INTRODUCTION

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IT HAS BECOME CUSTOMARY in the United States to refer to the left of center in American politics as "liberal." This, however, is misleading because a liberal in the large sense, as Judith Shklar stressed, seeks, in the first place, "to secure the political conditions that are necessary for the exercise of personal freedom"[1]—a description that also fits many conservatives in America. In fact, what has reliably distinguished Left from Right in American politics for the past fifty years is a sense of priorities and an opinion about government's purpose. To be on the left has meant to give priority to the end of promoting progress—that is, expanding the domain of individual liberty, particularly in regard to privacy and personal autonomy, and developing a more equal, inclusive society. To be on the left has also meant believing that government has the means and the moral obligation to accomplish the task.

In their agreement over ends or goals, or of what progress consists, progressives in America today differ from their counterparts on the

1. Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in Nancy L. Rosenblum, ed., *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21.

right. Although conservatives in America—classical, libertarian, and neoconservative—make a priority of conserving goods that they believe are in danger of being lost or debased, they are nevertheless divided over which moral and political goods are most urgently in need of conservation. In contrast, contemporary progressives—whether they lean toward the center or further left, or whether they draw inspiration from the original Progressive Era reformers, the New Deal, the Great Society and the civil rights movement, or the cultural transformations of the 1960s—are principally divided over the means—the kinds of government action and the sorts of supplements or alternatives to government action—for achieving the progressive end around which they unite. Accordingly, this book focuses on the debates within the party of progress about how to promote it. This is in contrast to the book's companion volume, *Varieties of Conservatism in America*, which deals relatively little with party politics.

The contributors to this volume examine the varieties of progressivism in America from different perspectives and with different expertise. Two are journalists, two are professors of political science who specialize in political philosophy (one of whom served as Deputy Assistant for Domestic Policy to President Clinton), one is a law professor, and one is a sociologist and policy analyst. All think and write beyond their professional niches. Some are more descriptive in their chapters; some are more prescriptive. Although all proceed from a progressive point of view, no effort was made to achieve a common voice, impose a uniform terminology, or elaborate a shared view of American politics; instead, the varieties of voice, terminology, and view on display in this volume combine to give a better sense of the varieties of progressivism in America.

Part I deals with Old Democrats. To understand who they are, and the shape they gave to the modern Democratic Party, it is necessary, according to Ruy Teixeira, to return to the party's origins in the New Deal. The party's governing idea was straightforward: government should help the average person by regulating capitalism and

shielding the less advantaged from the vicissitudes of the market. Its worldview "had deep roots in an economy dominated by mass-production industries, [and] was politically based among the workers, overwhelmingly white, in those industries." Indeed, the Democratic Party became the party of the white working class and, through their support, the dominant party in America. But much has changed in the past eighty years. As manufacturing jobs in America decreased and the service sector grew, the size and influence of the Democrats' traditional blue collar constituency shrank. Moreover, many working-class members felt estranged by the cultural upheavals of the 1960s, along with the more strident side of the civil rights movement. They associated the attacks on the family and on the traditional virtues of hard work and self-restraint with the student uprisings, feminists, anti-war activists, consumer advocates, and environmentalists. And they believed they were asked to shoulder an unfair portion of the burden—high taxes to support welfare reform and the turbulence of forced integration of their schools—of achieving social justice.

