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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, PH.D., 1978

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GRADUATE COLLEGE

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE AND HIS DEMOCRACY, 1919-1944

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

JACK WAYNE TRAYLOR

Norman, Oklahoma

1978

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE AND HIS DEMOCRACY, 1919-1944

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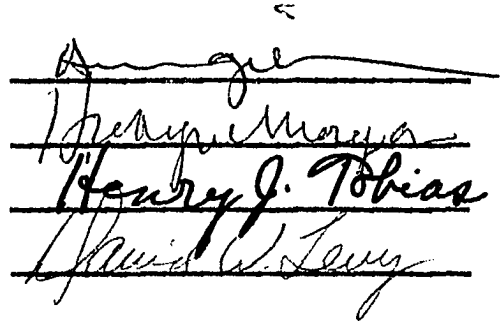

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people have faithfully assisted me in various ways during the course of my research and writing in the graduate school of the University of Oklahoma. For their patient guidance I wish to thank my dissertation committee: Professors Arrell M. Gibson, David W. Levy, H. Wayne Morgan, and Henry J. Tobias.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the curators of the William Allen White Collection, Emporia State University: Mr. Robert Hampton, Mrs. Mae Andrews, and Mrs. Dorothy Homman.

The entire staff of the Kansas State Historical Society has been most helpful, particularly Joseph W. Snell, Executive Director; Robert W. Richmond, Assistant Secretary; and Nyle H. Miller, Executive Director Emeritus.

Finally, I want to thank my parents, Mr. & Mrs. Wayne B. Traylor, for their tireless support.

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WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE AND HIS DEMOCRACY, 1919-1944

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

William Allen White was one of America's leading political observers from the end of the nineteenth century until his death in 1944. His biographers tell how hundreds sought his advice, from those in the most humble stations of life, to presidents. Millions read his books, articles, and editorials. Those same biographers indicate that White reached his pinnacle of influence and popularity during the last twenty-five years of his life, the period from 1919 to 1944. But they have not fully explored the reason for this. Why did White rise to such a venerated position after World War I? The answer can be found in a thorough examination of his writings during that time, and an analysis of one of the leading issues of that quarter-century. That issue, with which White dealt more than any other, was democracy and its future. But White's idea of democracy differed from that of most other observers. White wrote "democracy is the institutionalized expression of the Christian philosophy

in ordinary life. . . ."[1] As world conditions changed over a span of twenty-five years, White altered his position on various issues and therefore seemingly contradicted himself on numerous occasions. But a thorough analysis of his writings reveals his consistent emphasis on democracy, and says much about the thinking of an old Progressive as he interpreted a changing, post-World War I America.

White had preached the importance of maintaining and strengthening democracy in America based on a Christian social philosophy, which he equated with the concept that an individual should treat his neighbors as he wished to be treated, since his early Progressive days at the beginning of the century. But his support of this doctrine did not elevate him to his highest position in American life until after World War I when democracy came under attack. Although this idea appeared in all forms of White's writing--unpublished manuscripts and letters as well as published articles, books, and editorials--he developed his reputation as country statesman and defender of democracy after World War I through his published works, those that millions of Americans read and from which they came to know him. Perhaps more Americans read his numerous magazine articles than any other form of communication because of the wide circulation of that medium. But certainly many also read his books and

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[1]William Allen White, "What Democracy Means to Me," Scholastic, Vol. XXXI (October 23, 1937), 9.

newspaper articles, including his Emporia Gazette editorials which received attention around the country. Even his speeches and radio broadcasts had a wide impact for many publications printed them, either in excerpt form or in their entirety. White's "letters-received files" in the White Papers at the Library of Congress and in the White Collection at Emporia State University testify to his regional, national, and international following, and indicate the importance of his opinion to both the famous and the unknown of the world.

White's biographers have pointed to the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s as the time when he reached his peak of influence and recognition in America.[2] And they have cited his support of democracy and Christian principles. Some have touched on White's beliefs about democracy while concentrating on his varied activities. Others have presented intimate personal portraits of their subject or briefly mentioned the importance of democracy and Christian philosophy to White's thought. But none have delved into the connection between his near obsession with those ideals and his ascension to prominence during the last twenty-five years of his life.[3]

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[2]Walter Johnson, William Allen White's America (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), p. 331; David Hinshaw, A Man From Kansas: The Story of William Allen White (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1945), p. 179.

[3]Everett Rich, William Allen White: The Man from Emporia (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941); Johnson, White's America; John DeWitt McKee, William Allen White: Maverick on Main Street (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975); Hinshaw, Man From Kansas; Frank C. Clough, William Allen White of Emporia (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1941).

This study will focus on the relationship between White's emphasis on democracy and the position of esteem he held in America from 1919 to 1944.

White was born in Emporia, Kansas, February 10, 1868, and grew up in nearby El Dorado, which at that time was still a rough frontier town. After high school, he attended the College of Emporia for three semesters, then moved on to the University of Kansas at Lawrence. He never completed requirements for a degree, but did establish something of a reputation for himself as a writer on the school newspaper.[4] He then worked as a reporter, first on the Kansas City Journal, and then on the Star. In 1893 he married Sallie Lindsay, who became his lifelong companion and adviser. In 1895 they purchased the Emporia Gazette, and with the great public acclaim of his "What's the Matter with Kansas?" in 1896, White was well on his way to fame. In that editorial he blasted the farmer-Populists as a detriment to the state's progress, and looked to the prosperous as the hope for a stable society. White was a strong supporter at that time of those he called the "best people," the leaders of government and business.[5] It was not until after the turn of the century, when he became a leading Progressive, largely through the influence

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[4]William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 3; Clough, White of Emporia, p. 55; Rich, Man from Emporia, p. 46; Johnson, White's America, pp. 10, 31.

[5]White, Autobiography, pp. 199, 229; Johnson, White's America, p. 71; McKee, Maverick, pp. 22, 31, 35.

of Theodore Roosevelt, that his writings reveal a shift to an emphasis on a Christian-based, democratic philosophy. This philosophy largely was responsible for elevating White to his highest point of national fame after World War I. The phenomenon of his ascendance on a platform of defense of democracy reveals the dominant thought of an old Progressive and the importance of his ideas to the American public.

CHAPTER 2

DEMOCRACY, CHRISTIANITY, AND WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE

In 1936, William Allen White wrote: "Jesus of Nazareth, standing on the mountain which His sermon made famous, probably sowed the seeds which have flowered into modern democracy."[1] In that sermon Jesus introduced mankind to what has become known as the golden rule: "Therefore, all things whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."[2] White maintained that the golden rule was the essence of Christian thought. He believed that this doctrine had a powerful impact on the world, for it motivated men to ease the burdens of their fellow humans. Since he thought democracy was designed to encourage people to make life more pleasant for others, he saw a direct connection between it and Christian philosophy. He believed democracy and Christianity advanced over the centuries at the same pace.[3]

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[1]William Allen White, "Some of the Problems of Christian Education," United Presbyterian, Vol. XCIV (April 30, 1936), 11.

[2]Matt. 7:12.

[3]William Allen White, "What the War Did for Brewer," Yale Review, Vol. VIII (January, 1919), 250; William Allen White, "What Democracy Means to Me," Scholastic, Vol. XXXI (October 23, 1937), 9.

White listed the birth of Christ as one of the three great events in the world's history. The discovery of America and the beginning of the battle of the Marne during World War I were the other two.[4] White was not as interested in the fact that Jesus came into the world to die for mankind's sins, as he was that He came to show humanity how to live a happier life. White did not understand the doctrine of atonement, but believed Jesus' life was of even greater significance than His death. He looked upon Christ as the first complete gentleman the world had known. White admired Him because he believed He suffered persecution for His teachings in Judea, was friendly toward grafters and sinners and saw their good side yet kept His faith in humanity, then died rather than live as king over His country. To White, Jesus was a Jewish martyr who spoke out against Roman oppression and the counterfeit government of the Pharisees.[5]

White was not sure that Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, was crucified as a sacrifice for man's sin, and was resurrected from the dead. And he did not consider the matter important, for he felt the language of the Bible was largely symbolic. He thought the Bible was valuable only as it taught men to live a happier and more useful life.

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[4]White to Chauncey Williams, 13 March 1918, Selected Letters of William Allen White, 1899-1943, ed. Walter Johnson (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), p. 188.

[5]White to Miss Sedgwick, 20 January 1915, William Allen White Papers, Library of Congress, microfilm copy, box 47, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; William Allen White, "The Christ of Today," Topeka Journal, 11 May 1914.

The Biblical miracles did not seem amazing to White, for he looked upon the twentieth century developments in physics and chemistry as more startling than changing water to wine. White's view was typical of the twentieth-century modernist who rejected the historic doctrines of the Christian faith.[6]

White confessed in his autobiography that the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson made a strong impact on his thinking while he was still a youth, and he carried those thoughts into his adult life. Emerson helped him understand what White called "the puzzle of life." The puzzle, as White saw it, was how to direct man's efforts toward altruistic, or democratic as he stated it, motives. The solution was through an exaltation of mankind. Man's potential for growth, particularly the development of his kindly impulses, was infinite. Give man a chance to be altruistic, through Progressive measures for example, and the encouragement of a physically and morally healthful environment, and he would be altruistic. White got these ideas partially from his reading of Emerson. And the Bible, particularly those parts containing Jesus' teachings, seemed to strengthen those beliefs.[7]

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[6]William Allen White, "As I See It: The Uses of Ambiguity," New York Tribune, 11 Feb. 1923; William Allen White, "The Mission of Bryan," Judge, Vol. LXXXII (May 20, 1922), 19; William Allen White, "The General Motors Show," Emporia Gazette, 19 Nov. 1941; Herbert Wallace Schneider, Religion in 20th Century America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 119-21, 127.

[7]William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946), pp. 103-104.

