

## Must-Reads

# Must Read 26.01: Richard John on Academics, Chroniclers, and the Writing of Political History

Grant Madsen • 01/26/2026 **Blog Post**

“Academics, Chroniclers, and the Writing of Political History”

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*In June 2025, at the request of the eminent historian of U.S. institutions Donald T. Critchlow, I participated in a plenary session at the biennial meeting of the Policy History Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina.<sup>[1]</sup> The topic of our panel was “Does Political History Have a Future?” My contribution to this forum is below. It has been revised to make it suitable for publication. My angle of vision is that of a historian of the United States who continues to believe in the Enlightenment ideals that have inspired the nation’s democratic experiment at a moment in the history of the republic in which these ideals have been challenged by the course of events and the pronouncements of elected officials.<sup>[2]</sup>*

The provocative question that I was invited to address—“Does Political History Have a Future?”—had been framed to focus the panelists’ attention on the possibility that the writing of political history might cease to be undertaken by faculty members based in the nation’s colleges and universities. Firmly convinced that historians make poor prophets, I will parry this question and instead consider how two groups—who I will call academics and chroniclers—have written the political history of the United States in the past hundred years and how they might learn from each other to improve their craft. (I am not concerned in this essay with movies, documentary films, or museum exhibits, though, of course, these genres can also be important forums for political history.)

Since the early twentieth century, much of the most trenchant political history published about the United States has been written by *academics* employed by colleges and universities in departments of history and political science and by *chroniclers* who, while often closely associated with academics, make their living in whole or in part from the royalties that they obtain from publishers for the books and articles that they write on historical topics.

The distinction between academics and chroniclers, of course, is somewhat arbitrary, since academics also tell stories and chroniclers can and often do contribute to academic inquiry. Yet, in practice, it is not hard to figure out who falls into which category. Academics teach for a living, often in institutions that offer them permanent lifetime employment. Chroniclers, if they are successful, write for a living, which they sometimes supplement by lecturing or even speechwriting. Academics orient themselves toward their academic peers and their eighteen-to-twenty-one-year-old students, while chroniclers try to meet the expectations of their editors and hold the attention of their readers. The audience for the books that academics publish is typically quite small: the print run for most university press monographs is around 300 copies. The audience for the books that chroniclers publish is often considerably larger and can reach beyond the tens of thousands or even more.<sup>[3]</sup>

Political history has the potential to foster a collective sense of belonging, hold powerful individuals and institutions to account, and provide a vision of a better future. Yet it can also reveal relationships that might otherwise remain hidden or even repressed. Academics can learn from chroniclers how to craft compelling narratives that center individuals and groups without marginalizing institutional arrangements. Chroniclers, for their part, can learn from academics the value of locating stories in a broad historical context.

Academics who write about the political history of the United States mostly teach in departments of history or political science. Chroniclers fall into one of two general categories: *journalists* and *biographers*. Journalists range across the ideological spectrum from Kevin Phillips and Michael Lind to Isabel Wilkerson and Nikole Hannah-Jones. Biographers include chroniclers as diverse as Ron Chernow, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Stacy Schiff, David McCullough, and Kai Bird. Several influential authors who have written widely on topics in U. S. political history defy easy categorization—among them Jill Lepore, Sean Wilentz, Michael Kazin, Wilfred M. McClay, and Howard Zinn.

Many projects that appeal to academics would be anathema to chroniclers and vice versa. Academics once wrote about military affairs; recently, this branch of political history has been almost entirely taken over by chroniclers. When, for example, filmmaker Ken Burns needed an expert in military history to feature in his recent multipart documentary on the American Revolution, he turned not to the academy, but to the prolific journalist-turned-historian Rick Atkinson. Non-academics, in contrast, rarely publish textbooks, though this has not always been true. In 1930, for example, Charles A. Beard published an authoritative classroom-ready primer on the operations of the U. S. federal government. Though Beard had been trained as an academic, he left his position at Columbia University during the First World War to reinvent himself as a professional writer (more on him below).

