

John Whiteclay Chambers II. *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. Second Edition. Pp. xiii, 333. Paper, \$14.00.

John Whiteclay Chambers II of Rutgers University offers a thoughtful overview of that great episode of national housecleaning known as the progressive movement. He does this by describing and explaining the various efforts to uplift American life between the catastrophic depression of the 1890s and the era of the Great War. Unlike some authors who cover a particular historical period, Chambers provides his own interpretation, one that is sensible and fully developed. Generally speaking, he argues that the progressive movement marked the birth of modern America. But more than that, he sees it as a time of the "new interventionists." A plethora of individuals and groups correctly concluded that it was necessary to modify America's mostly unrestricted individualism and its poorly regulated marketplace. This stimulus came not merely from the post-Civil War phenomenon of industrialization and urbanization but from conditions produced by those five troubled years of the mid-1890s. "During the Progressive Era the interventionist, reformist mood stemmed from the traumatic disruptions of the depression of the 1890s," writes Chambers, "which helped convince many Americans that industrialization would not automatically cure its own ills and that purposeful action was required."

What is so valuable about *The Tyranny of Change* is that it contains the best and most recent scholarship of the progressive period. Chambers has a firm grasp of the historical literature, including such monumental works as David P. Thelen's *The New Citizenship: Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885-1900* (1972) and Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (1988). So for either instructor or student, Chambers's book would provide a good overview of the period based on the leading historiography.

While *The Tyranny of Change* is not suited for introductory history students, it is appropriate for majors, advanced upper-division students, and graduate students. All groups will benefit from the concise bibliography. Although this section is hardly encyclopedic, it lists in an annotated format important works (articles and books) on a variety of topics.

Those individuals who cover the progressive movement in their American history survey or specialized courses will not only gain from Chambers's understanding of progressivism, but they will also benefit from some wonderful quotations and descriptive detail. Such materials can add to the attractiveness of anyone's lectures.

There are weaknesses to *The Tyranny of Change*, but they are minor. In the earliest parts, the narrative is poorly written, but then the over-all quality improves markedly. While it is difficult to consider *all* interpretations of a particular movement, Chambers would have profited had he incorporated the ideas presented by Albro Martin in his somewhat ignored study, *Enterprise Denied: Origins of the Decline of American Railroads, 1897-1917* (1971). Arguing that the political reformers ruined the railroad industry with unreasonable regulations, Martin sets out an excellent framework in which to examine carriers during the progressive era. But often such a conservative interpretation is slighted by scholars, particularly those who strive to be "politically correct."

Everyone who teaches American history for the decades of the 1890s through the 1910s should read *The Tyranny of Change*. The book holds considerable value for instructors and advanced students alike and is published in an attractive format.

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