In his autobiography, White told of a strange meeting with an unknown man on an Emporia street during the editor's youth. As White was walking up the city's main business street one spring evening, the man approached and engaged him in conversation. The two strolled along together for a time when the subject of conversation turned to religion. The man told White not to be concerned about determining the truth of Biblical miracles and the virgin birth of Christ, that the same stories could be found in many religions. The important thing, he said, was to look upon Jesus as a young man who saw his nation in bondage and pointed a way of deliverance to his people through a philosophy of peace, humility, tolerance, and charity, rather than force of arms. He portrayed Jesus as history's greatest hero. Jesus' crucifixion and "the symbol of his resurrection" proved the indestructibility of truth, the man argued. White said that whatever religious faith he had came from the teachings of that man. He wrote in his autobiography: "My ears had been opened by Emerson. That unknown man turned over the sod of my spirit and uncovered an understanding heart."[8]

How could one man, a stranger, in one evening during the course of a single conversation make such a lasting impression on White? White tended to almost blindly trust certain men. His devotion to Theodore Roosevelt was a good example. Another was his close relationship with Herbert Hoover. During

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[8] Ibid., pp. 107-109.

the 1930s, intimate multi-page letters to the ex-president were common.[9] White provided two clues in his autobiography which help to explain his susceptibility to the stranger's doctrines. First, he said because he was seventeen and "youth opens its heart in those days to the great mysteries," the man's ideas had a lasting impact. Apparently young White was searching for some hidden meaning in the Bible. But more importantly, he revealed that he attended a Bible class in which the teacher espoused the method of Biblical interpretation known as "higher criticism." This theory led his teacher to argue that two or three men, not one, wrote the book of Jeremiah, that the four Gospels were written from tradition between 50 and 100 years after the deaths of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and that Moses made many errors in chronology. White said that "it interested me, as an Emersonian, to know that my theory of spiritual gravitation toward the triumph of righteousness in human relations was not dependent upon any script or text."[10]

White argued that the fundamentalist churches, those whose members believed in the virgin birth, Christ's deity, His bodily resurrection, and future return to earth, were old-fashioned. He thought that during periods of injustice, such as economic depressions, many people supported these churches

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[9]See White Papers, Library of Congress, for that period.

[10]White, Autobiography, p. 107.

because they found it easier to turn to heaven and hell to balance right and wrong, than to use government to do it. He contended that the underprivileged looked to heaven to provide their ideal of justice and to hell as a way of punishing their enemies.[11]

White arrived at that conclusion during his youth in El Dorado, Kansas. He told in his autobiography how he and a friend visited a revival there. They noticed that only the poor attended. There were no lawyers, doctors, or merchants there, White said, only workers and failing farmers. Then his companion made the observation that set White's opinion about fundamentalist Christianity:

> "Will, look at that crowd. Too poor to skin. They've just got to have heaven to square it up with themselves for falling down and they've just got to have hell for people like us who are having such a good time. They can't figure out a just God without a heaven and a hell."

"And it has stuck with me all these years," White said.[12]

White believed an evolutionary altruism began during Christ's life and continued into the twentieth century. He maintained that Jesus' altruistic doctrine that men should live more for others, and less for themselves, began a process which changed the heart of man and remade humanity.

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[11]William Allen White, "Emporia in Wartime," New Republic, Vol. CVI (April 13, 1942), 491; William Allen White, The Changing West: An Economic Theory About Our Golden Age (New York: Macmillan Company, 1939), p. 39.

[12]White, Autobiography, p. 122.

This doctrine, which White called "the Jesus element," made cooperation among people inevitable. They formed larger and larger groups, and as they did they learned to live together.

White argued that when this doctrine of Jesus first gained prominence in the world about a hundred years after His death, it was only a plan of salvation, a way to get into heaven. Millions accepted the doctrine, White said, and formed a cult of heaven-seekers who thought they had to be kind, considerate, humble, and cooperative to enter the kingdom of heaven. As people began to use these qualities to buy their way into heaven, they started institutionalizing these traits in government and social customs. In this way, they created their own heaven on earth.[13]

White believed that the people of the world in the twentieth century had free will to choose good or evil. They could walk the path of Jesus toward continued cooperation if they so desired. He wondered if at some other time an intelligent civilization had existed on another planet, and progressed toward a divine ideal, and then had fallen back into chaos because it was too greedy to continue on its way. This was the position in which he saw twentieth century America.[14] It could forge ahead on its altruistic, cooperative journey, or fall back into an "every man for himself" world because each person was too self-centered to live under the golden rule.

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[13]William Allen White, "God Only Knows," Homiletic Review, Vol. CVII (April, 1934), 303-304.

[14]Ibid., p. 305.

On the threshold of World War I, White stated that the spirit of Jesus was alive and healthy in the civilized world, a term which he used to designate western Europe, the United States, and the British Empire. He foresaw a coming era of brotherhood and kindness. White believed the western nations felt a new responsibility to assist the weak, provide a decent education, and maintain a clean environment.[15] These were some of his criteria of a democratic society. After World War I and on until his death, there were times when he doubted the strength of Jesus' creed in the civilized world, but he always clung to the hope that it would ultimately prevail.

White, in his emphasis on the social implication of Jesus' teachings, was part of a movement known as Christian modernism which originated early in the twentieth century. The modernists denied, or at least regarded as irrelevant, the doctrines of the Trinity, Christ's virgin birth and diety, His future bodily return to earth, and the divine inspiration of the Bible. They thought man was capable of constructing an ideal civilization on earth through the guidance of God. But they viewed God as an abstract principle of righteousness, an influence, rather than a divine Person. Modernism obtained its ideas from New England transcendentalism, idealism, and evolutionary thought.[16] White particularly drew on the last source, for he believed an evolutionary process of altruism

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[15]White, "The Christ of Today."

[16]Schneider, Religion, pp. 117-22.

had been at work in history since the time of its originator, Jesus Christ. White, as a modernist, sought to organize a broad community of thought in America which would support his Progressive ideals. Modernism, since it really was more philosophical than Biblical, appealed not only to certain Christians and Jews but also to those who considered themselves neither.

Modernist thought was composed of a threefold structure: the deliberate application of religious ideas to secular culture; the immanence and revelation of God in human cultural development; and the belief that society was progressing toward a level of perfection known as the Kingdom of God. These ideas were central to the entire liberal movement from the 1870s into the 1930s.[17] White both helped direct that movement and in turn was shaped by it.

White, like others of a similar persuasion, relied heavily upon the tenets of modernism as a philosophical background to his work. He seemed to say "our quest for justice can have success because of the validity of these ideas." White depended on what he perceived as the basic goodness of the Anglo-Saxon middle class to carry American life into a higher level of development. He thought that spreading out from the main streets of a thousand country towns were stores and homes filled with decent people who if given some leadership, would gladly strive for a higher quality of life for

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[17]William R. Hutchison, The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 2.

themselves and their neighbors. White's writings during his final quarter-century are a barometer of his reaction to how well these people lived up to his dream.

White, like other modernists, also viewed the doctrines of modernism as a way of charting a moderate course between the extremes of post-World War I attitudes best typified from our current perspective by H. L. Mencken and William Jennings Bryan. Mencken represented the cynic who had no spiritual sensitivity and no hope for the progress of mankind. Bryan represented those who stressed personal salvation through Jesus Christ,[18] White abhorred the Mencken position and veered away from Bryan's stand, preferring good works over individual redemption.

While modernists thought of themselves as pioneers of new advances in religious thought, they did not always look upon change as positive.[19] To his final day White clung to habits and patterns of thought adopted during his early manhood. It is not surprising then that he never gave up hope that America would rise to the level of justice he first envisioned as a young Progressive. (As we will see, though, his vision of the just society often did not include the immigrant and the non-Anglo-Saxon). Recognizing his attachment to Victorian America it does not seem so strange that he continued to travel

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[18]Paul A. Carter, Another Part of the Twenties (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 43.

[19]Hutchison, Modernist Impulse, p. 4.

about Emporia in a horse-drawn buggy long after most other business and professional men had switched to automobiles. And neither is it so odd that he never learned to drive a car and seldom listened to a radio.[20]

A good example of the continuum in White's thought was his long-term espousal of his concept of democracy. He argued that in every human heart there were two conflicting forces--altruism and egoism--the yearning to give versus the desire to receive. A person's life depended on how he responded to these influences. No one was all good or all bad in White's eyes. But if a man followed his altruistic nature, he was pursuing a democratic ideal. If he chose his egoistic side, he was an enemy of democracy. White believed that if in any human unit, whether it was the home, community, state, region, nation, or civilization, altruism prevailed and the people therefore were more kindly, decent, and reasonable than mean, then that human unit was democratic. If the people were greedy, were suspicious of everything outside their sphere and too quick to accept everything within, if they rejected reason but supported force as a method of governing, then their human unit was not democratic.[21]

White viewed democracy primarily as a social order which encouraged the kindly impulses of humanity. In a democracy, all of man's affairs--his business, education, government,

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[20]Frank C. Clough, William Allen White of Emporia (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1941), pp. 203, 207.

[21]White, Changing West, pp. 115-16.

social customs, religion, and opinions--were designed to make life enjoyable for the decent, kindly person. Life in a democracy steadily progressed upward so that the man who yielded to the altruism in his heart enjoyed an increasingly more pleasant existence in which justice prevailed. White admitted that the free forces which guided a democracy were slow, functioned with much waste, and sacrificed efficiency for the slower pace of common consent, but he supported the democratic process since he maintained it allowed men to be free. And he was certain that it would triumph over orders in which force dominated.[22]

White contended that most people defined democracy as a system based upon universal suffrage and the guarantee of free speech, a free press, the writ of habeas corpus, and the right of trial by jury. But he looked upon these as the machinery of democracy. They were means to an end but not the end itself. The goal, democracy, was a philosophy of life, an attitude toward the weak and oppressed, an aspiration toward justice. It was designed to provide equality of opportunity to everyone. In White's view, democracy was not necessarily a form of government, it was a way of living.[23]

White used biological terminology to describe democracy. He maintained that it, like any other organism, possessed

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[22] Ibid., pp. 114-17.