Academics and chroniclers approach the writing of political history with different priorities. Academics incline toward manageable researchable topics that can survive the gauntlet of peer review. If they are in a history department, they are expected to undertake research in multiple archives and to publish their findings in a book-length monograph aimed not only at specialists but also at that proverbial will o' the wisp, the general reader. If they are in a political science department they are trained to prioritize methodological rigor—whether in quantification, political theory, or the subfield known as American Political Development (APD)—and are encouraged to write in a style that will garner them citations in highly ranked journals. Political history written by academic historians evokes the distinctiveness of a specific place and time; political history written by academic political scientists advances a theory in the expectation that it might be exportable to other times and places.

Chroniclers, even if mindful of the sting of academic disapproval, harbor fewer misgivings about unabashedly choosing topics with a mass market readership in mind. This is particularly true for those chroniclers who rely for a living on the royalties that they receive from the sales of their publications. In reality, to be sure, the situation is more complicated. Chroniclers do not always obtain the financial return that they seek, while academics can attain vast audiences. Consider, for example, the daily newsletter—“Letters from an American”—that is published online by Boston College history professor Heather Cox Richardson.<sup>[4]</sup> Richardson’s newsletter currently has over 2.7 million subscribers, an astonishing total for a publication that provides detailed, historically informed commentary on current events.

Richardson’s project has garnered her renown, but also criticism. This is to be expected, since she presents herself in her newsletter as a leader of a grassroots

social movement to raise the consciousness of the electorate.<sup>[5]</sup> In so doing she has become what critics of this kind of politically charged academic-history-writing have labeled a “resistance historian,” a term that gained wide currency during the Biden administration to describe academics who mobilized their historical expertise to make sweeping pronouncements about national affairs.<sup>[6]</sup>

Speaking truth to power, of course, has long been an academic ideal. Yet even among professors who enjoy the protection of tenure, it has often been pursued most effectively by individuals who have chosen to write for a living. Consider, for example, the early twentieth-century polymath Charles A. Beard. A history Ph.D. who taught briefly at Columbia University, Beard was much admired by his peers not only in history but also in political science. He has the distinction, for example, of being one of the few individuals to have been elected to the presidency of both the American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association. Following his resignation from Columbia University during the First World War, Beard remade himself as a highly successful professional writer. In a succession of influential monographs, textbooks, and interpretative essays, Beard, sometimes in collaboration with his wife Mary or his son William, popularized a resolutely progressive nationalist political narrative that lauded technical advance, hailed public administrators, and envisioned the coming of a “workers’ republic.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Beard’s success as a professional writer, or what we today might call a public intellectual, opened the way for successors, such as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., whose “vital center” liberalism shaped his laudatory accounts of the presidential administrations of Andrew Jackson and Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>[8]</sup> Schlesinger is the rare academic who strove to break free of the confines of the classroom. Though he long taught in history departments, he regarded himself primarily as a writer who crafted personality-driven accounts of high politics: the 1830s became the “Age of Jackson,” the 1930s the “Age of Roosevelt.” Schlesinger’s bravura political portraits did not always win the approval of his history department colleagues. The “presidential synthesis,” as Thomas C. Cochran would disparagingly dismiss narrative political history in 1948, lacked the “social realism” to address the multitude of “spiritual and material problems” with which an “important academic discipline” that employed many thousand practitioners should be expected to engage.<sup>[9]</sup>

Cochran’s critique pointed toward the future, at least among political historians within the academy. In framing arguments about political events, historians and political scientists have been markedly *less* inclined than chroniclers to ascribe agency to specific individuals or groups. A case in point is the thesis that David

