

# Lecture 6: Democracy 1870-1914

**J. Bradford DeLong**

**Professor of Economics, U.C. Berkeley  
Research Associate, NBER**

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## **10.1: From Monarchy to Republic to Democracy**

James Madison was not enthusiastic about a *democracy*:

A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert result from the form of government itself; and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual. Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths. Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would, at the same time, be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions...

James Madison was enthusiastic about a *republic*. The people—that is, the male adult people, and not all of them—were to choose a small, select group of representatives who had the people’s values and well-being at heart but not their passions or their interests, and the representatives would then govern subject the procedural checks-and-balances that produced the complex orrery that is still the government of the United States. And, remember, it was not all of the adult male people who got to vote or, originally, were supposed to vote. From the very beginning of the Constitutional Convention, the qualifications required to vote for your representative in the House of Representatives were always “the same as those of the electors in the several states for their legislatures,” and the franchise qualification to vote for your state legislature could be as strict as any state’s decision process should wish—as long as it preserved “a republican form of government.”

In Britain on the eve of World War I less than half of adult males could vote for their representative in the House of Commons. In Germany the legislature for the dominant state of Prussia was chosen in a fashion that gave a third of votes to those who held the top third of the national wealth. And the United States of America did not attain universal suffrage until—well, until the late 1960s, after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Even then, consider Republican political activist William Rehnquist’s “ballot security” efforts in Arizona. According to Superior Court Judge Charles Hardy, Rehnquist and his assistants had set up a system by which:

every Black or Mexican person was being challenged... [as] a deliberate effort to slow down the voting... to cause people waiting their turn to vote to grow tired... and leave.... [H]andbills were distributed warning persons that if they were not properly qualified to vote they would be prosecuted...

William Rehnquist’s services were valued enough by Republican Richard Nixon to name him an assistant attorney general, and his services as assistant attorney general were valued enough for Richard Nixon to appoint him to the Supreme Court. And his services as justice were valued enough by Ronald Reagan to appoint him Chief Justice.

But even though one person-one vote had not by 1914 (and has not today) become an uncontested right, the principle of universal adult (male) suffrage as the touchstone of political legitimacy did make massive strides forward in the years up to World War I. What came to be called “social democracy” crept forward to become the dominant political position in the North Atlantic. It became accepted by the middle of the political spectrum that economic society would be primarily a market economy in which wealth was unequally distributed due to effort, skill, luck and choosing the right parents and in which wealth counted.

Only the socialist fringe and near-fringe on the left wanted the abolition of private property and the rational distribution of the social division of labor... well, by it was not clear what. That position was rejected by the rest of political society. But, equally, the view that existing inequalities were just and holy was equally restricted—this time to a right wing fringe and near fringe. Indeed, even the right-wing fringe and near-fringe was not unified. Some held that inequalities driven by inherited unequal ownership

of land and inherited marks of status were holy and just: they viewed inequalities emerging from the creative destruction and accumulation of the market with, at best, suspicion. But others viewed those same inherited and status inequalities with suspicion: the inequalities that were just, this other fraction tended to argue, were social-darwinist inequalities of wealth that showed that some had demonstrated greater fitness in an economic struggle for advantage if not survival.

That political society would be a realm in which each (male) individual's preferences counted equally in choosing the government, and that the government would then curb and control the economy in order to limit the influence of those whom Republican President Theodore Roosevelt called the "malefactors of great wealth" was a principle accepted by the middle. Only the left fringe that that the government should have a totalizing role—that all questions should be settled and all social life organized by a government in which one counted for one. Only the right fringe that that the government should play no role in limiting or curbing inequalities that arose out of inheritance and the market.