[23] William Allen White, "Thrift and Democracy," Life Association News, Vol. XXXIV (December, 1939), 372-73; White, "What the War Did for Brewer," pp. 246, 250.

three qualities--the power to feed itself, the power to reproduce itself, and the power to protect itself. Democracy fed on justice. It reproduced through the extension of justice based upon reason. And the potency of its ideals provided democracy's defense.[24]

White viewed the development of American democracy as an evolutionary process that had its roots in the nation's revolution. Before that time, he argued, all men were not equal before the law. Since then they have been given equal opportunity. After the revolution mental ability began to be rewarded, and men of intelligence worked to break down the barriers of caste, tradition, and special privilege. However astonishing White's view about the significance of the revolution may seem, it was not atypical of his thought nor of that of Progressives generally. He tended to place great symbolic importance on various events in American history, no matter how significant they really were. The revolution seemed to White to be the time when Americans--the population at large, not just leaders--wrested power away from a foreign oppressor. The people had the ability then to govern themselves. The fact that there actually were substantial suffrage limitations did not dissuade him from forming a mental picture of the beginning of a great advance toward democracy. Progressives had tremendous faith in the ability of people to govern themselves. They easily could look to the

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[24]White, Changing West, p. 120.

revolution as the time it all began, however small the start.[25]

The Declaration of Independence was the charter of American ideals which led the nation toward democracy, according to White. The Constitution was the charter of liberties, the rules citizens followed in developing democracy. White thought Americans struggled from the time of the Constitution's adoption to make it come abreast of the Declaration. The latter was the static goal toward which they strove. Americans regularly changed the Constitution to make it reflect their aspirations during a particular era. As man's altruism increased and his sense of duty toward his neighbor widened, his liberties grew. Americans amended the Constitution to bring it into line with their expanding desire to work for the common good.[26]

The income tax, the direct election of United States senators, women's suffrage, and the lame duck amendments, all were examples of the American people democratizing their Constitution to make it reflect their increasingly altruistic desires, White argued. He thought the income tax bolstered democracy because it used the taxation of the national income as an agency of human welfare, while the

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[25]William Allen White, "The Day We Celebrate," Judge, Vol. LXXXIII (July 1, 1922), 16; David P. Thelen, The New Citizenship: Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885-1900 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972), p. 3.

[26]William Allen White, "The Men Who Make a Country: A Thought For a Great Occasion," American Legion Monthly, Vol. I (July, 1926), 8.

other three amendments gave the electorate more direct participation in government.[27] In his evaluation of the income tax, White expressed his view of affairs as he imagined them to be, rather than as they actually were. The income tax provided government with power that was used for such purposes as waging war as well as promoting humanitarian programs. White's perception sometimes reflected his dreams more than conditions as they really existed.

In 1910, White published a book entitled The Old Order Changeth: A View of American Democracy.[28] In it he argued that America slowly progressed toward a more democratic society during the 1800s and then made a giant leap in that direction during the Progressive period of the early twentieth century. In the beginning of the new century there arose a spirit of brotherhood in America, he said, which did not exist a hundred years earlier. The individual became more important than he was during Alexander Hamilton's time. The change came about, White said, because during the earlier period God sat on a throne in a distant land, ruling the universe like an exalted Frederick the Great. But during the Progressive movement God began to move in the hearts of men, and the kingdom of heaven came to America. Faith in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man gave the masses political

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[27]William Allen White, "Progressive Leader," Saturday Review, Vol. XVI (July 10, 1937), 5.

[28]William Allen White, The Old Order Changeth: A View of American Democracy (New York: Macmillan Company, 1910).

influence, shorter working hours, and more education and self-respect. White's terminology reflected his modernism. To him, God was an abstract force of altruism rather than a divine Person. So he thought the advances of Progressivism indicated a manifestation of God in men's attitudes. His language was typical of many Progressives. They grew to maturity at a time when church affairs played a prominent role in each community. Their words reflected the religious orientation of their early environment.[29]

Man's harnessing of steam also improved the quality of life in America, White contended. He saw the nineteenth century as the great age of steam. First, steam conquered distance. It pulled people closer together and allowed the American worker more leisure time. He used that time, White said, to reflect on conditions around him. The worker saw inequality in American life, and joined with others to form a public opinion that protested against conditions as they were. Modern democracy emerged from this revolt, White argued. He referred to what he saw as a new attitude of the common man. The individual increasingly put the welfare of others first, and each person sought to provide a measure of justice for his neighbor. In White's view, the golden rule caught hold in America.

White's analysis of this process of increasing democratic consciousness was more descriptive of the middle class

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[29] Ibid., pp. 3-4; Otis L. Graham, Jr., The Great Campaigns: Reform and War in America, 1900-1928 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 15.

Progressive reformers like himself than the urban workers. True, workers of the late nineteenth century did band together into such organizations as the Knights of Labor to protest existing conditions, just as some twentieth-century workers organized the Congress of Industrial Organizations. But they then proceeded to consider those bodies a manifestation of their class interests. White and most Progressives desired a classless, neighborly society in which all persons worked together for the common welfare. They sought a preservation or restoration, as conditions dictated, of the kind of society they thought existed in the America of their childhood.[30]

Sometime in the nineteenth century a clash developed between democracy and capital, White said. Capital to him usually meant the part of every man's heart that was devoted to selfishness.[31] This clash was part of the struggle that existed between the two forces since America's beginning, but in the nineteenth century it came more into the open. For a time, White argued, capital and democracy fought an even battle, but around 1885 the former began to get the upper hand. The forces of capital developed an extra-constitutional government--the business government. So there existed two governments--the constitutional government representing democracy, and the business government representing

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[30]White, Old Order, p. 5; Graham, Great Campaigns, p. 153.

[31]White, Old Order, p. 6.

capital. The constitutional government protected people and property against crime. The business government sanctioned crimes of cunning if the perpetrators directed their misdeeds against public rights rather than property rights.[32]

Then in the late nineteenth century, White contended, the two governments merged with the forces of capital gaining the dominant position. The transfer of the use of money in politics from legitimate purposes to illegitimate schemes caused the merger, White said. For example, hiring a man to work at the polls evolved into hiring him to vote for the party that paid him his salary. The companies that contributed the most to the campaign funds received special privileges. Under that system, democracy became dormant and the greed of capital dominated.[33]

But in the first decade of the twentieth century, with the advent of the Progressive movement, America took a bold step toward democracy, White believed. The establishment of the party system as a functional part of the American government early in the nation's history restricted the growth of democracy because the government and the party ruled from the top down. The party controlled government and the individual had only a limited influence in political affairs. But the Progressive movement changed that situation. The direct primary system gave each voter a greater voice in

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[32] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[33] Ibid., pp. 12-16, 21.

nominating candidates. A federal law limiting corporate campaign contributions and state laws requiring primary candidates to file their expense accounts and list their contributors, reduced the power of money in party affairs, White said. He believed these moves indicated a support for democracy in America. Citizens were determined to create an atmosphere in which they could convert their combined wisdom into governmental policy. White stated that if God is love, then the movement toward democracy was a divinely-planted instinct.[34]

Even though a great shift toward democracy occurred during the first decade of the twentieth century, White cautioned that the struggle to fan the spark of altruism in man's heart was just getting underway. This concern for American democracy was the foundation of most of his writing the remainder of his life. White was confident that his democratic principles would allow the nation to enjoy the neighborly society he idolized, in spite of an increasingly complex social and economic system. He feared, however, that Americans would look upon the Progressive gains as ends in themselves, rather than as means to a goal. White believed that the universal force that preachers called sin was really selfishness. Men had to curb this evil and turn to the righteousness in their hearts if democracy was to prosper. The collective will of the people had to conquer greed.[35]

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[34] Ibid., pp. 30, 38-40, 52-53, 62-63.

[35] Ibid., pp. 65-66.

White thought that America had a racial advantage that would help keep it on the democratic path. He argued that Teutonic Aryans dominated in the settlement of America and that this placed the nation in a favorable position. He contended that some non-Teutonic Aryans came to North America and married native women. These unions pulled the Aryans down to the inferior level of their wives, White said. Other non-Teutonic Aryans immigrated to America under the rule of a king or priest, and this tyranny gradually destroyed them. But the Teutonic Aryan transported his home and free institutions to this continent, brought his wife with him, and thus he escaped the degenerating effect of native women and the despotism of a king or priest, White concluded. This process gave America the best blood in the world. It was the blood of people who came here with a wide vision. White believed that this nation would continue to enjoy the benefits of the world's best blood because there were no hordes of inferior races on its borders ready to sweep across the country. There were inferior races in the world, he said, but two oceans and Americans' abhorrence of crossbreeding protected the nation from them. Blatantly racist as this view is, it was not an unusual one for old Progressives such as White. Reared in a post-Civil War atmosphere which assigned specific characteristics to various ethnic groups, they often thought in terms of extending the dominion of the white race. White stressed the importance of equal opportunity as a cornerstone

of democracy, yet sometimes it never occurred to him that this should apply racially and ethnically.[36]

In his autobiography, White stated that he read, early in his career, a book entitled Anglo-Saxon Superiority, by Edmond Demolins. Very likely this book influended his thinking about race. At the top of a map opposite the title page showing areas of Anglo-Saxon dominance in the world, Demolins stated that his map "illustrates sufficiently the extraordinary power of expansion of that race which seems destined to succeed the Roman Empire in the government of the world." And in the introduction to one section of the book he said that "we shall make clear the principal causes of the actual superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race in triumphing over the difficulties of the struggle for existence."[37]

White's childhood environment also contributed to his racial attitudes. Anglo-Saxons predominated in his part of frontier Kansas. Most of his neighbors thought of the recently-removed Indian peoples as more of a nuisance than a distinct cultural group. In White's immediate circle, any person of non-western European origin seemed foreign. Yet he and his society were not basically evil in their racial views. They must not be condemned for lacking the cultural awareness of the 1970s. They must be seen as they actually existed--an isolated people caught up in a post-Civil

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[36] Ibid., pp. 197-98, 252; Graham, Great Campaigns, pp. 149-50.

[37] White, Autobiography, p. 326; Edmond Demolins, Anglo-Saxon Superiority: To What It Is Due (New York: R. F. Fenno, 1899), p. 161.