Donald advanced in his 1978 *Liberty and Union* about the factors that forestalled secession in the years immediately preceding the Civil War. Rejecting the common assertion that the war had been hastened by a small group of malcontents, whether abolitionists or fire-eaters, Donald lifted up the “fire extinguishers” that had historically smothered the “brush fires” of political, economic, and ideological contestation. These fire extinguishers were an *institution*, a *symbol*, and a *rhetoric*. The *institution* was the political party; the *symbol* the U.S. Constitution; and the *rhetoric* popular oratory.[\[10\]](#)

Much has changed since the 1850s, raising doubts about the continuing efficacy of these three retardants in dampening civil unrest. Yet it remains a testament to David Donald’s vision that, prior to the unexpected victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, few would have seriously questioned the staying power of the political party, the U. S. Constitution, and popular oratory as brakes on the conduct of the nation’s political elite.

Chroniclers typically rely on individuals and groups not only to carry their narratives, but also to describe how and explain why a particular sequence of events unfolded as they did. Donald, along with many, if not most, of the academics who have written political history in the past half century, did not. For him, no single individual—not even Abraham Lincoln—was truly indispensable. This was Donald’s conviction even though he himself was a gifted biographer who himself would write a prize-winning biography of the sixteenth president.[\[11\]](#)

Donald’s political sociology placed relatively little emphasis on two agents of change that were easier to overlook for a historian of the 1850s than they are for a historian specializing in the more recent past. The first was technical advance, a social engine that, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, would catapult the United States to the first rank of the world’s industrial nations. The second was the plethora of governmental institutions—distinct from the political party—such as the courts, the military, and the administrative apparatus of the municipal, state, and federal governments.

Among the most influential of the early chroniclers of these dual developments was the very same Charles A. Beard who had retooled himself as a professional writer in the 1920s. While Beard is remembered today primarily as a realist who probed in a 1913 monograph the economic interests that shaped the framing of the U. S. Constitution, he deserves to be recognized also for his commitment to recognizing the centrality to political history of technical advance and the rise of the administrative state. In the final chapter of his magisterial 1927 *Rise of American*

*Civilization*, coauthored with his wife, Mary R. Beard, the present became the “machine age,” a capacious metaphor that remains to this day a source of inspiration for social theorists.<sup>[12]</sup> And in a 1930 political science textbook that he coauthored with his son, William, the nation’s central administrative state became a “half-mythical giant uniting in one person a whole multitude”—an “*American Leviathan*”—a metaphor that they borrowed from the seventeenth-century English political theorist Thomas Hobbes.<sup>[13]</sup>

A talented stylist with a gift for the kind of soaring oratory that David Donald admired in a Daniel Webster or an Abraham Lincoln, Beard repeatedly urged his academic peers to broaden their intellectual horizons. For U. S. political science to have a future, or so Beard declared in his luminous 1926 American Political Science Association (APSA) presidential address, it must reckon with the structuring presence not only of governmental institutions but also of technology. No less than the State, Beard explained, technology, too, had also become a “modern and Western Leviathan”: “Ever fed by the irrepressible curiosity of the scientist and inventor, stimulated by the unfailing acquisitive passion—that passion which will outlive capitalism as we know it and all other systems now imagined by dreamers—technology marches in seven-league boots from one ruthless, revolutionary conquest to another, tearing down old factories and industries, flinging up new processes with terrifying rapidity, and offering for the first time in history the possibility of realizing the idea of progress so brilliantly sketched by Abbé de Saint-Pierre at the opening of the eighteenth century.”<sup>[14]</sup> Long before Joseph Schumpeter would conjure up the “gales of creative destruction” in his *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942) to explain the relentlessness of technical advance—and with a confidence in the inexorability of economic development reminiscent of the most florid tributes to the temporarily triumphant bourgeoisie in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848)—Beard alerted his colleagues to the enormous political significance of the human conquest of the natural world.

