

But the Roots Remain: The Wisconsin Progressives in the Great Depression and Post-War Era



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Abstract
This work is concerned with the development of the Progressives, a political faction of the Republican Party which was active in Wisconsin during the first half of the 20th century, throughout the Great Depression, and the Post-War era. It was during this period that the Progressives broke with the Republican Party, formed the Progressive Party and gained control of the state from 1934 through 1938, before finally dissolving in 1946, with many members moving into the Democratic Party, where they rejuvenated that moribund state party. This work, furthermore, focuses on the those Progressive leaders who operated in Wisconsin's northern counties, a region which had a long tradition of Progressivism, the influence they had upon the creation of the Progressive Party and the political realignment which followed its dissolution.

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The Great Depression was a worldwide catastrophe whose causes and consequences alike were global in character. "The primary cause of the Great Depression," reads the first sentence of President Herbert Hoover's Memoirs, "was the war of 1914-1918." And that so-called Great War, along with the Depression it spawned, was the driver that eventually produced the even greater catastrophe of World War II. The United States had participated only marginally in the First World War, but the experience was sufficiently costly that Americans turned their country decidedly inward in the 1920s. They disarmed their military forces and swiftly dismantled the nation's war machinery. The Great Depression, a decade-long period of unemployment and poverty beginning in 1929, resulted from several economic factors in the United States including an overall decline in demand, imbalances and weaknesses in the economy, faltering demand for housing, and reduced production in the automobile industry. Loans to foreign nations after World War I became problematic in the 1920s as European countries lacked the means to repay the loans, destabilizing American debt markets. Farm prices began to fall in the post-war period and farmers, already deeply in debt, could not pay back their credi