War national expansion in which Anglo-Saxons played an important role. White's racism, developed largely in the nineteenth century, seems contradictory to his primarily twentieth-century emphasis on a democracy based on altruism and brotherly love. And from a logical standpoint it is contradictory. But White was a curious mixture of ideas. If on occasion his nineteenth-century racism emerged in his twentieth-century thought, it does not negate the fact that he rose to national prominence after World War I on a platform of support for a democracy based upon Christian philosophy.

White placed much of his hope for the future of American democracy on the strength of the educational system. Since ignorance was an enemy of democracy, the country needed education to reduce it. White emphasized the importance of schools instilling spiritual values in their students. Even vocational schools should relate the trades they taught to a broader purpose in life. For he believed anyone who was willing to work hard, live thriftily, and grab quickly, even if he had a low intelligence, could gain fairly abundant material rewards in the society. But Americans needed a commitment to strengthening their democracy, in addition to a dedication to their jobs, and this could come only through education.[38]

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[38]William Allen White, "To Make a Life—Not Just a Living," Graduate Magazine, University of Kansas, Vol. XXVI (November, 1927), 5.

White believed that qualitative progress in a democracy emanated from educational institutions where men could withdraw from the world, reflect on life, and discover new facets of truth. Material knowledge was important just as was spiritual. Sometimes advances in the material world brought gains in the spiritual as well. Newton's discovery of gravitation, and similar break-throughs, merged with Christ's philosophy of altruism and changed the world, White said. When man realized that laws governed life and there was an order to the universe, he gained courage and dignity which led him to democracy.[39]

White's emphasis on order played an important role in his popularity during the 1920s and 1930s. Post-World War I American society grasped desperately for a sense of security after the shattering experiences of the European conflict and the domestic upheavals resulting from the clash between the pro-war and anti-war factions. Some persons tried to find this security through the creation of new systems of thought--particularly in the areas of religion and morality. Others attempted to experience a feeling of security by reaffirming their belief in traditional ideas. The latter group comprised a larger portion of the population than once thought, and White received strong support from it.[40] His contention that

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[39] Ibid., p. 6.

[40] Roderick Nash, The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930 (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1970), pp. 2-3.

a set of immutable laws controlled the universe was comforting to many.

White also stressed the importance of education because he believed truth was seldom static. Men were constantly discovering new material and spiritual laws. Yet despite changing truth, democracy remained the same. As the altruism in man's heart, it was the one constant value in the universe. The real students were the ones who did not fear the truth, even new truth. They pursued an education in order to learn to live a happier, more useful life.[41] The future of democracy rested on their shoulders.

To further support democracy White thought an education should develop in a person what he called "a capacity for trained attention."[42] This was the ability to read at one sitting at least fifty pages of a book that seriously discussed an important topic of the day and then write a summary of the passage using simple English properly spelled and punctuated. A person needed to develop this ability in order to contribute to the collective wisdom necessary in a democracy. If he did not gain this from his education, no matter how good his grades were or how many degrees he attained, he had wasted his time. The strange new problems that continually arise in a society would bewilder him. A person with

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[41]White, "To Make a Life--Not Just a Living," pp. 6-7.

[42]William Allen White, "Education and the Greater Law," Graduate Magazine, University of Kansas, Vol. XXXVII (December, 1938), 5.

the capacity for trained attention would be able to spot a dictator or other foe of democracy should one come onto the American scene. He would not mistake kindness for cowardice, nor would he suspect everyone and believe everything. White observed that a fool was always both suspicious and credulous. The fool had no place in White's democracy.[43]

In addition to developing trained attention, White thought an education should produce tolerance, intellectual curiosity, and a working knowledge of the various fields of human activity in science, the arts, commerce, and industry. Then too, a person should acquire from his education righteousness--the practice of acting fairly toward his fellow man. Whether he enjoyed a wealth of material goods or only the necessities, these habits of thinking should direct him toward an abundant life. After a person gained these qualities, he would develop competence in his chosen profession or occupation.[44]

White believed Christian colleges produced the type of education he advocated much better than state colleges and universities did. The active alumni of the state institutions thought only of material goals, not spiritual values. They developed a university into a place that was "fired with a lust to be known by its football team, to be recognized as a smart social organization, to be famed as a place

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

where fast steppers are bred."[45] White feared that this materialistic attitude of America's public colleges endangered the nation because it denied students the chance to receive the wider vision of life necessary in democracy. White said too many Americans tried to solve their problems with an adding machine. They did not ask what a proposal was worth but what it cost. Too many governmental leaders were concerned with taxes but not justice, righteousness, and neighborly kindness.[46] These attitudes were all a result of the materialism characteristic of many state colleges.

White believed that the Christian colleges produced graduates who had a sense of service and a loyalty to something besides money. They possessed an altruistic spirit and the wider vision. But he also observed that many Christians did not support their church colleges as well as they should. This was the problem. The public institutions had the necessary financial base for their programs, but were not committed to the values that nourished democracy. The Christian colleges advocated democratic ideals, but lacked sufficient funds to advance their ideas. White thought it was imperative for the health of democracy that Christians contribute more money to their colleges.[47]

White looked upon two institutions as important adjuncts to the total educational system that bolstered

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[45] White, "Problems of Christian Education," p. 11.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

democracy--the library and the newspaper. Public libraries were schools of continuing education in his view. After leaving high school, most Americans did not complete a college education, he observed. Their only hope of expanding their mental horizons was through the library. The public library was the most democratic American educational institution, White said, for it was available to everyone regardless of race, creed, or nationality. If schools would instill the reading habit in their students, the public library could educate the world, for it was receptive to new ideas and fresh points of view. It was free from the influence of prejudice, party politics, and religious intolerance, he said, and it furnished information on both sides of every important topic.[48]

White thought Americans should give stronger support to their libraries. They should encourage larger appropriations of funds because many libraries did not have enough copies of certain books to meet their patrons' demands, and they were not able to purchase some important volumes that should have been on their shelves. White charged that over half of the people of the nation lacked any library facilities at all, and that most Americans did not recognize the educational value of these institutions. He urged libraries to give more encouragement to their patrons, both the poorly

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[48]William Allen White, "The Educational Service of the Library," School and Society, Vol. XVIII (November 10, 1923), 554-55.

educated and scholars. Since the library was such a democratic institution, its services should be greatly expanded.[49]

White viewed the newspaper as a companion to the total educational system which strengthened democracy. Two aspects of the newspaper accomplished this in White's opinion--the advertising and the news. White believed that, contrary to what some had charged, advertising did not control a paper's editorial policy. If outside forces did dominate the reporting they came from the social sector--the country club, church, or wealthy friends of the editor.[50]

White maintained that newspaper advertising represented economic democracy in action because it created new wants in people's hearts and encouraged them to work hard for things they had never before owned. How could White conceive of advertising as democratic? He used an example from his own life to illustrate. When he was a boy in El Dorado, Kansas, his newspaper employer rode in a fringe-topped surrey, but White walked. That was in the period before widespread newspaper advertising. As an adult and editor of the Emporia Gazette, after newspaper advertising became popular, both White and his employees owned automobiles, and many of the latter drove better models than their employer. This was the democratic way, White said, for

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[49] Ibid., p. 555.

[50] William Allen White, "The Editor and the Merchant Prince," Judge, Vol. LXXXIII (August 5, 1922), 16.

advertising encouraged all people to purchase the same types of products. It equitably distributed the nation's goods, and gave everyone the opportunity to boost his living standard.[51]

Strange as this view may seem, it actually was consistent with White's democratic thought. As with many Progressives, White envisioned a classless society created not from dictatorial edict but from the free choice of the people.[52] According to his reasoning, advertising allowed everyone to have an equal knowledge of available products. Each person would strive to improve his material status in order to achieve about the same level of affluence as his most prosperous neighbor. In White's community throughout his life (both his actual, physical community and the national community of which he had a mental, probably somewhat distorted, image) there were no really wealthy or acutely poor individuals. So no one would have to alter his position drastically in order to achieve a level of affluence similar to that of his neighbor. Thus, advertising contributed to White's democracy.

Some might argue that White's esteem of newspaper advertising represented a conflict of interest, that he supported it so strongly only to boost his own profits. But that contention would be speculative. The written records simply do not give any indication of it. Besides, is it sinister for a

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[51]William Allen White, "Divine Discontent," in Kansas Facts, 1930 (Topeka: Charles P. Beebe, 1930), pp. 126-27.

[52]Graham, Great Campaigns, p. 153.

professional person to think his work in some way contributes to the common good of society?

While advertising led to the fair distribution of material items, the news department helped disseminate spiritual values and promote the golden rule in a community, White said. His ideal newspaper emphasized the improvement of the democratic quality of life in a city, but did not dwell on sensational stories of sex, violence, and greed, forces that were anathema to White's creed of kindness and love. He believed there were some common institutions a newspaper should support. These included a municipal band and an auditorium in which it could give concerts; a Young Men's Christian Association with a gymnasium, swimming pool, and dormitory to make it self-supporting; and a welfare association that would offer a free job placement service and care for the community's poor.[53]

White believed that America was traveling a road of steady spiritual progress. This progress promoted democracy because it gave men hope for a better future. The world was not a material world, he said, but a spiritual one. Men advanced when they adhered to the ideal of kindness. There was culture even in Sodom, men were orderly under the Roman government, and they were industrious in the time of the

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[53]White to Rolla Clymer, 29 March 1918, William Allen White Papers, Library of Congress, microfilm copy, box 47, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; William Allen White, "Good Newspapers and Bad," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. CLIII (May, 1934), 581-86.