Technology was for Beard inescapable. Alongside the “pitiless reality” of the march of time, it had become for the political scientist a “fundamental fact”: “Under the convulsive pressures of technology pouring through time, turning social orders into ever-new kaleidoscopic patterns, all thought, all policies, and all actions in the sphere of statecraft—political science—must be formulated unless, forsooth, we are to resort to utopias and academic sterilities. This, it seems to me, is the most fundamental fact of our discipline.”<sup>[15]</sup>

Beard’s invocation of technology as an agent of change was a new departure in political science. So, too, was the expansive meaning with which he invested the

term “technology” itself—a meaning that had recently been popularized by the political economist Thorstein Veblen.[\[16\]](#) No less innovative was Charles and Mary Beard’s tribute to the “machine age” in the following year in their *Rise of American Civilization*, or Charles and William Beard’s paean to the “American Leviathan” three years later. The “machine age” and the “American Leviathan” gradually fell out of fashion as organizing themes for U. S. political historians. Far more enduring were two related catchphrases that the Beards helped to inscribe in the U. S. political historians’ lexicon: namely, the “Gilded Age” and the “New Deal.”

Each of these catchphrases is problematic in ways often overlooked by academics and chroniclers alike. The “Gilded Age” reeks of what E. P. Thompson once called the enormous condescension of posterity. At its core, it reduces a large, and in certain respects emphatically progressive, swath of U. S. history—that is, roughly, the period between 1873 and 1900—to a sordid spectacle of materialism, corruption, moral squalor, and lamentable taste. If viewed in the long sweep of U. S. history, one might be inclined to respond: compared to ... what?[\[17\]](#) To identify greed with capitalism, warned social theorist Max Weber in 1920, was a naïve idea best consigned to the “kindergarten of cultural history.” Generations of U. S. political historians have failed to heed Weber’s admonition.[\[18\]](#)

Like many catchphrases, the “Gilded Age” originated as a periodizing tool for the fine arts. One of its early adopters, the pioneering historian of technology Lewis Mumford (whose friend Van Wyck Brooks is credited with popularizing the catchphrase by including it in the title of a chapter of his 1920 biography of Mark Twain), would eventually reject it in favor of the “Brown Decades” in a book on late-nineteenth-century aesthetics that Mumford published in 1931.[\[19\]](#) Unfortunately, Mumford’s alternative color-coded catchphrase never caught on, and the “Gilded Age” became an all-purpose descriptor for a quarter century of U. S. political history.[\[20\]](#)

The pedigree of the “Gilded Age” catchphrase is in one sense impeccable, descended as it is from the title of an 1873 novel coauthored by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner.[\[21\]](#) Yet the “Gilded Age” that Twain and Warner conjured up in 1873 had *virtually nothing* in common with the “Gilded Age” of the historians. To be specific, even the most careful reader of *The Gilded Age* would find in this novel *no mention whatsoever* of cities, factories, immigrants, labor unrest, or big business. Indeed, it may well be in part for this reason that commentators so consistently dismiss the novel as mediocre and dull: its “best part,” one cultural historian quipped, was its three-word title.[\[22\]](#) Revolving as it did around events not on Wall Street but in Congress, *The Gilded Age* looked backward to the Civil War era,

rather than forward to Alan Trachtenberg's "incorporation of America" or Samuel Hays's "response to industrialism." In particular, it poked fun at the foibles of a post-Civil War generation of lazy, self-deluded strivers who hoped to strike it rich by feeding at the public trough. Like so much late-nineteenth-century social criticism, it pitted the virtues of industriousness against the vices of idleness in a morality play in which the virtuous ultimately prevailed. In this sense, it looked forward more to the "forgotten man" of William Graham Sumner than the "cooperative commonwealth" of Laurence Gronlund.

