

**Steven L. Piott. *American Reformers 1870-1920: Progressives in Word and Deed.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. Pp. 224. Paper, \$26.95; ISBN 0-7425-2763-8.**

This book is a collection of twelve biographical essays dealing with major figures of American social, political, and economic reform in the period 1870-1920. Arranged in chronological order and rooted in secondary sources, these essays include well-known reformers such as Lester Frank Ward, Jane Addams, and Walter Rauschenbusch, as well as lesser known reformers such as Charles W. Macune, Harvey W. Wiley, and John Randolph Haynes. In discussing the contributions made by these individuals, Piott transcends the traditional late nineteenth and early twentieth-century divisions between Populism and Progressivism; instead, he develops a comprehensive political and economic framework that not only underscores the excesses of industrial capitalism but also outlines a framework for amelioration. To this end, Piott identifies three commonalities among reformers.

The first of these is the belief that late nineteenth-century capitalist development did not benefit all Americans. The power and wealth of Big Business came at the expense of the urban working class, an unskilled labor force exploited by low wages and lack of government protection. High tariffs, land grants to railroads, and federal government willingness to use the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to thwart unionization reinforced the perception that the government served the wealthy. Farmers also struggled as the balance of economic and political power tipped to favor centralization and wealth. Expanding technology, rising productivity, and declining commodity prices often trapped growers in a cycle of poverty perpetuated by the crop lien and sharecropping systems.

No reformer believed these systemic problems were beyond amelioration; confidence in human resourcefulness and the emerging perspective of the period is the second commonality shared by all reformers. Even the most radical among them believed these excesses were a confluence of political, economic, and cultural factors that could and should be altered by concerned citizens. Finally, all of these reformers acknowledged the need for government intervention to readjust the balance of power in American society. Whether considering Charles W. Macune's agitation for the subtreasury plan or Alice Paul's campaign for woman suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment, all of these reformers defined government as part of the solution.

This text would be a useful addition to any introductory American history class as well as to any upper-level class dealing with nineteenth-century history. Written in a very straightforward style, the essays could be used individually. In taking a biographical approach to the contributions of each of these reformers, the essays put their work into a larger historical context that undergraduates often forget. People shaping nineteenth-century America were, in turn, shaped by the mid-century traumas of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Moreover, several of the essays highlight the ongoing controversies contemporary Americans confront on such issues as the efficacy

of the direct democracy and the desirability of the Equal Rights Amendment. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Americans are once again wrestling with questions of the viability of industrial capitalism and the role of government in American life. This text will help students put those questions into a valuable historical context.

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**Michael D. Gordin.** *Five Days in August: How World War II Became a Nuclear War.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007. Pp. 226. Cloth, \$24.95; ISBN-13: 978-0-691-12818-4.

This short book presents a reconsideration of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan in the last weeks of World War II. Given the considerable scholarship on the subject, it is difficult to find much new to say. Yet Michael Gordin, an assistant professor of history at Princeton University, does. As he notes, diplomatic, military, and scientific historians have explored the dropping of the atomic bomb in different ways and asked different questions. Historians of science focused on the creation of the weapon itself, while military historians examined its military utility and place in the United States' strategic bombing campaign. Like General Curtiss LeMay at the time, they often see the atomic bomb as simply an extension of the already destructive fire bombing of Japan. Diplomatic historians concentrated on the political reasons for the bomb's use, and many of them, particularly Gar Alperovitz, have probed the Truman administration's motivations for dropping the bomb, and suggested that the primary reason for its use was to demonstrate American military might on the eve of the Cold War.

Gordin unites these disparate approaches and corrects errors of both omission and commission in previous works. As he notes, the bombing of Hiroshima focused attention on the atomic bomb, but fire bombing raids against Japan continued. The last of these was an 800-bomber raid that arrived over Japan about the time Emperor Hirohito broadcast Japan's surrender on August 14. Contrary to what many scholars argue, Truman delegated the authority to drop the atomic bombs to field commanders, making the bombing of Nagasaki on August 9 a military rather than a political decision. Few military or political leaders expected the second bomb to end the war. They expected to drop several more and had a third bomb ready on August 15. Henry Stimson, one of the few politicians at the time who recognized the revolutionary nature of the bomb, actually expected it to shock the enemy into surrender. Even after Japan's surrender, American leaders feared a militarist coup by senior Japanese officers who would renew the war. Gordin reminds the reader that the surrender was not an instantaneous process, but a month-long sequence of events fraught with suspicion and potential violence.