So over time the range of those who could vote and the importance of voting advanced. France was in one respect the leader. It first saw universal male suffrage in 1792—although effective suffrage of any kind was gone by the coronation of Napoleon in 1804 and did not return, save for a brief interval 1848-1851, until 1871. France was in other respects a great laggard: female suffrage did not come to France until the expulsion of the Vichy Nazi collaborationist regime in 1944. The first European land to offer universal suffrage was Finland in 1906, when it was the Grand Duchy of Finland with the Czar of Russia as its Grand Duke.

New Zealand has a somewhat better claim to be the leader in one person-one vote. Universal suffrage came to New Zealand in 1893. But even though women could vote you could not vote for women until they were granted eligibility to serve in New Zealand's parliament in 1919. And beforehand all Maori males over 21 could vote in New Zealand from 1867—but only European-descended males who had property could vote until 1879.

In Great Britain universal manhood suffrage came in 1918, when the suffrage was extended to all men and to women over 30. Adult women under 30 had to wait until 1928. 1928 thus saw the culmination of the long process that started in 1832 with the passage of the first Reform Act,

which nearly doubled the electorate from one in ten to one in five adult males and which eliminated such interesting electoral districts as Old Sarum. Old Sarum had no resident voters—the local landlord, the Earl of Caledon, chose the renters of the five houses whose tenants had the right to vote. He had paid £60,000 pounds for this “rotten borough” in 1802 when he bought it from the Pitt family. The 1867 Reform Act doubled the number of voters yet again; 1872 saw the secret ballot; 1883 imposed campaign spending limits; 1884 expanded the electorate to 3/5 of adult males; 1885 shifted parliamentary district boundaries in the direction of one man-one vote; and the Parliament Act of 1911 removed the power of the British House of Lords to do more than delay legislation—all before the Fourth Reform Act of 1918 which enfranchised all men over 21 and all women over 30 who owned or were married to men who owned property.

The expansion of the franchise, of course, mattered a lot. The 1846 repeal of the Corn Laws which put high tariffs on food imports is impossible to envision without the First Reform Act. So is the creation of the British social insurance state—although in 1870 it was still regarded as a bold leap when Britain established free universal public schools for children under ten. The rationale for that limited step was that of Robert Lowe, First Viscount Sherbrooke and a member of Lord Palmerston’s cabinet. The effect of the Reform Act of 1867 had been, he said, to make the richer segment of the working class the masters of the government, and “we must educate our masters”—not that he liked the Reform Bill especially:

This principle of [political and electoral] equality which you have taken to worship is a very jealous power; she cannot be worshipped by halves, and like the Turk in this respect she brooks no rival near the throne. When you get a democratic basis for your institutions, you must remember that you cannot look at that alone but you must look at it in reference to all your other institutions. When you have once taught the people to entertain the notion of the individual rights of every citizen to share in the Government, and the doctrine of popular supremacy, you impose on yourselves the task of re-modelling the whole of your institutions in reference to the principles that you have set up.... You must take education up the very first question, and you must press it on without delay for the peace of the country...

## **10.2: Mass Politics and Populism**

Once the people—the adult, male, white people that is—had the vote, what were they going to do with it?

The coming of (male) democracy in the North Atlantic was all mixed up with the coming of modern industry—the move out of agriculture and into industrial and service occupations—the coming of the modern city (the move from the farm to someplace more densely populated), and the coming of heightened within-nation income inequality.

America in 1776 was, if you were a native-born adult white male, a remarkably egalitarian country. The richest one percent of households owned perhaps fifteen percent of the total wealth in the economy—including the “human wealth” of their slaves in their share of property but not in the aggregate wealth total. (After all, a slave is valuable property to the slaveowner—but equally or rather more so unproperty, antiproperty, negative property to the slave: a slave society can easily have a minority owning more than 100% of the national wealth once this is taken into account.) A top one percent owning only some fifteen percent of wealth is a very low value for such a statistic: the United States today is somewhere north of 40% of wealth owned by the richest one percent of households.

Inequality among white males at least did not grow that much as America’s north began to industrialize in the years up through the Civil War—and the Emancipation Proclamation and the thirteenth amendment gave a substantial equalizing push to the economy. In the aftermath of the Civil War the top one percent of households appear to have held perhaps a quarter of the wealth of the country.