The initial response of the Old Democrats to the changes over the years was to maintain their commitment to New Deal welfare state policies while opening their party to a diversity of left-wing voices and policies. The white working class, however, refused to go along, resulting in George McGovern's massive defeat in 1972, Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, and Reagan's landslide re-election in 1984. In response, the New Democrats arose to reform the party, to persuade it to shed its image as captive to the idea of "big government" and the programs of "tax-and-spend liberalism," and to craft a message more congenial to middle-class interests and values. It fell to Bill Clinton to adapt the New Democrat message to electoral realities. In fact, contends Teixeira, this adaptation involved a synthesis of New Democrat solicitude for the upwardly mobile middle class and Old Democrat devotion to ambitious government programs aimed at the less well-off. Gore's defeat in 2000, in Teixeira's view, was not a consequence of the fragility of the Clinton synthesis but

rather a reflection of the candidate's unfortunate limitations. According to Teixeira, neither should one be misled by the war on terror. Although the war has delayed the formation of what he has argued is an emerging progressive majority, the task for progressives, he believes, is clear: they must remain true to their roots by defending the common man and woman against big corporations and the very wealthy while keeping up with the changing composition of their constituency by reaching out to minorities and to the college-educated professionals in America's large urban centers.

Thomas Edsall is largely in agreement with Teixeira about the origins of modern progressive liberalism in the New Deal and its development over the past seventy-five years, but he poses in stark terms the electoral challenge that the progressive coalition in America now faces. It no longer rests on the overwhelmingly male world of organized labor. Instead, Edsall bluntly writes, it consists, on the one hand, of "an alliance of the so-called subdominant, who are joined by the shared goal of seeking a haven from market pressures as well as insulation from majoritarian moral and social norms that are often experienced as discriminatory." On the other hand, it includes the growing legions of highly educated voters, typically working in professions that require advanced degrees and centered in major metropolitan areas. The new Democratic professional class wants a party that reflects its devotion to "a range of recently democratized rights centered on autonomy, self-development, and individualism."

It was its successes, argues Edsall, that account, in large measure, for the progressive coalition's dramatic transformation. The very policies and social reforms their party championed propelled the working class "have-nots," the original mainstay of the coalition, into the comfortable middle class, thus making them "haves." Edsall agrees with Teixeira that as the 1960s and 1970s unfolded, working-class Democrats found themselves increasingly at odds with the party's intensifying focus on race, reproductive rights, criminal defendant rights, welfare rights, and anti–Vietnam War protests, as well as unhappy

with the growing tax burden their party supported, in particular for programs that they believed were taking away their jobs. They also saw their schools disrupted by forced integration while upper-middle-class whites who vigorously supported these policies remained untouched by their dislocating effects. The tensions have persisted. Today, the progressive coalition combines "a socially liberal, well-educated, secular Left leadership cohort, aligned with racial minorities . . . and other previously marginalized groups." This mix of progressive constituencies, Edsall suggests, gives rise to two big questions: Can the coalition hold? And can a movement continue to be considered progressive if it increasingly abandons the aim of representing working-class voters?

Part II explores the contribution of New Democrats. William Galston identifies several forces that fueled the movement's rise: interparty competition in the wake of repeated defeats in presidential elections, the transformation of the American economy from industrial to postindustrial, and the introduction of new ideas by members of the party elite. But Galston, who played important roles in the story he tells—as issues director to Walter Mondale in the 1984 campaign; as a founding member of the Democratic Leadership Council, the flagship organization of the New Democrats; and as Deputy Assistant for Domestic Policy to President Clinton—maintains that the formulation of new ideas was the biggest factor in the success of the New Democrats. Indeed, in 1989, along with Elaine Kamarck, Galston coauthored "The Politics of Evasion," a manifesto that laid out general themes—in opposition both to Reagan-style conservatism and to the left-liberalism of its own party—that would come to define the New Democrats' governing agenda. Galston and Kamarck proceeded from observations about the growing importance of personal independence, the increase in middle-class mobility, and the need for market-based solutions to progressive challenges. From there, they argued for equal opportunity, as opposed to both unregulated competition and equal outcomes. They favored reciprocal responsibility

between the individual and the state in contrast, on the one hand, to a regime of pure individualism and, on the other, to a regime of lavish entitlements. And they affirmed the importance of community as an alternative to promoting morals through the law and to ignoring morals and attending only to claims about rights.