Inquisition, he said, but civilization was shifting and uncertain until kindness entered men's hearts.[54]

Humanity's increasing sensibility--its more refined thinking--produced kindness, White said. And greater knowledge broadened mankind's sensibility. So as man learned more about his world, his kindness multiplied. And as his level of kindness grew, he became less concerned with the material aspect of life and more with the spiritual. This was White's theory of spiritual progress.[55]

Spiritual advancement came from a group effort. As kindness in the hearts of certain members of a community increased, these people exerted pressure on their neighbors to conform to their higher standards. Men who had smaller than average sensibilities, those who caused suffering, became unhappy as peer disapproval mounted against them. In this way, White said, human sacrifice and the torture chamber passed from existence, and the death penalty and railroad rebates were on their way out.[56]

Democracy was the highest and final expression of this spiritual evolution, White maintained. It gave everyone an equal opportunity. It helped provide public schools to abolish ignorance; universal suffrage to arm the weak against the strong; and direct nominations, the referendum,

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[54]William Allen White, A Theory of Spiritual Progress (Emporia, KS: Gazette Press, 1910), pp. 7, 16-17, 35.

[55]Ibid., pp. 13, 15.

[56]Ibid., pp. 8-9, 11-14.

initiative, and recall to purify politics. Democracy motivated the movement to abolish corporate campaign contributions. Through old age pensions, profit sharing, workingmen's clubs, and factory sanitation programs, employers with wide sensibilities and the democratic spirit gave all of their employees an equal opportunity to raise their living standard.[57]

White looked to the mid-twentieth century as a time when man would gain a better understanding of spiritual laws, just as he earlier learned so much about physical laws. White thought that the laws of the human spirit, human mind, and human conduct were a part of a great law that governed the universe. These laws were at work in the United States, regenerating man. Americans maintained a hope for a brighter future, and accepted the responsibility as their brother's keeper. They taxed the few for the benefit of the many and distributed their great mass production equitably.[58] White was not really concerned about the existence of wealth and poverty in the United States. First, he thought of his Emporia neighborhood as a microcosm of the entire country. As long as his acquaintances had a chance to receive what he considered their fair portion of the nation's material

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[57] Ibid., pp. 17, 28-30.

[58] William Allen White, "Foreward," in Arthur E. Hertzler, The Grounds of an Old Surgeon's Faith (n.p.,[1944]), p. 5; William Allen White, "Speech Honoring Miss Addams," January, 1927, William Allen White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, 14-16.

output, and he believed they did, then he assumed everyone did. But more importantly, opportunity was a vital element in White's democracy. The abuse of the power of wealth concerned him, but not the existence of wealth. The fact that people lived in poverty bothered him only if he thought they had no chance to rise out of it. If Americans had the opportunity to distribute their production equitably, and White thought they did, then the deed was as good as accomplished.

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White argued that this quality of tolerance, which he thought came from Americans' opportunity for economic mobility, and the very fact that the nation primarily was middle class,

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[59]William Allen White, "The Eternal Bounce in Man," Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol. III (July 15, 1937), 606.

gave the country unity. It was remarkable, he said, that the United States remained unified for it was composed of six distinct regions, several religions, and a number of nationalities. But Americans' acceptance of their neighbor's uniqueness allowed them to live in harmony.[60]

White maintained that the home was the center of America's middle class democracy. The youth in each home learned through their work that service made them happy. Their parents taught them honesty and consideration for others, and the youth came to realize that family solidarity pays because "home folks are decent."[61] More importantly, they learned that family unity was based on benefits given rather than benefits received, a precept that fit in well with White's conception of democracy.

White viewed the home as a great working model of democracy. The father, in most cases, realized he was not the boss but the great servant of the family. The mother, since she enjoyed the privileges of suffrage and quite likely had a job, looked upon herself as a fellow worker, not a slave. The children quickly saw the importance of living at peace within a human unit. The obligations, duties, and pleasures of human affection characterized the family, White said. These produced the altruistic impulses America needed to make it prosper in the world community.[62]

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[60] Ibid., pp. 606-607.

[61] William Allen White, "Home for Christmas," Emporia Gazette, 25 Dec. 1939.

[62] Ibid.

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White believed that America, the land of democracy and spiritual regeneration, was primarily a middle class nation. Americans gave the poor a chance to elevate themselves and made the wealthy so self-conscious about their potential abuse of economic strength that they relinquished the power of their fortunes and entered the vast middle class. White realized that various standards of living existed in America. But people were free to move often from one stratum to another. This promoted democracy, White contended, for the person who enjoyed a comfortable living during one period but then had to struggle to secure his necessities at another time was more sympathetic toward other people's problems.[59]

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[60] Ibid., pp. 606-607.

[61] William Allen White, "Home for Christmas," Emporia Gazette, 25 Dec. 1939.

[62] Ibid.

White maintained that America, or any nation, could learn a lesson from the American home. He believed that a country should have the same spirit of mutual help and cooperation found in the democratic home. He called for nations, during times of peace and prosperity, to plan ahead for depressions. Some citizens, he said, never develop the acquisitive skills necessary to survive periods of social and economic calamity. A nation should provide for its citizens' welfare just as a home plans ahead for the sickness of its members. A home has insurance and savings. A nation should, in prosperous times, prepare for possible periods of depression.[63]

Although White frequently urged Americans to adhere more strictly to democratic principles, he looked upon his country, state, and particularly his town, as examples of places where democracy was working. Americans were democratic while Europeans primarily were not, he said, because Americans enjoyed a high degree of security. The European's necessities--food, clothing, materials for shelter--came from his adjacent region. If a natural disaster such as a flood, drought, or fire disrupted the production of farm or factory goods in a European's local area, he might face physical suffering, and he constantly lived with that fear. The American, by contrast, received his necessities from all over the North American continent. If calamity struck the production

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[63] Ibid.

of a commodity in one area, the American would not suffer, for the output of another region would fill the gap. Therefore, the European, unlike an American, was constantly aware of the need for security.[64]

As a result, White said, the American was primarily concerned with comfort and the prospect of a certain amount of luxury for himself, his family, and his neighbors. The American had faith in the justice of God and, generally speaking, the nobility of man. His sense of material well-being allowed him to think about higher things than just day-to-day existence. The European, for good reason, doubted everything and was interested only in his own and his family's welfare, not that of his fellow men as the American was. He was too busy caring for his daily survival to be concerned about his neighbor. White admitted that the American was often materialistic, but once he accumulated money he willingly gave it away as taxes for health, education, and recreation. And in his will, the typical American generally left his money for a variety of charitable ventures, something rarely done in Europe, White said. The American was a rugged individualist and a well-developed democrat with an advanced sense of social responsibility.[65]

White was too optimistic about the generosity toward charitable organizations that the typical American displayed

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[64]William Allen White, "The American in the Making: Rugged Individualism," New York Times Magazine (January 17, 1932), 15.

[65]Ibid.

in the provisions of his will. Again, he tended to attribute the ideas of his own circle--the Progressive-minded primarily--to the American population as a whole. He described the nation as he hoped it would become--a community of individuals gladly giving their money and energy to the public welfare through voluntary organization so government would not be forced to expand too far. Yet government had the right to intervene in men's affairs to insure equal opportunity and a wholesome environment for the majority. Despite what White said, few taxpayers "willingly" paid taxes in the sense that they did it without complaint. But in his belief that Americans demanded governmental programs for health, education, recreation, and other services, White was completely accurate. Despite a discussion stretching over decades about the over-expansion of government, Americans consistently have appealed for governmental action to solve their problems.

White thought that democracy had triumphed in Kansas. He always looked upon it as a New England state that grew up in the center of the continent. Its New England character was a quality of mind, White maintained. Immigrants from that region populated Kansas during its original settlement, he said, and brought with them Puritanism, the doctrine that the state can intervene in the individual's life if necessary for the benefit of the common welfare. Since under the law the voters of the new state had the choice to accept or reject slavery, the New England immigrants, most of whom were

abolitionists, joined in a bitter struggle with the proslavery advocates over the fate of Kansas. The Puritans won and as a result looked upon themselves as idealistic crusaders. White approved of their victory for he thought that people who believed they were their brother's keeper would choose abolitionism over slavery. The Puritan-abolitionist, thus, was democratic.[66]

White said that ex-Union soldiers obtained free land in Kansas after the Civil War, and as a result Yankees dominated the immigration into the state during the 1870s and 1880s. They were strongly in favor of prohibition, and most were Republicans. The Republicans in the state supported prohibition while the Democratic party, composed of the old proslavery forces and their descendants who came to Kansas in the 1850s and 1860s, opposed it. The prohibitionists won the contest and instituted strong laws to enforce their sentiment, including those that permitted search for and seizure of alcoholic beverages, forbade doctors to prescribe liquor and druggists to stock it, and made a second liquor violation a felony.[67]

White argued that Kansas produced so many Populist leaders since the state's Puritans wanted to combat evil simply because it was wrong. They also supplied considerable

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[66]William Allen White, "Kansas: A Puritan Survival," Nation, Vol. CXIV (April 19, 1922), 460-61.

[67]Ibid.

support to the Progressive movement since they looked upon it as a way to realize their unfulfilled Populist goals. Even though they did not secure all that they hoped for in both movements, White said, the Puritans considered defeat a gain since it drew attention to good causes. Therefore Kansans, White maintained, were more interested in crusades than conquests.[68]

White argued that the Kansas Puritans, continuing to support the idea that the state could interfere in the individual's life for the benefit of the majority, next secured additional protection for the common welfare. They gave the State Board of Health power to eliminate the common drinking cup and the roller towel in public places, oversee distribution of various toxins to combat contagious diseases, and close unsanitary hotels, restaurants, and grocery stores. In addition, White said, the Puritans provided the state of Kansas with authority to guaranty bank deposits, regulate the sale of stocks and bonds, establish a state hospital for the care of the crippled, print textbooks and distribute them at cost, and tighten supervision of public utilities operating in the state. The Kansas Puritans censored movies and banned them entirely on Sundays, made gambling illegal, prohibited prostitution, and allowed Sunday baseball only because it was an amateur pastime.[69]

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., p. 461.

