



Anti-democracy college An outline of the corporatist culture of organized social machinery and the leadership of the land-grant agricultural colleges in the progressive era
by Gordon Gary Scoville

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University
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Abstract:

The Morrill Act of 1862 established a national system of land-grant colleges and universities. Generations of scholars have viewed these institutions as democratic because the schools supposedly diffused opportunity to realize the traditional liberal principle of individual freedom for self-determination. Through an analysis of the leaders - presidents, deans, and directors - of the land-grant agricultural subdivisions in the "progressive" era, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine whether the leadership's completion in that period of a tripartite organization of resident instruction, research, and extension accorded with democracy.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony guided the examination. This idea refers to a cultural process of practicing principles in such a way as to form class alliances that secure popular consent to a dominant politics. Use of the historical method of "internal criticism" established the credibility of primary material that entered a dialogic encounter with the Gramscian conception, which provided a provisional explanation of the original documents.

The results of the dialogue show the tripartite structure as a class alliance embodying the Newtonian world machine as a business corporation based on corporatist principles of centralized authority, priority of office over individual, and fragmented functions. Agricultural college leaders helped convey specific forms of organized corporatism to farming people. Corporatism consisted of organization that supplanted popular reconstruction of society with central coordination of mass objectives as the fragmented pursuit of single-issue interests. In the countryside, this conveyance sought to reproduce elements of the organizational design exemplified by the tripartite arrangement, and thus aimed to secure consent to a dominant politics of corporate liberalism that shifted liberal agency from individuals to centrally coordinated groups.

The study concludes that collegiate participation in and support of this rising mode of political dominance took form in assistance in constructing a "corporatist culture of organized social machinery" -- the extension of corporatist principles and practices in a society that the college leadership imagined to be a machine. This diffusion constituted an anti-democratic denial of the individual and popular capacity to determine their societal destiny.

ANTI-DEMOCRACY'S COLLEGE: AN OUTLINE OF THE CORPORATIST
CULTURE OF ORGANIZED SOCIAL MACHINERY AND THE
LEADERSHIP OF THE LAND-GRANT AGRICULTURAL
COLLEGES IN THE "PROGRESSIVE" ERA

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This thesis has been read by each member of the graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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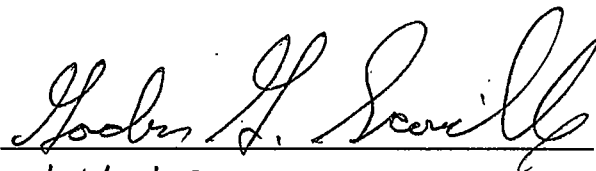
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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations of convention proceedings and government documents are used in the endnotes.

- (1) AAACES, Proc. Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations, Proceedings.
- (2) AAFIW, Proc. American Association of Farmers' Institute Workers, Proceedings.
- (3) Editorial, ESR, Editorial, Experiment Station Record, United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Experiment Stations.
- (4) OES, Report Bulletin, Circular United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Experiment Stations, Annual Report.
- (5) SPAS, Proc. Society for the Promotion of Agricultural Science, Proceedings.
- (6) USDA, Year. United States Department of Agriculture, Yearbook.

ABSTRACT

The Morrill Act of 1862 established a national system of land-grant colleges and universities. Generations of scholars have viewed these institutions as democratic because the schools supposedly diffused opportunity to realize the traditional liberal principle of individual freedom for self-determination. Through an analysis of the leaders -- presidents, deans, and directors -- of the land-grant agricultural subdivisions in the "progressive" era, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine whether the leadership's completion in that period of a tripartite organization of resident instruction, research, and extension accorded with democracy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The General Theme of the Study: From Liberalism
to Corporate Liberalism

The Morrill Act of 1862 authored a national system of land-grant institutions of higher education. The Hatch Act of 1887 and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 nationalized research and extension work as integral parts of a tripartite mission wherein the leaders of the collegiate subdivisions of agriculture in these schools conducted resident instruction, experiment station investigation, and off-campus diffusion. Both contemporaries and later scholars assumed that the triune production, transmission, and suffusion of knowledge constituted the democratization of higher learning, the popularization of what had once been the privileged domain of a few. This dissertation principally asks if that assumption accurately conveys the meaning of the conduct of those leaders. At the same time, the far-ranging subject of this study, which provides context for its specific focus on the leadership of the land-grant agricultural colleges, is an examination of the development of democracy during the "progressive" era of American history, encompassing the years from the turn of the twentieth century to World War I.¹ This introductory chapter will establish the concepts and methodology for the exploration of the special and contextual topics of the thesis.

The issue of politics is central to these subjects. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis speak of political matters in terms of the "socially consequential exercise of power" as a determining process that proceeds in all spheres of a society, and which impels some to seek a destiny defined by others. Rather than accept the common assumption that confines the field of political action to governmental policies regarding the distribution of the economic surplus, they encourage that it be viewed as inclusive of multifaceted activity in which all social practices are implicated. For example, when schools and families convey knowledge and norms that bear on individual life prospects, they are partaking in a substantial determination of human destiny that is political in nature. For Bowles and Gintis, this determination is democratic when it fixes on an organization of power, of politics, that engenders the maximum feasible popular liberty to have voice in the decisions that shape living conditions. Of course, not everything in society can be reduced to political dynamics, but nothing can be understood apart from them. Thus, Bowles and Gintis offer a politically derived criterion for the analysis of a society: "All social arenas, then, are susceptible to a common set of normative principles and can be analyzed in terms of the differential manner in which they organize the range of human practices."² These principles and their varying practice are the material of politics as they define human destiny. Both can be specified by considering the dominant modes of political organization in America at the turn of the twentieth century.