Out of these observations and themes, the New Democrats developed a variety of policies. They supported fiscal discipline, calling for cuts in government programs and for the closing of corporate tax loopholes. They emphasized education and training. They favored a dramatic expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit. They sought to align social programs with middle-class values through market-based health care reform, welfare reform, increases to the size of police forces, and a program of voluntary national service. They called for a shift in foreign policy, arguing that American diplomacy and America's armed forces should serve not only our conventional national security interests but also our democratic ideals. Galston credits President Clinton with several successes in translating New Democrat policy into practice: deficit reduction; free trade promotion (by presiding over passage of NAFTA and a round of GATT negotiations); and, over the strenuous objections of many in his party, welfare reform in 1996. Galston also blames the president and his scandal-ridden second term for squandering a golden opportunity to consolidate New Democrat gains. Although they remain a major source of progressive ideas in the post-Clinton era, the New Democrats continue to fail, Galston observes with regret, to achieve grassroots support for their visions of progress.

Franklin Foer begins his analysis with the heady sense of triumphalism that the New Democrats displayed in the summer of 2000 at the national convention that nominated Al Gore and Joe Lieberman. In the wake of Howard Dean's ascent in the 2003 primary campaign and Lieberman's failure to gain traction, much less inspire enthusiasm, that heady moment seems ancient history. What explains the rapid descent into malaise? As Edsall contended in regard to the

Old Democrats, so Foer maintains about New Democrats—their success brought about their downfall. Having effectively pushed their party, under Clinton's leadership, to embrace middle-class values, pursue fiscal restraint, and recognize the value of community, religion, and patriotism, they left themselves, after Gore's defeat, without a coherent purpose and their party without an urgent need for them.

To be sure, maintains Foer, progressives are united in many policy areas. In economics, all wings of the party recognize the importance of fiscal restraint. On affirmative action, the New Democrat critics and the Old Democrat proponents have largely accepted the status quo. And on the question of old-fashioned Democratic populism, the New Democrats in campaign 2004, according to Foer, have moved a few steps to the left, criticizing corporations, free trade, and the Bush administration for policies they believe tilt decidedly toward the wealthy and the extremely wealthy. In the wake of the war on terror, however, a genuine divide has emerged on the question of foreign policy. Foer worries that, just as the dovish, multilateralist side of the party has found its voice, the New Democrats have fallen silent about the need for a vigorous defense abroad of both America's interests and ideals. However, in harmony with Galston he believes that the most important challenge for the New Democrats is to move beyond the world of Washington think tanks and Georgetown dinner parties, where they are most comfortable, and develop a broader constituency for a program of progressive reform built on middle-class values and the realities of the postindustrial economy.

Part III assesses the future of progressivism in America. David Cole asks what a progressive lawyer can do when progressives do not control any of the three branches of government. Progressives are still adjusting. The heyday of progressive lawyers ran from about 1953 to 1986, from the Warren court through the Burger court. For more than three decades, the Supreme Court acted as a significant force for social change, handing down such landmark decisions as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, declaring segregation in public schools ille-

gal), *Gideon v. Wainright* (1963, extending the right to a lawyer, paid for by the state, to all indigent persons under interrogation or indictment in the criminal system), *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966, requiring that police inform accused of their rights), *Roe v. Wade* (1973, holding that the constitution protects a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy), *Craig v. Boren* (1976, declaring sex discrimination presumptively invalid), and *Bakke v. Regents of California* (1978, upholding the constitutionality of using race as a factor in university admissions). The election of Ronald Reagan, argues Cole, changed all that. Reagan made a political issue of federal judicial appointments, attacking judicial activism and placing hundreds of conservatives on the bench. The first President Bush continued the work. Today, progressives face not only a judiciary that is less sympathetic to the use of the courts for progressive reform but also, as a result of progressive achievements over the past fifty years, a range of more systemic and less soluble problems.