White maintained that the Kansas Puritan was an idealist who worked toward a great democratic civilization. That Puritan wanted his country's collective income to benefit the American democracy as an example to the rest of the world, and he realized that slavery, the saloon, venereal disease, impure food, dishonest bankers and stock salesmen, and dealers of expensive schoolbooks were all economic drains on democracy. They worked against the Puritan's conception of an ideal society. So the Kansas Puritan, fighting back, passed a variety of economic reforms designed to secure his dreams.[70]

White contended that Kansans were more prosperous, happier, and wiser under their democratic Puritan civilization than were people who lived under what he called the Latin system, which disregarded individual welfare and believed that to waste was human and to enjoy divine. The "Latin system" to White was a way of life in which the church, wealthy landowner, industrialist, dictator, or all of them, controlled men's lives. In this environment people cared nothing for the welfare of their neighbors. It was not necessarily a place but rather it characterized the life of people who did not live in a democratic environment. White argued that a number of facts supported his view about the superiority of Kansas. The typical Kansan, he said, was neither

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[70] Ibid.

wealthy nor poor. He lived on a small farm, or in a detached house on a fifty-foot lot near a school, and owned an automobile. The typical Kansas farmer received regular free mail service and subscribed to several newspapers and periodicals. The average town dweller lived on a paved street, and enjoyed telephone, gas, sewer, and electrical service.[71]

Kansans were moral people, White maintained, who obeyed the legally-expressed will of the majority. They were just and righteous, provided for the equitable distribution of material goods, and lived in peace with their neighbors. They felt a responsibility for the destiny of their race. Kansans valued life and liberty, but used the Ten Commandments, golden rule, and the interpretation of them in the Kansas statutes to regulate the pursuit of happiness. This was a good example of the "institutionalized expression of the Christian philosophy in ordinary life," that is, White's democracy. Kansans were contented people, White observed, but under their Christian civilization they valued justice above joy.[72] In short, Kansas in White's eyes was proof that democratic-Christian philosophy could serve as a foundation for an economically and socially strong civilization.

In 1920, White wrote a description of his home town, Emporia, in which he characterized it as a model democratic

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[71] Ibid., pp. 461-62.

[72] Ibid., p. 462.

environment.[73] He said it was not the only such town, for it was typical of those of similar size in the Midwest. Emporians felt a responsibility to regulate their neighbors' environment, White argued, and they demonstrated their concern in various ways. The original town charter in 1857 contained a provision invalidating the title to any lot where persons sold liquor in violation of the law. White said city officials had no more trouble enforcing the prohibition law than they did administering statutes against stealing. He boasted that the local police made less than 100 arrests for all offenses during the year just prior to his writing the article.[74]

The Emporia city government owned and operated several services that were vital to the public welfare. These included the waterworks which supplied water to every house in town, a garbage collection service, a network of sewers, and twenty-five miles of paved streets. A municipal band presented free concerts, and there were two orchestral societies. Four public gymnasiums and three public swimming pools provided wholesome exercise for the youth of the city and, as White observed, kept them out of trouble.[75]

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[73]William Allen White, "'Ever Been in Emporia?'" New Republic, Vol. XXII (May 12, 1920), 348-49.

[74]Ibid., p. 349.

[75]Ibid., p. 348.

Emporians did not forget education, White indicated. In a town of 2,000 families, 2,700 children attended public schools. A large percentage of the high school graduates went on to college, primarily because there were two institutions of higher learning in the city. Three public libraries and a branch outlet provided reading service to all sections of the town, White said. In addition, there were two bookstores and five newsstands, and the 10,000 citizens read 2,300 copies of the local newspaper daily, and 1,200 copies of the Kansas City Star. Finally, White argued, the citizens were prosperous and enjoyed an equitable distribution of wealth. Automobiles outnumbered families. No one was really rich or poor, and no able-bodied man or woman was in the poorhouse.[76]

White's description of his home town resembled only slightly the typical boosterism of the 1920s. He was proud of his community, but he did not emphasize its large industries or potential for them, nor did he point to any projected real estate boom. Rather he stressed the concern of citizens for their neighbors' welfare. He viewed prohibition as a workable solution to the abuse of alcohol, and he was pleased with his community's dedication to liquor control. He pointed to Emporia's public recreational facilities, educational system, libraries, literate population, and moderate affluence.

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[76] Ibid., pp. 348-49.

White viewed his nation, state, and town as places where democracy generally flourished. He believed Americans had to adhere to democratic-Christian principles if the nation was to continue on its path of spiritual progress. However, from 1919 to 1944, the year of his death, he saw threats to this progress. That was the period of a crisis for democracy throughout much of the world, and White directed his writing during that time toward a defense of his Christian-democratic creed.

CHAPTER 3

THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY

A crisis of democratic thought and of democracy itself existed from the end of World War I until the time of the Allied victory during World War II. Throughout that period questions arose over the viability of democracy in the modern world, and many people expressed their reservations or hostility toward the creed in the periodicals and newspapers of the day. The sentiments of a number of persons from various segments of the business and academic world significantly contributed to that climate of opinion, either because of their professional esteem or because of the influence of the publications for which they wrote. Some were openly opposed to democracy while others supported it but foresaw problems it might encounter. The sizable body of writings that mirrored those feelings from 1919 through World War II indicate the crisis the democratic creed suffered during that era. And it suggests that White's rise to his height of prominence at that time was no accident. He addressed himself to one of the leading issues of the period and attracted the admiration and support of those

Americans who stood behind him in his defense of democracy against its many critics. White, his supporters, and his opponents, differed in some cases on the details of what "democracy" meant. But they agreed on its major premise--that the free expression of popular opinion should determine public policy.

Democracy's problems--and hence the background against which White's influence soared--really began with the United States government's approach to the nation's entry into World War I. Until that time, most Americans were content to remain aloof from the Old World and build their democracy apart from foreign concerns. But in 1917 they suddenly realized that American interests might require intervention in the European conflict. President Woodrow Wilson's contention that the United States had a duty to impose a just peace on the world for the protection of democracy laid the foundation for the postwar debate on the subject. He could have based his case for the necessity of American intervention in the war on the fact that Germany presented a danger to American shipping or that it threatened to control the Atlantic. But he knew that the argument that America had a duty to safeguard the expansion of democracy throughout the world would move the nation's citizens in a unique way. The year 1917 marked a great turning point in the minds of contemporaries because it was then that the president insisted that the insurance of democracy's safety only

in the United States was not a satisfactory state of affairs.

Wilson's rationalization for the nation's participation in the World War assumed moral overtones. A villain, the Central Powers, provoked the hero, the Allies, into mortal combat. It was a struggle between good and evil. Americans, having faith in steady progress, believed that the western nations ultimately would triumph and bring peace and happiness to the world.[1]

But the Versailles peace negotiations, with their emphasis on retribution against Germany, seemed to dampen the enthusiasm of many United States citizens for establishing worldwide democracy, as their reluctance to join the League of Nations demonstrated. Later, White would point to that Versailles failure to secure democracy as part of the peace negotiations as an important cause of World War II. Americans had been excited about intervening in the military conflict to pursue chosen objectives, but they were hesitant to obligate themselves to abide by the decisions of a League Assembly.[2] Judging from the ideas expressed in periodicals and newspapers, perhaps one reason was that some had lost faith in American democracy and were not sure it was worth promoting abroad.

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[1]William R. Brock, The Evolution of American Democracy (New York: Dial Press, 1970), pp. 208-209; Ralph Henry Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought, 2nd ed. (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), p. 399.

[2]Brock, American Democracy, p. 209.

Herbert L. Stewart of Dalhousie University expressed that opinion to the academic community in an article for the American Journal of Sociology.[3] He argued that one common definition of democracy was that it was a system in which individual preference had to yield to collective will. But was the collective will synonymous with wise rule he asked. Not necessarily, because there was a great gap between the best minds and the average minds of any era. That posed a particular problem in the twentieth century, he said, for the masses did not have sufficient leisure time to master such a complex subject as modern government. It was difficult for the average person to take a long-range view over a short span outlook, and to sacrifice immediate personal interest for remote social benefit. So in the future, citizens in democratic societies should be prepared to relinquish some of their decision-making power in favor of allowing elected officials with special knowledge to formulate more policy decisions based on their own judgment rather than on the opinion of the electorate, Stewart argued. And public officials had to be prepared to assume the responsibility that the complex world of the 1920s demanded.[4]

Criticism of American democracy at the end of the World War also came from abroad, and White was an attentive

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[3]Herbert L. Stewart, "Some Ambiguities in 'Democracy,'" American Journal of Sociology, Vol. XXVI (March, 1920).

[4]Ibid., pp. 547, 549-50, 555.

observer and analyst of it. Japanese writer S. Wasshio noted that while the Allied nations presumably had fought for democracy, the American system did not seem to be a good pattern for the rest of the world. He argued that monopoly and the unscrupulous methods of large industries characterized the United States. The major businesses were typically aggressive, so it could be assumed that the nation's government would express the same attitude in foreign affairs. Wasshio worried that America might come to dominate China and Siberia and thus squeeze out Japanese interests there. He maintained that United States policy in the Far East was the test of American democracy. If Americans maintained faith in free trade and condemned capitalistic imperialism, then the peace of the Orient would be guaranteed on the basis of democratic principles. But if they put their full efforts behind business ambition, they and the American system would become the menace of the world.[5]

The view that the World War failed to insure democracy's future continued into the mid-1920s. An observer with a government background, former Solicitor General James M. Beck, speaking before a 1926 meeting of the Baltimore City Club, said that the democratizing efforts of the war were in vain. He argued that there was a world tendency away from democracy such as had not existed for 150 years. White, a

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[5]S. Wasshio, "The Danger of American Democracy," Living Age, Vol. CCCIII (December 20, 1919), 697, 699-700.

firm believer in the evolutionary progress of democracy, must have cringed at such negativism. Beck asserted that President Wilson committed a grave error in leading the nation to believe that a war could be a means of promoting democracy. Although he changed his mind about war later, White and many other Progressives originally supported Wilson's military efforts as a way of advancing democracy. This idea fit in well with their American mission spirit.[6]

