

Reinventing "The People"



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In this much needed comprehensive study of the Progressive movement, its reformers, their ideology, and the social circumstances they tried to change, Shelton Stromquist contends that the persistence of class conflict in America challenged the very defining feature of Progressivism: its promise of social harmony through democratic renewal. Profiling the movement's work in diverse arenas of social reform, politics, labour regulation and "race improvement," Stromquist argues that while progressive reformers may have emphasized different programs, they crafted a common language of social reconciliation in which an imagined civic community ("the People") would transcend parochial class and political loyalties. As progressive reformers sought to reinvent a society in which class had no enduring place, they also marginalized new immigrants and African Americans as being unprepared for civic responsibilities. In so doing, Stromquist argues that Progressives laid the foundation for twentieth-century liberals' inability to see their world in class terms and to conceive of social remedies that might alter the structures of class power.

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