By 1900, however, the United States was as unequal an economy in relative terms as—well, as it was at the peak of the housing bubble. The United States had become the Gilded Age country of industrial princes and immigrants living in tenements of our political memory. On the one hand, Andrew Carnegie built the largest mansion in Newport, Rhode Island with gold water faucets. On the other hand, 146 largely-immigrant workers died in the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in Manhattan because the exits had been locked to keep workers from taking fabric out of the building in order to make their own clothes. Surveys and guesses suggest that in the first decade of the twentieth century the richest one percent of U.S. households held something like half percent of national wealth. Attempts to count the wealth of the merchant princes themselves reinforce the suspicion that the pre-World War I U.S. was more unequal than at any time before or since. John D. Rockefeller was some four times

richer relative to the wages of the average American of his day than William H. Gates is today. (And Rockefeller was some ten times richer relative to the total size of the U.S. economy.)

The country of immigrants and plutocrats was very different from a country of yeoman farmers (among, once again, native-born adult white guys: all the stuff about Americans pulling together to raise each others' barns and respect each others' claims ignore the fact that the first rule of property law was that no claim by a Mexican or an Amerindian need be respected—if they were then the heir of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo would be in the same position in California today that His Grace Gerald Grosvenor, 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Westminster is in Britain today.) For at its beginning the United States had been a land of yeoman farmers in its Founding Fathers' imaginations, and in large part in reality. How would things change when the society ceased to be one with a prosperous working and a broad middle class, and an elite made up of hard-working lawyers and merchants on the one hand and a few plutocratic slaveholders on the other? How would things work when the inheritors of land or resources or capital lorded it over everybody else—and bought politicians for small change? Alexis de Tocqueville, a keen-eyed commentator on American society in the first half of the nineteenth century and author of *Democracy in America*, had feared the growth of such a class of plutocrats, such an “aristocracy of manufacturers”:

The territorial aristocracy of past ages was obliged by law, or thought itself obliged by custom, to come to the help of its servants and relieve their distress. But the industrial aristocracy of our day, when it has impoverished and brutalized the men it uses, abandons them in time of crisis to public charity to feed them.... Between workman and master there are frequent relations but no true association. I think that, generally speaking, the manufacturing aristocracy which we see rising before our eyes is one of the hardest that have appeared on the earth...

In the United States the rising concentration of wealth during the pre-World War I era provoked a widespread feeling that something, somewhere had gone wrong with the country's development. Abraham Lincoln had thought he lived, and for the most part had lived, in an America in which:

the prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him...

Since the outcome in Lincoln's day was a largely middle-class society, Lincoln and his era:

[took] it that it is best for all to leave each man free to acquire property as fast as he can. Some will get wealthy. I don't believe in a law to prevent a man from getting rich; it would do more harm than good. So while we do not propose any war on capital, we do wish to allow the humblest man an equal chance to get rich with everybody else...

As Ray Ginger writes:

Lincoln... stood for an open society in which all men would have an equal chance.... "I am a living witness," he told a regiment of soldiers, "that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has."... From the Civil War to 1900, Abraham Lincoln dominated the visions of the good society which were being projected to exonerate the successful and to inspire the young.... But during those very decades... the social realities that had shaped the Lincoln ideal were being chipped away...

And he quotes a Chicago laborer:

"Land of opportunity," you say. You know well my children will be where I am—that is, if I can keep them out of the gutter...

Many of the prosperous (and many of the native-born not-so-prosperous) blamed foreigners for what was going wrong with America in the late nineteenth century: aliens born in China, Japan, Italy, Spain, Poland, and Russia who were incapable of speaking English, or understanding American values, or contributing to American society. And were probably genetically feeble-minded too, with children incapable of ever becoming smart and well-educated enough to be full partners in American civilization—especially the Chinese and the Jews. Don't laugh—that's what they argued, and that was one reason that if you were French or British you had an easy time fleeing Europe for America in the late 1930s on the eve of World War II but the gates were shut against you if you were Russo- or Polish- or even German-Jewish.