that meant uniting with many of those comprising a complex configuration of administrators, scientists, teachers, engineers -- professional intellectuals, who represented a rising "New Class" of support personnel for the emerging bureaucratic order.¹¹

Corporatist principles. How could a collectivist system, the opposite of its individualist predecessor, still be thought of as "liberal?" The retention of this name points to the incorporation of traditional values into the new society on the basis of "corporatist" principles: centralization of authority or legitimate power, priority of institutional office over individual, fragmentation of functions, and the extension of these principles as a foundation for the organization of the American social whole.¹²

Individual freedom was increasingly relocated. Instead of finding expression through autonomy apart from large-scale organizations, its exercise was channeled into the officially coordinated, functional activities of particular institutions -- relative autonomy within bureaucracy rather than independent of it. Befitting the rising priority on office and organization, and although Americans continued to think of themselves in individualistic terms, actual liberal agency was shifting from individuals to groups. The spread of corporatist principles signaled that Americans were finishing their excursion to the frontier and were being guided toward a future as joiners.

*relocation
of indiv.
freedom
under new
liberal
regime*

Organized corporatism. Business leaders and their New-Class allies wished for the nation's populace to transcend their localist heritage and embrace a nationalism that aimed for an integrated society composed of organizations that

Liberalism

Ceaseless economic growth as a sign of unlimited progress, unfettered productive power, the earthy wisdom of the common-sense practicality of the "average man," opportunity for individual geographic and social mobility, useful knowledge acquired through ingenuity and inventiveness, Horatio Alger's climb from rags to riches, faith in self-help, decentralized or localist governmental authority, the inviolable freedom of the market -- all of these, and more besides, constituted a constellation of assumptions that for much of their history many Americans received as the normative principles and teleological ideals of a properly organized "liberal society."³

Turn 9
The
Century

As we shall see in ensuing chapters, the practice of them formed the politics of liberalism. Yet, rather than signal the existence in the American past of a homogeneous political tradition, liberalism moved in several intellectual currents and turned in multiple directions. The *laissez-faire* competition of Social Darwinism was not equivalent to Jefferson's family-farm agrarianism. Enlightenment rationalism was not identical with the self-made ethic upheld in Jacksonian rhetoric. The conception of a natural right to property did not always square with egalitarian aspirations for personal rights to greater self-determination.⁴

Social unity amid these discordant traditions depended on a common desire for individual freedom from external constraint and on a shared yearning for liberty to realize the highest possible self-improvement and autonomous self-government. This libertarian quest ideally would be available to all who did not infringe on the right of others to participate in it.⁵ According to the liberal view,

if conceived of as a wide-open marketplace imbued with Lockian limitations on governmental interference, then American society could become a free world.⁶

Broadcast from press, pulpit, and schoolroom, by the middle third of the nineteenth century the Jacksonian ideology of self-help was in ascendancy over all other contemporaneous liberal expressions. Richard Hofstadter has noted both its traditional middle-class authorship and its embodiment in the person of Abraham Lincoln.

Thoroughly middle-class in his [Lincoln's] ideas, he spoke for those millions of Americans who had begun their lives as hired workers -- as farm hands, clerks, teachers, mechanics, flatboat men, and rail-splitters -- and had passed into the ranks of landed farmers, prosperous grocers, lawyers, merchants, physicians, and politicians. Theirs were the traditional ideals of the Protestant ethic: hard work, frugality, temperance, and a touch of ability applied long and hard enough would lift a man into the propertied or professional class and give him independence and respect if not wealth and prestige. Failure to rise in the economic scale was generally viewed as a fault in the individual, not in society. . . .

This conception of the competitive world was by no means so inaccurate in Lincoln's day as it has long since become; neither was it so conservative as time has made it. It was the legitimate inheritance of Jacksonian democracy. It was the belief not only of those who had arrived but also of those who were pushing their way to the top. If it was intensely and at times inhumanly individualistic, it also defied aristocracy and class distinction. Lincoln's life was a dramatization of it in the sphere of politics as, say, Carnegie's was in business.⁷

By the early twentieth century, one did not need to presume a golden age of the liberal past in order to recognize that during the antebellum years the prevalence of owner or partner-managed firms had provided a relatively hospitable environment for liberal hopes.⁸ A small-scale entrepreneurial or proprietary

capitalism had furnished a basis upon which ideals of decentralized authority and individual freedom could be verified by actual economic experience. But such confirmation was increasingly undermined by the early twentieth century.

Corporate Liberalism

That erosion was produced by the rise of the business corporation. Initiated by its industrial and financial leaders in the upper middle class, the corporation represented a new form of capitalism, a collectivizing of private property into large-scale organization that provided for the centralized control of processes of supply, production, and distribution.⁹ It likewise created the reconstruction of the nation's politics. Efforts of political reconstruction were prompted by the growing reality that economic experience increasingly invalidated traditional liberal principles of decentralization and individualism.

The dominant response to the invalidation was "corporate liberal." Scholars have disputed what this concept means,¹⁰ but it can be understood as a designation for the politics that began to construct a collectivized social order compatible with corporate capitalism. Regulatory and other bureaucracies were built to operate like corporations and to preserve their scale of activity. Functionally specific groups were organized with aims that fell short of challenging corporate power. Technical experts, possessing advanced training from institutions of higher education, supplied the managerial skills to enable the new organizations to work smoothly. Corporate liberal society was formed principally through an alliance of business leaders with an expanding administrative state apparatus. When business leadership allied with this state, in concrete terms