Much of the writing of the 1920s that attacked democracy concentrated, as Herbert L. Stewart did shortly after the war, on the mental inability of the average man to help direct public policy. American novelist and essayist Cornelia James Cannon, writing in a 1922 edition of the Atlantic Monthly, was a literary spokesman for the anti-democratic position. She maintained that the World War army intelligence tests indicated that almost half of the American draftees could be classified as morons. In particular, large numbers of blacks, and whites of Polish, Italian, and Russian birth scored low on the tests. Therefore, a much larger proportion of people with low intelligence existed than the public previously believed. This fact had an important applicability for American democracy, she argued, for any democratic system demanded a great deal from the individual citizen. And the recent

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[6]"War a Failure, Says Beck," New York Times, 7 Feb. 1926, p. 23; Joan Hoff Wilson, American Business & Foreign Policy, 1920-1933 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971), p. 2.

movement for the establishment of more direct forms of democracy through such measures as the referendum and initiative could result in even more stringent demands from each person. Yet in instances where those measures were adopted and used, the results were disappointing, Cannon asserted. She suggested that the information gathered from the intelligence tests demonstrated that the average voter was so mentally inferior that he was not able to contribute to democratic processes.[7]

White acknowledged in the 1920s that what he called a "moron majority" existed, but he maintained that the evolutionary growth of the democratic spirit eventually would overcome it. Yet he did not go as far as he might have to counter the arguments of Cannon, for he placed a disproportionate amount of faith in the ability of Anglo-Saxons to secure democracy. Racial and ethnic backgrounds should have played no part at all in determining potential support for democracy. White's ideas of Anglo-Saxon superiority bolstered the conclusions of the intelligence tests that blacks and East Europeans were mentally inferior, and the tests in turn supported his views. But the belief in Anglo-Saxon supremacy among the population generally at that time prevented this line of reasoning from having a seriously detrimental effect on democracy in the minds of most Americans.

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[7]Cornelia James Cannon, "American Misgivings," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. CXXIX (February, 1922), 147, 150-51, 153, 155.

Cannon stated that the American forefathers realized that all people would not have the mental ability to direct governmental affairs. So they developed a representative system of government in which men would select the most qualified from among them to lead. Instead of using forms of direct democracy, Americans should attempt to devise some way of educating the electorate to more skillfully choose the individuals to represent them in government.[8]

George Barton Cutten, president of Colgate University, showed that the anti-democratic spirit pervaded some of the highest levels of academic leadership when he spoke out against American democracy in 1922. America never had a real democracy, for citizens' low average intelligence would not permit it, he said. An intellectual aristocracy ruled in commerce, industry, the professions, and government. America actually had a constitutional monarchy, Cutten argued. The president wielded great power over both foreign relations and domestic affairs, he had the authority to initiate legislation, and he appointed foreign ambassadors. The president therefore was a sovereign rather than a servant of the people. And Cutten applauded that system for he believed that the United States needed a form of autocratic rule. In times of stress particularly, Cutten said, Americans called for a ruler to direct them, rather than provide their own democratic leadership. During the World War, he contended, President

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[8] Ibid., p. 153.

Woodrow Wilson was the world's most autocratic ruler in the greatest so-called democracy.[9]

Cutten argued that the widespread delusion that democracy was a workable possibility stemmed from the notion that manhood suffrage constituted self-government. But simply having the privilege of voting did not provide self-government, he said. In large populations particularly, voting at best merely delegated authority to others. And in the United States, during emergencies, it authorized autocracy. The only purpose of elections was to capture mob support for a candidate, not to translate citizen sentiment into governmental policy. Machines such as Tammany Hall did not want an intelligent electorate, Cutten observed, for they would not be able to use one. They based their power on mental sub-normality. The intelligent person had no need for a political machine. But the unintelligent were only too happy to turn their potential voice in government over to someone else, in return for various favors.

Government can rise no higher than its source, Cutten argued. The United States government derived its character from the average of the American electorate. With the army intelligence tests proving that such a large number of men suffered from a below par mental ability and that many could not even comprehend the significance of the ballot, genuine democracy was unthinkable, Cutten concluded. Many leaders once

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[9]Silas Bent, "University Head Derides Delusion of Democracy," New York Times, 26 Nov. 1922, Sec. IX, p. 1.

said that the hope of democracy lay in education. But that was based on the assumption that nearly everyone could be educated. The intelligence tests proved that a sizable group of Americans were not capable of being educated sufficiently so that they could assume their proper responsibility in a democracy. White never accepted such a pessimistic view of the usefulness of education. He always contended that it would enable Americans to make their democratic order a continued success.

Cutten criticized the American system for submitting complicated questions to the voters or to their elected officials, regardless of their qualifications for reaching a decision. He cited the tariff issue as an example. There probably were no more than ten tariff experts in the nation, yet the American system called upon people with a mental age of perhaps thirteen years to formulate decisions on the subject. The only solution to the problem was to create an intellectual aristocracy that would make the ruling necessary to govern a nation. Cutten proposed the disenfranchisement of the mentally unfit as the means to accomplish that. He applauded the South's refusal to allow blacks to vote as a positive step, but believed that giving the franchise to intelligent blacks as well as competent whites, and restricting the franchise to all of the mentally deficient regardless of race, would be preferable.[10]

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[10] Ibid.

Cutten contended that Americans who lost their right to vote would not object. For most people did not really want to govern themselves, he said, and they had no natural craving for democracy, a view that White found abhorrent. Past experience proved that citizens did not protest against benevolent governments, no matter how despotic, Cutten argued. Rebellions came from people suffering under oppressive and unjust governments but not from those living under strong, beneficent governments, so why would they object to the rule of those best qualified, he asked. Everyone who was mentally capable could receive all of the education he was able to absorb. Those who could not complete a certain level of education would be denied the vote, not because they were uneducated, but because they were mentally deficient.

Cutten maintained that Americans already had begun erecting the framework for the intellectual aristocracy's rule. The intelligence quotient tests used in schools provided a good evaluation of a person's mental ability early in life, he said. Children were directed toward the vocation for which they were best suited on the basis of such tests. In the same way, individuals could be tested at an early age and judged either fit or unfit to vote. Those of superior intelligence would receive special leadership training to prepare them for public service. Those of lesser mental ability would not mind allowing the intellectual aristocracy to govern as long as it remained benevolent, for they would be directed into useful work appropriate

to their ability, and a contented person was not prone to rebel, Cutten concluded.[11]

Darwin P. Kingsley, president of the New York Life Insurance Company, in an address to the 1927 convention of the Association of Life Insurance Presidents held in New York, demonstrated that anti-democratic sentiment existed even among the top business leadership, normally the bastion of conservatism. He also criticized the American democratic system for not efficiently using the services of its most talented members. If a democracy endured, its best people must rule it, he said. Then he went on to criticize what he called the "foolish philosophy of the Declaration of Independence" for offering equal political power to everyone. By contrast, White thought the Declaration was of vital importance to the American democracy. Under the American system, Kingsley continued, voters did not elect the best-qualified individual to office, so the most talented worked for business amd science. That situation characterized the state of affairs in the United States at that time he said--strong business and scientific leadership and weak governmental direction.[12]

Another academic representative, Professor Michael Pupin of Columbia University, blamed Jacksonian Democracy for developing what he thought was the false idea that nearly

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[11] Ibid.

[12] "Insurance in 1927 at $16,900,000,000," New York Times, 9 Dec. 1927, p. 37.

everyone was equally qualified to hold a public office. It arose as a justification for the spoils system, he said. Replacing office-holders periodically with a new set of individuals without regard to training was an absurdity in the relatively simple age of the early nineteenth century, but it became disastrous in the complex twentieth century. Americans recognized the need for the trained expert in all professions except public service.[13]

Will Durant, one of the most prominent writers and interpreters of public affairs at that time, suggested in 1929 that the United States democratic system actually encouraged mediocrity in public office. The first principle of American politics was, he said, that exceptional education was undesirable in elected officials. The process by which this situation developed was a long one. Democracy arose in America out of a state of equality between the falling aristocracy and the rising middle class, Durant argued. There was free land in America and free men. Then as time passed the free land became exhausted. Farmers found their fields mortgaged and their markets under capitalistic control. Many of them fled to the growing cities where they went to work in factories using tools too costly for them to own personally. Natural inequalities became more apparent with the growing complexity of industrial life. Next, differences in the economic status of individuals intensified. Political machines

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[13]"A Scientist on the One Great Failing of Democracy," World's Work, Vol. XLIX (January, 1925), 242.

formed to prey on the needs of the growing lower classes who sold their political independence and finally became simply a commodity that the political bosses sent to the polls to gain reelection. Political machines thus destroyed democracy, Durant concluded.[14]

Under the political system of the 1920s, voters cast their ballots as a superfluous gesture, Durant continued. Politicians maintained the polls to establish in the minds of the populace the false notion that they, the citizens, controlled governmental policy. Yet perhaps the voters were beginning to realize what a farce they were participating in Durant surmised. The large numbers of qualified citizens who did not vote testified to that. Durant maintained that education could not restore democracy in America. People simply were born, lived their lives, and died faster than they could be properly educated. And the ignorant reproduced faster than those who valued learning, so there always was an abundance of the uneducated.[15] This notion was completely contrary to White's fundamental beliefs.

Durant said he knew of no way to revive democracy except to require office-seekers to have training for their prospective positions. Would a person want someone to treat

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[14]Will Durant, "The Reign of Mediocrity," Forum, Vol. LXXXI (January, 1929), 35-36.

[15]Ibid., pp. 36-37.

his physical ills whose only qualification was that he had a desire to do the job, Durant asked. Of course not. So, Durant argued, those individuals who wished to govern a city, state, or the nation should be trained in the art and science of administration. Then, each person who received that instruction could run for office without the requirement of a nomination. And to further guarantee that only well-qualified individuals ruled, no one should serve in a high position without first having worked at least two years in the next lower office. A person who only wanted a governing post as a means of obtaining graft would not undertake such an arduous program, Durant maintained.