Many of the middle class, especially the farmers, blamed the rich, the easterners, and the bankers for what was going wrong with late nineteenth-century America. The Populists of the 1890s blamed the eastern bankers and the gold standard. The Progressives sought reforms to try to diminish the power of what they saw as a wealthy-would be aristocracy: the

“malefactors of great wealth” in Theodore Roosevelt’s words. But the Populists and the Progressives remained minority political currents in America until the coming of the Great Depression. In the meantime, the voters continued to narrowly elect Republican presidents—or that triangulating bastard Grover Cleveland—who were more-or-less satisfied with American economic and social developments, and who believed that “the business of America is business.” The Democrats who sought a more equal distribution of income and more action by the government to put its thumb on the scales of the market in the interest of greater equality failed to wield political power even though they had a solid lock on the votes of the south after the disenfranchisement of the 1870s and a pretty solid lock on the votes of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. The populist and progressive eras failed to make much of an impact on American policy before World War I—but the availability of the Populist and Progressive agendas made the shift in American politics in response to the Great Depression a generation later rapid and substantial. Every left-of-center initiative that had been proposed between 1885 and 1914 was dusted off and given a try in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal.

How did politics and economics interact at the bleeding edge—at the most-rapidly growing and industrializing place on the pre-World War I earth, in that era’s counterpart to today’s Shanghai, in Chicago?

In 1840, when the Illinois and Michigan canal opened connecting the Mississippi River with the Great Lakes, Chicago had a population of 4000. In 1871 Mrs. O’Leary’s cow burned down a third of the city. In 1885 Chicago built the world’s first steel-framed skyscraper. On May 1, 1886, the American Federation of Labor declared a general strike to win the eight-hour workday. On May 3, 400 police officers protecting the McCormick farm equipment factory and its strikebreakers opened fire on a crowd, killing six. The next day eight police officers were murdered by an anarchist bomb at a rally in protest of police violence and in support of the striking workers—and the police opened fire at the crowd and killed perhaps twenty civilians, largely immigrants, largely non-English speaking (nobody seems to have counted). A kangaroo court convicted eight innocent left-wing politicians and organizers of murder and five were hanged. In 1889 Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor asked the “Second International” to set aside May 1 every year as the day for a great annual international demonstration in support of the eight-hour workday and in memory of the victims of police violence in Chicago in 1886.

In 1893 the new Democratic Governor of Illinois, John Peter Altgeld, pardoned the three still-living “Haymarket Bombers,” saying that the real reason for the bombing was the out-of-control violence by the Pinkerton Security Company guards hired by McCormick and others. In 1894 That Triangulating Bastard Grover Cleveland used U.S. troops to break the Pullman strike centered in Chicago—over the protests of Altgeld, who pointed out that Art. IV §4 of the Constitution gives the power to the President to use troops inside states against domestic violence *only* “on application of the [state] legislature, or the executive (when the legislature cannot be convened), and that neither he nor the legislature had applied. That summer Cleveland persuaded Congress to make a national holiday in recognition of the place of labor in American society—not on the International Workers’ Day that was May 1 but a moveable feast on the first Monday in September instead.

John Peter Altgeld (December 30, 1847 – March 12, 1902): governor of Illinois from 1893 until 1897. Altgeld improved workplace safety and child labor laws, pardoned three of the men convicted of the Haymarket Affair, and, for a time, resisted calls to break up the Pullman strike with force. As governor, Altgeld spearheaded the nation's most stringent child labor and workplace safety laws, appointed women to important positions in the state government, and vastly increased state funding for education. Altgeld left home at age 16 to join the Union Army. In Chicago he founded a prosperous law firm and undertook a series of real estate development projects, most notably the 16-story Unity Building (1891).