If "Gilded Age" is suspect, then when about "Progressivism"? Here the issue is more complex. The term "progressive" *was* widely used by contemporaries, making it far less problematic. Even so, and precisely because of its ubiquity, it has been invested with so many disparate meanings that its utility as a descriptor has been frequently called into question. Though a cultural critic penned an "obituary" of the "Progressive Movement" as long ago as 1970, its burial was premature: "progressivism" remains a textbook staple today.<sup>[23]</sup> Yet if indeed there had been a "Progressive Era"—a claim for which a much stronger case can be made than for the "Gilded Age"—one wonders not only when it ended (in 1917? in 1921? in 1953?) but also when it began. A plausible case for its start date can be made for 1892, since the Omaha platform of the People's Party included several planks that self-proclaimed progressives would adopt; for 1888, the publication date of Edward Bellamy's utopian novel, *Looking Backward*, a *tour de force* that spawned a social movement to bring the nation into alignment with recent technical advances in the production and distribution of goods; or even for 1879, the publication date of Henry George's landmark *Progress and Poverty*, a publishing sensation chock full of arguments that influential progressives would embrace.<sup>[24]</sup>

Like "the Progressive Era," "the New Deal" has also long been a textbook staple, an impressive achievement for a catchphrase popularized by journalist Stuart Chase to invest Franklin Roosevelt's Democratic Party platform with a Veblenian pedigree.<sup>[25]</sup> (Interestingly, the lineage of the catchphrase "New Deal" also appears to have originated with Twain, a connection that Roosevelt affirmed in 1935 when an admirer reminded him that Hank Morgan, the hero of Twain's 1889 *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, had used the phrase to hail an ultimately disastrous experiment in social engineering as a necessary reform.)<sup>[26]</sup> While the "New Deal" catchphrase would find its way into several midcentury textbooks, it was not until the publication of Schlesinger's *Coming of the New Deal, 1933-1935* in 1958 that it became firmly enshrined as a descriptor for an entire epoch of the nation's history.

The catchphrase is in certain respects an outlier. No other avowedly partisan political slogan remains a textbook staple today. "Jacksonian Democracy" is long gone, so too is the "Fair Deal," the "Square Deal," and even the "Great Society." Given the highly contested nature of political slogans like "Green New Deal," can the original "New Deal" survive as a textbook descriptor in a politically divided nation? Or to put it differently, now that the attack on the U. S. Capitol on 6 January 2021 has been celebrated in official U. S. government publications, can the reframing of the 1930s be far behind? And if it were, might there be genuine intellectual benefits for academics and chroniclers alike? Whether or not such questions engage academics, they are likely to find an audience among chroniclers unconstrained by academic convention, with unpredictable results.[\[27\]](#)

One thing seems clear. Academics and chroniclers would be well advised to turn their attention to the significance for U. S. political history of the technical advances that emerged in the half century between the 1876 centennial of the Declaration of Independence and Beard's 1926 APSA presidential address. Long known to social planners and economic historians as the "second industrial revolution," these technical advances have been recently rebranded by Sven Beckert as the "second great divergence."[\[28\]](#) The first great divergence witnessed the rise of Europe in relation to Asia; the second great divergence the rise of the United States in relation to Europe. No matter what one calls this transformation, the rapidity of economic growth in the United States in the century that began in 1870 (a transformation that with a few exceptions noticeably showed after 1970), is justly regarded as one of the most momentous in the history of the planet.[\[29\]](#)

On this point, and on many others, Beard was on the mark. In an age in which the fire extinguishers identified by David Donald have been partially disabled, it is incumbent for academics and chroniclers alike to be mindful of the ways in which public life in the United States had been transformed not only by the "American Leviathan" that predated the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt to the U. S. presidency in 1932, but also by the "continuous conquest of material environment by applied science" that Beard, writing as a political scientist impatient with the self-imposed blinders of the academy, foregrounded with such prescience a century ago.[\[30\]](#) Whether or not the United States has been since the late eighteenth century a "technological republic"—as the authors of a recent bestseller by two tech gurus proclaim—it would become one with the commercialization of nuclear power, the computer, and the Internet.[\[31\]](#) And it will be up to academics and chroniclers, writing in their different registers, to describe how this happened, what difference it made, and why it matters.

