasy,' OK? The American Fantasy: everybody's gonna be rich, you buy a lot of things, you'll be happy? No, that's an American fantasy, which means it's the American nightmare. That needs to go. We don't believe in that at all ... I'm talking about something much, much deeper than that. Something that we had in this country until the commercializers turned it into something else."

Boldly railing against the false happiness of consumer capitalism -- the cornerstone of economic liberalism -- otherwise known as the U.S. global economy, Jones goes onto a working-class definition of the American Dream he wants to rebuild: that you should be able to "walk out your front door, go to a dignified job, put in a good day's work and come back home with a paycheck that you can feed your family with and give your children a better life." . . . .

This email was sent to jbennet@uark.edu by leland@freespeech.org | Free Speech TV | PO Box 44099 | Denver | CO | 80201

LET'S NOT OVERLOOK "RADICAL"
**Z Magazine** identifies itself as Radical.

For example (March 2014, p. 2), its many projects “offer radical content in as many ways as possible.”

But their radical is not socialist or communist. Communist and socialist were extirpated from US political options after WWII by the systematic denigration of the idea of “left,” sometimes using police state tactics. We must never forget that all of these labels shifted rightward when the traditional radical parties were silenced. Before the communist and socialist parties were suppressed, liberal was centrist.

Another Way to Define Progressive is to Distinguish it from What It Is Not by Focusing on Individuals Who Consider Themselves Progressive [Books by their nature to do this. –Dick]

**Paul Krugman, The Pathetic Centrists**

Krugman writes: "So **progressive Democrats** have seized on an op-ed by the group Third Way - an op-ed attacking Elizabeth Warren and Bill de Blasio for their terrible, horrible economic populism - as a way to start reclaiming the party from the 'centrists.' And it's working: the centrists are very much on the run." [READ MORE](https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/17/opinion/paul-krugman-the-pathetic-centrists.html)

So here’s how the perspectives seem abstractly to line up: radical, progressive, liberal, conservative, right, far right. “Liberal,” like “communist” and “socialist” before it, has been so hammered and denigrated by the right that its adherents are changing names, “framing” themselves, as some rhetoricians would say, to appear more favorable to the public. --Dick

BUT ONE MORE, AN UNEXPECTED, PERSPECTIVE

**UU Principles and Practices: LIBERAL? PROGRESSIVE?**

**Dick Bennett** (December 29, 2002)

Today we honor the members of UU, that is, US, who practice their beliefs through positive actions.

You may be astonished to find Unitarian Universalism –that is US—in the pages of the magazine MOTHER JONES, but we are present in every issue. How that happens is as close as today’s and every Sunday service’s bulletin.

Look at the back of today’s program. Take a moment to read the seven-point covenant. We “affirm and promote”: dignity, justice, equity, compassion, spiritual growth, free inquiry, democracy, world community, peace, and liberty for all people and respect for all species and for the earth. An aspiring, soaring, breathtaking affirmation. The core of liberal values. One of the main reasons people join UU. But we not only affirm these principles, we promise to promote them, to take positive action.
But how do we do that? Well, Unitarian Universalism provides us with a very concrete guide. These are the “Resolutions and Resources” found in every UU office in the “Resolutions & Resources Handbook.” What are they? They are the Resolutions passed by the annual UU General Assemblies. Lyell and Marki Thompson have attended these assemblies for us, by the way, for several years. Each UU Fellowship has the opportunity to discuss them in advance and give its input.

At the General Assemblies, the UU covenant we affirm each Sunday is put into practice.


Economic justice? The GA passed resolution after resolution setting forth specific recommendations for reducing world hunger and controlling population—in 1966, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1983, and on and on. One of our members, by the way, Roald Peterson, spent his life trying to increase food for the world’s hungry. The GA also supported Cesar Chavez and the grape boycott in 1969 and the lettuce boycott in 1972, and other farm worker initiatives.

Rights and liberties? The free search for truth? In 1962 the GA defended the rights of teachers to their own ideals, and in 1967 it promoted freedom of dissent in all public facilities and in the communications media. In 1963 the GA urged all its members to organize classes on the Bill of Rights and to urge public and private schools to include such classes in their regular curricula.


Respect for the sanctity of all life and for the interdependent web of all existence? Ecology, environmental justice? Over and over the GA has defended the environment, setting forth specific recommendations to eliminate toxic substances and hazardous wastes and for protecting the biosphere. In 1997 the GA recommended 8 actions for the protection of earth, air, and water; for example, the use of renewable sources of energy and the use of public transportation.

But what about MOTHER JONES magazine? Well, it’s been here all the time, and I don’t mean just by the magazine’s actual existence. It’s been here on the cover of our Principles and Resolutions. Mother Jones, or Mary Harris Jones, was a union organizer and general hell raiser. She is supposed to have originated the slogan on the cover of our “Principles and Resolutions”: “Don’t Mourn, Organize.”

References:
The first essay, by Todd Gitlin, excoriates the Bush admin. for making "a long-building imperial tendency explicit and permanent" and for seeking and gaining "justification for easy recourse to war whenever and wherever an American president chooses." (Packer weighs in too: "The admin. wants to wage war on terrorism and still preserve all the privileges and injustices of a
The second essay, by George Packer, I will focus on for our purpose of defining a liberal, progressive program. Packer affirms these principles:

democracy, struggle against totalitarianism
individual liberty + human solidarity
world cooperation, the United Nations
international law, the UN
reduction/abolition of weapons of mass destruction in ALL countries
humanitarianism
toleration
economic justice
labor rights
environmental protections
checks on capital flow, privatization, and corporate power
prevention of wars via multilateralism of International Criminal Court, UN peacekeeping operations, and other UN agencies
reducing our dependence on oil
and more

Dick Bennett

AND DR. STRANGELOVE?

Subjects this complex are hard to end. First, “liberal” refers to a set of ideals but also the behavior—perhaps the true liberal versus the practicing conservative pretending to be liberal. Second, which follows from the first, “liberal” and Democrat are not synchronous.

And third, the UUs raise a question. Did you notice how little attention my other sources gave to liberalism and war? Perhaps that was because sometimes the Democrats have been as hot for war as the Republicans. List the over 40 invasions and interventions by the US since 1945 and count the ones under a Democratic and Republican. The historian William Blum wrote, “interventions are us.” J. William Fulbright denounced bi-partisan belligerence and bellicosity. And Democrats and Republicans were the object of the satire of Dr. Strangelove.
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Dick Bennett

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