In response, maintains Cole, progressives have shifted substantive commitments and tactics. First, they have largely abandoned the ambitious demand that courts recognize "affirmative rights"—that is, enforceable obligations on the part of government to provide social and economic benefits so that citizens can effectively exercise their basic rights. Instead, progressives have stressed the more limited claim that courts should ensure that rights enjoyed by some should be enjoyed equally by all. Second, they have adopted utilitarian arguments in favor of rights they believe are essential for respecting human dignity. So, they argue, the right to a decent level of material goods and the right to education should also be supported because they benefit society as a whole. Third, they have begun to look beyond federal courts by taking their arguments for progressive reform to the political branches of government, to state courts, or directly to the people. In keeping with this refocus, they have come to see lawsuits that they do bring in federal courts not as self-contained interventions but as one front in a concerted effort to educate and mobilize the

public. Fourth, they have looked outward to international law, universal human rights, and other nations' constitutions as the basis for legal arguments to effect change in U.S. courts. In sum, Cole believes that progressive lawyers in America have advanced their cause by refining their understanding of the factors affecting, and the trade-offs inherent, in progressive reform.

Jeffrey Isaac concludes the volume with a reassessment of the overall prospects of progressivism in America. Like Cole, Isaac presents a chastened prognosis. Contrary to the hopes for a progressive revival that were developed by a number of influential authors in the mid-1990s, as well as to those hopes that received expression in books published after George W. Bush became president, which argued that his election was an anomaly and that demographic, cultural, and economic trends point toward a new progressive hegemony, Isaac sees a political climate that is inhospitable to dramatic progressive change. It's not that Isaac believes that conservatism in America is on the ascendance. Rather, Isaac argues that features of contemporary America that he calls postmodern are thwarting the consolidation of a progressive coalition. Among the most notable of these features are a "'post-Fordist' economy characterized by extreme forms of flexibility and mobility that defy regulatory mechanisms and that severely test the capacities of the nation-state; new forms of consumerism and consumer credit that severely weaken the 'organic solidarities' that in the past grounded oppositional social and political movements; and especially new forms of communication . . . that profoundly call into question the progressive assumption of any kind of rational public or meaningful public discourse about public problems and their solution." The result is that American society has become inhospitable to large-scale political movements, however much progressives may believe that the claims of equality demand them.

What is the best progressive response? Isaac examines a variety of writings that, over the past decade or so, have emphasized the role that civil society and its voluntary organizations can play in the

advancement of generally progressive ends. He is largely in agreement with proponents of "the new citizenship" and "the third way" that "an ambitious agenda of political reform and socioeconomic regulation is unlikely to be enacted; thus, more modest and localized efforts represent the best hope for a left-liberal politics of democratic problem solving and public regulation." Yet even as he affirms that this chastened approach has much to recommend itself under current circumstances, he insists that progressives must acknowledge its disadvantages from a progressive point of view. Indeed, he goes so far as to characterize the gap that has opened between the pursuit of progressive ends and the viability of mobilizing majorities on their behalf as the "tragedy" of progressive liberalism. But he still insists on the moral and political imperative to search out opportunities to promote progress through the pragmatic, piecemeal initiatives now available.

The debate among progressives about the most suitable means for the promotion of progressive ends persists. The choice depends on shifting coalitions; political leadership; developments in culture, economics, demography, and technology; and unforeseeable actions and events beyond our borders. It is unlikely, though, that progressives can afford to confine themselves to contending with this complex of factors. There is no reason to suppose either that progress has no costs or that progress does not depend on dimensions of moral and political life to which conservatives give particular attention and for which they acquire special expertise. It may well be that progressives need conservatives—just as conservatives need progressives—not only to keep them honest and energetic, but also to keep them apprized of those human goods that they have less practice in recognizing and honoring. Certainly such a lesson is taught by that larger liberalism that orients, spurs, and restrains the varieties of progressivism, as well as the varieties of conservatism, in America.