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[1] The first meeting of the Policy History Conference (PHC) in 2002 created a welcoming and intellectually vibrant interdisciplinary forum for historians and political scientists marginalized by the then-dominant interpretative dogmas of their respective disciplines. Open and inviting in spirit, the conference became a safe space for what might be best described as an insurgent movement to overturn what had become a stiflingly hidebound anti-political-history academic orthodoxy. Attendees included the sociologists Theda Skocpol and Paul Starr; the political scientists Richard Bense and Elizabeth Sanders; and the historians Brian Balogh, Robin Einhorn, and Alice O'Connor.

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[2] Leo Marx, "Believing in America," *Boston Review*, 1 December 2003, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/leo-marx-believing-america/>

[3] In the two decades since its publication in 2004, Ron Chernow's biography of Alexander Hamilton has sold over 2 million copies, due, in no small part, to its transformation into a hit Broadway musical. It would be hard to name a single publication in any field of U. S. history in the past quarter century that has had a greater influence on public life.

[4] <https://heathercoxrichardson.substack.com/>

[5] Nate Silver, "What is Heather Cox Richardsonism?" *Silver Bulletin*, 16 December 2025, <https://www.natesilver.net/p/what-is-heather-cox-richardsonism>

[6] William Hogeland, "Is the Age of the Resistance Historians Coming to an End," *Slate*, 11 July 2024, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2024/07/biden-step-down-history-heather-cox-richardson.html>; Charlotte E. Rosen "The End of Resistance History," *Protean Magazine*, 20 January 2025, <https://proteanmag.com/2025/01/20/the-end-of-resistance-history/>

[7] Clyde W. Barrow, *More than a Historian: The Political and Economic Thought of Charles A. Beard* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), chap. 4.

[8] William E. Leuchtenberg, "The Historian and the Public Realm," in *The Liberal Persuasion: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and the Challenge of the American Past*, ed. John Patrick Diggins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 29-32.

[9] Thomas C. Cochran, "The 'Presidential Synthesis' in American History," *American Historical Review*, 53 (July 1948): 749.

[10] David Herbert Donald, *Liberty and Union: The Crisis of Popular Government, 1830-1890* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1978), pp. 27-29.

[11] James M. McPherson, "A Passive President?" *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1995, pp. 134-40; Eric Foner, "Honest (But Passive) Abe," *Nation*, 20 November 1995, pp. 622-26.

[12] Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), chap. 30; Richard Staley, "The Interwar Period as a Machine Age: Mechanics, the Machine, Mechanisms, and the Market in Discourse," *Science in Context*, 31 (September 2018): 263-92. In their textbook the Beards declined to ponder how the U. S. central government differed from Hobbes's monster. If they had, they might well have observed that the legitimacy of the American Leviathan, in contrast to its English counterpart, rests ultimately not only in the consent of the governed, but also in its subordination to periodic popular control.

[13] Charles A. Beard and William Beard, *The American Leviathan: The Republic in the Machine Age* (New York: Macmillan, 1930). The Beards' admiration for the federal civil service was palpable on every page of their textbook, which they dedicated to "the thousands of men and women who loyally serve the public on land and sea under the auspices of the Government of the United States."

[14] Charles A. Beard, "Time, Technology, and the Creative Spirit in Political Science," *American Political Science Review*, 21 (February 1927): 5. For a trenchant critique of Beard's technocratic rationalism, which verged on the utopian, see Cushing Strout, "The Twentieth-Century Enlightenment," *American Political Science Review*, 49 (June 1955): 333-37.

[15] Beard, "Time, Technology, and the Creative Spirit," p. 5.

[16] Eric Schatzberg, *Technology: Critical History of a Concept* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), chaps. 8-9.

[17] Rebecca Edwards, "Politics, Social Movements, and the Periodization of U. S. History," *Journal of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era*, 8 (October, 2009): 463-47.