By 1900 Chicago had a population of two million. 70 percent of its citizens had been born outside the United States.

Altgeld, Addams, Dewey, Veblen, Darrow, Dreiser, Debs, Louis Sullivan

### **10.3: Going Further? Socialism**

The idea of a market economy curbed by the government

## 10.4: The Shadow: Populist Nationalism as Social Darwinism

We read Norman Angell: We did not read Max Weber. Nationalism as social-darwinist doctrine:

Max Weber, "The National State and Economic Policy":

[W]e all consider the German character of the East as something that should be protected, and that the economic policy of the state should enter into the lists in its defense. Our state is a national state, and... we have a right to make this demand....

[T]he economic struggle between the nationalities follows its course even under the semblance of 'peace'. The German peasants and day-labourers of the East are not being pushed off the land in an open conflict by politically-superior opponents. Instead, they are getting the worst of it in the silent and dreary struggle of everyday economic existence, they are abandoning their homeland to a race which stands on a lower level, and moving towards a dark future in which they will sink without trace. There can be no truce even in the economic struggle for existence; only if one takes the semblance of peace for its reality can one believe that peace and prosperity will emerge for our successors at some time in the distant future. Certainly the vulgar conception of political economy is that it consists in working out recipes for making the world happy; the improvement of the 'balance of pleasure' in human existence is the sole purpose of our work that the vulgar conception can comprehend. However... [reality] prevents us from imagining that peace and happiness lie hidden in the lap of the future, it prevents us from believing that elbow-room in this earthly existence can be won in any way than through the hard struggle of human beings with each other....

The overwhelming majority of the fruits of the economic, social, and political endeavours of the present are garnered not by the generation now alive but by the generations of the future.... [T]here can... be no real work in political economy on the basis of optimistic dreams of happiness.... The question... is not 'how will human beings feel in the future' but 'how will they be'.... We do not want to train up feelings of well-being in people, but rather those characteristics we think constitute the greatness and nobility of our human nature....

The economic policy of a German state, and that standard of value adopted by a German economic theorist, can therefore be nothing other than a German policy and a German standard.... Our successors will not hold us responsible before history for the kind of economic organization we hand over to them, but rather for the amount of elbow-room we conquer for them in the world.... Processes of economic

development are in the final analysis also power struggles, and the ultimate and decisive interests at whose service economic policy must place itself are the interests of national power.... The science of political economy is a political science... a servant of politics... of the lasting political-power interests of the nation.... [F]or questions of German economic policy... the ultimate and decisive voice should be that of the economic and political interests of our nation's power, and the vehicle of that power, the German national state...

[http://books.google.com/books?id=WaV7Q35jy\\_AC&pg=PA128&lpg=PA128&dq=max+weber+%22vulgar+conception+of+political+economy%22&source=web&ots=sCHQNhK5qG&sig=ScmEe6\\_9HEO5XmtjjoaSijYZUy4#PPA129,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=WaV7Q35jy_AC&pg=PA128&lpg=PA128&dq=max+weber+%22vulgar+conception+of+political+economy%22&source=web&ots=sCHQNhK5qG&sig=ScmEe6_9HEO5XmtjjoaSijYZUy4#PPA129,M1)

- This is a pre-WWI German liberal
- This is a German talking about Poles—Konrad Adenauer: "A Prussian [an eastern German] is a Pole who has forgotten who his grandfather was..."
- World War I did not change Weber's mind...

Yet more:

In the outstanding works of our historical colleagues we find that today instead of telling us about the warlike deeds of our ancestors they dilate at length about "matriarchy," that monstrous notion, and force into a subordinate clause the victory of the Huns on the Catalaunian Plain...

But in 451 the Huns lost the Battle of Chalons to the Visigothic-Roman coalition led by Comes et Magister Utriusque Militae et Patricius Flavius Aetius [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Chalons...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Chalons...)

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