[18] Max Weber, "Author's Introduction" [1920], in Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5), ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 17.

[19] Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1865-1895* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1931).

[20] My discussion of Mumford is indebted to a series of email exchanges with Alan Lessoff. See also Lessoff, "The Gilded Age City in American Political Discourse and Lore," in *Stadt-Macht-Korruption*, ed. Jens Ivo Engels, Andreas Fahrmeir, Cesare Mattina, and Frédéric Monier (Stuttgart: Franz Steinger Verlag, 2017), pp. 143-54.

[21] Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976), pp. 43-45, 50-65; Scott Sandage, "The Gilded Age," in *A Companion to American Cultural History*, ed. Karen Halttunen (New York: John Wiley & Sons., 2008), pp. 139-42; Richard R. John, "Who Were the Gilders? And Other Seldom-Asked Questions about Business, Technology, and Political Economy in the United States, 1877-1900," *Journal of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era*, 8 (October 2009): 474-80; James Livingston, "The Myth of a 'Second Gilded Age,'" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 31 January 2016, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-myth-of-a-second-gilded-age/>

If one wished to salvage the "Gilded Age" catchphrase, Bledstein observed, we might well add the letter "u" to "Gilded" and refashion the epoch as the "Guilded Age" in recognition of the enormous significance in the late nineteenth century of two developments with long-ranging implications for U. S. history: namely, the emergence of the research university and the rise of the credentialed middle class (Bledstein, *Culture of Professionalism*, pp. 53-65). Several years earlier, Neil Harris provided a related, though distinct, justification for the "Guilded Age" as a catchphrase in his introduction to a compilation of late-nineteenth-century primary source documents: "No other era witnessed the formation of so many clubs, societies, lodges, and fraternal organizations. The Gilded Age was more properly a Guilded Age, an era of association for protection." Neil Harris,

"Introduction," in *The Land of Contrasts, 1880-1901* (New York: Geoge Braziller, 1970), p. 17.

[22] Sandage, "Gilded Age," p. 139.

[23] Peter G. Filene, "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement,'" *American Quarterly*, 22 (Spring 1970): 20-34. While there is remarkably little literature on the concept of the "Gilded Age," historical writing on the character and significance of the concept of the "Progressive Era" is vast. For one recent intervention, see [Daniel T. Rodgers](#), "Capitalism and Politics in the Progressive Era and in Ours," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 13 (July 2014): 379-86.

[24] Christopher England, *Land and Liberty: Henry George and the Crafting of American Liberalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023); Logan S. Istre, "The Enigma of San Francisco: Henry George and the Historians," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 24 (2025): 73-92.

[25] Stuart Chase, *A New Deal* (New York: Macmillan, 1932). Chase's enthusiasm for technical advance is evident on virtually every page of his tract: its frontispiece, for example, features a long quotation from Veblen's *Engineers and the Price System*.

[26] Cyril Clemens, *The Literary Education of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (Webster Groves, Mo: International Mark Twain Society, 1935), p. 34.

[27] While New Deal revisionism has been more visible among journalists—eg Amity Shlaes—it is not unknown within the academy. Recent monographs illustrative of this trend include David Beito, *The New Deal's War on the Bill of Rights: The Untold Story of FDR's Concentration Camps, Censorship, and Mass Surveillance* (Oakland, Calif.: Independent Institute, 2023) and Robert E. Wright, *The Long New Deal: A Public Choice Perspective* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).

[28] Sven Beckert, "American Danger: United States Empire, Eurafrika, and the Territorialization of Industrial Capitalism, 1870—1950," *American Historical Review*, 122 (October 2017): 1137-70.

[29] Robert J. Gordon, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U.S. Standard of Living since the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 2-3.

[30] Beard, "Time, Technology, and the Creative Spirit," p. 5.

[31] Alexander C. Karp and Nicholas W. Zamiska, *The Technological Republic: Hard Power, Soft Belief, and the Future of the West* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2025).