Durant admitted that such a plan would not be entirely democratic. It would be a combination of aristocratic government and democratic choice. But under the system then in existence, Durant said, democracy did not really work, for the voters simply had a choice between two evils. Give everyone an equal chance to make himself fit to hold office, he argued, but prohibit everyone who did not choose to become qualified from ruling.[16]

Durant concluded that in the final analysis the American people were responsible for the shortcomings of democracy because they overestimated their ability in maintaining their sovereignty as voters. They had faith that there was wisdom in numbers, yet they produced only mediocrity in their government. As the number of voters grew, they increasingly demanded

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[16] Ibid., pp. 37-38.

more ordinary rulers. Oratory became more important than intelligence or foresight as a quality that citizens used to judge a candidate.[17]

H. G. Wells, another influential writer of the period, in a 1927 evaluation of democracy, also centered his criticism on what he referred to as democracy's "objectionable type of ruler, the politician. . . ."[18] Theoretically the great, good, and capable individuals, Wells said, offered their leadership services to the electorate in a democracy. But the task of running for an office demanded such effort from a candidate that he had to align himself closely with a party organization and devote his time to electioneering so much that the voters judged him more on his campaigning ability than on his qualifications as a public official. So politicians, rather than statesmen, characteristically ruled democratic countries. Politicians in America, France, and Great Britain typically gathered around them a group of prosperous people who opposed any substantial changes in their systems, Wells contended. They prevented the creative individuals, who supported education and wanted to institute positive reforms, from implementing their ideas. As a result, governmental leaders in a democracy usually failed to improve life

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[17]Will Durant, "Is Democracy a Failure?" Harpers Magazine, Vol. CLIII (October, 1926), 558.

[18]H. G. Wells, "Doubts of Democracy Gather and Grow," New York Times, 20 Mar. 1927, Sec. IV, p. 2.

in their society.[19] White admitted that many politicians were unwilling to support improvements in the country, but he also pointed to the many progressive leaders who made a commitment to institute creative changes that would bolster democracy.

Wells also noted that voter apathy toward public affairs was a major defect of a democracy. The more democratic a society, the more serious the problem. In democracies where there was restricted voting, newspapers commonly reported legislative debates in detail because of citizen interest. But when suffrage became universal, parliamentary news almost disappeared from the papers since voters did not care to read about it. In a democracy with universal suffrage, citizens showed concern for political affairs only at election time, and then they were interested in the event merely as a sporting contest. When voters did cast ballots they seldom made choices according to their interests for they typically were ignorant of the basic issues.

Wells admired the Communists and Fascists for their enthusiastic devotion to their cause, even though he condemned the former's doctrine and the latter's cruelty and injustice. Most of those groups were composed of young members, and the young people of the world possessed a tremendous fund of dedication and enthusiasm. That resource would

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[19] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

construct a new political order that would supersede democracy, Wells concluded.[20]

Professor Moritz J. Bonn of Berlin was a prominent prophet of doom for democracy in the 1920s whose ideas were published frequently. He warned of its decline, citing losses for the system particularly in Europe. Bonn noted the lower standard of living in the European democracies during the 1920s, as opposed to what he considered the higher standards under monarchies before the World War. European citizens looked at the conditions of high unemployment and rising prices characteristic of the democracies during the 1920s, and compared them unfavorably with the more prosperous prewar monarchical systems. Not having studied political theory, the average European equated monarchy with economic strength and democracy with recession, Bonn argued. Critics also contrasted the prewar bureaucratic efficiency of the monarchies with the apparent administrative shortcomings of democracy. And they blamed democracy for the increased violence and decreased public morality in Europe during the 1920s, Bonn stated.[21]

Bonn also criticized what he believed was the tendency of European parliaments to divide into blocs representing classes or occupations, none strong enough to rule but all hostile to each other and unable to cooperate. The days of

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[20] Ibid., pp. 3, 20.

[21] "European Crisis," New York Times, 8 Aug. 1924, p. 5.

plain parliamentary majorities were at an end, said Bonn, for coalitions had taken control. Democracy was so weakened that it could not withstand another catastrophe like the World War, he warned.[22]

Walter Lippmann, widely-recognized writer and political analyst, arose as another prominent critic of democracy in the 1920s. He, as did others, decried what he believed was a major fallacy of the doctrine--that everyone was assumed to have a workable knowledge of public affairs. Supporters of democracy thought that the masses simply absorbed essential facts as they breathed in air. They believed the only necessary additions to that naturally-received knowledge were a good heart, a reasoning mind, and a balanced judgment, Lippmann said.[23]

Lippmann recommended a pooling of qualified opinions on important issues as a way of counteracting public ignorance of a wide sweep of topics. Accountants, statisticians, and similar experts should work together to direct governmental policy. Public opinion simply could not be relied upon to supply the knowledge needed for successful administration.[24]

H. L. Mencken, nationally-famous newspaper and magazine writer, was another significant critic of democracy during

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[22]"Crisis of Democracy," New York Times, 29 Aug. 1924, p. 13.

[23]Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p. 258.

[24]Ibid., p. 399.

the 1920s. He cited the general lack of intelligence of the masses, or what he called "the lower orders of men," as a basic defect of the society of the United States. Many Americans possessed a command of a large body of facts, he said, but most of the information was irrelevant. Lippmann, who hoped that somehow intelligence levels would rise among the populace, was too optimistic, Mencken argued. A majority of the men and women of every modern society were noneducable, and even if they could understand public issues, they had no desire to acquire knowledge. Yet a thirst or ability for learning would be of no avail, Mencken charged, for there were not enough enlightened teachers in the world to fill such a need. Teachers merely preserved and propagated the misconceptions that were currently in vogue anyway, so all plans to raise the intelligence levels of the masses were futile.[25]

The 1920s were a time of great stress and conflict in the United States. Many Americans ridiculed traditional beliefs such as the sanctity of the home, the potential for mankind's spiritual growth, and democracy.[26] Yet others, like White, staunchly defended them. The critics of democracy tended to have a pessimistic view about the ability of man to rule himself while White generally was optimistic.

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[25]William H. Nolte, ed., H. L. Mencken's Smart Set Criticism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 122-24.

[26]Paul A. Carter, The Twenties in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968), p. 51.

Democracy's detractors were reacting to the general disillusionment that followed World War I. White, on the other hand, rose above the postwar letdown and remained faithful to America's democratic tradition. In doing so, he acted as a spokesman for those who were not interested in becoming part of the "lost generation" and turning their backs on the nation's future. White's service helped to preserve the traditional values upon which American progress was founded.

By the end of the 1920s the United States and other nations were fully involved in the debate over democracy. Critics of the ideology emphasized various points, but they generally agreed on several basic premises: ignorance of the masses rendered popular sovereignty unworkable; democracy discouraged individuals of superior intelligence from participating in public service; and the future of democracy was dim.

The rise of the European dictators and autocratic systems also contributed to the crisis of democracy that existed from the late teens until the mid-1940s. The situation began as the world witnessed the Russian Bolshevists destroy capitalism in their country, watched Nikolai Lenin and later Joseph Stalin wield power there, and saw Benito Mussolini and his Black Shirts destroy parliamentary government in Italy and construct a Fascist dictatorship in Rome.[27] Then Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany in 1933

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[27]Gabriel, American Democratic Thought, p. 443.

and the Japanese spread military rule over the Far East. Finally, the outbreak of World War II threatened to spread totalitarianism over the entire world. All of those developments weakened democracy's strength in the world.

Mussolini's thought was a typical example of a dictator's view of democracy. He believed that a person who was dreaded could lead better than one who held the admiration of his people. Friendship between a public official and the populace was not enduring, he maintained, whereas fear never lost its impact. A ruler must always assume that all men were bad and would not work except under compulsion. Individual activity led to social decay, but the state could produce organized improvements. By nature the individual always attempted to disobey the law. Many persons would harm the interests of the state if such action benefitted them, but few would sacrifice themselves for their nation. These were all concepts to which Mussolini subscribed. He also believed that democratic nations set aside their free principles when under a crisis.[28] Certainly he was a dominant spokesman for international anti-democratic thought for many years.

In a 1928 speech, Mussolini charged that the masses were incapable of forming a collective will of their own and selecting representatives to govern them. Democracy was unnatural, he said. When a group of people gathered, a few persons or at least one naturally assumed leadership. Some

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[28]W. R. Inge, "Mussolini on Democracy," Living Age, Vol. CCCXXII (July 5, 1924), 15.

members of a given group were fit to rule, some not, but the desires of the majority had no effect on who should and who should not lead. This was true because of a fundamental law of nature in which "directing minds" were best qualified to rule. Reliance on an imaginary will of the masses never provided proper governing, for that came only when the people acquiesced to the rule of the "directing minds."[29]

Former German Emperor Wilhelm II, perhaps bolstering the dictators, also spoke out against democracy in 1928. Parliamentarianism and corruption always went together, he said, for group sovereignty had no conscience. In a monarchy one person, the king, was responsible for government, but the mob had no group sense of responsibility.[30]

Wilhelm lauded H. L. Mencken's attack on democracy. He priased Mencken's contention that the soul of the masses was like the soul of a child. The masses and children both were susceptible to the misdirection of an unscrupulous leader. The masses were not interested in liberty but only in the material advantages they could gain from a society. They were fascinated with democracy simply because it offered an ideal. But the ideal was based on the false premise that

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[29]Benito Mussolini, "Why Italy Rejects Democratic Rule," Current History, Vol. XXVIII (May, 1928), 181-82.

[30]Wilhelm II, "The Bankruptcy of Parliamentary Government," Current History, Vol. XXVIII (May, 1928), 175-76.

there existed a group of wise individuals known as "the people."[31] White believed that the views of individuals such as Mussolini and Wilhelm overemphasized the impact of man's selfish nature. He maintained that if nurtured, man's altruistic character would prevail and boost democracy.

By the late 1930s, democracy appeared to be in deep trouble around the world. One country after another fell to autocracy.[32] Fascism downed the concept of equality of opportunity wherever it conquered, and replaced it with the doctrine that the strong ruled and the weak submitted. It taught that if the strong failed to exercise their power properly, they would commit a gross injustice to civilization. Fascist writers emphasized that theme repeatedly. They scorned democracy and portrayed it as a decadent system. Wilhelm Stuckhart, in a guide he prepared for German history teachers wrote: "The experience of history and the findings of racial science teach us that Democracy has always been the political form of the racial decline of a creative people."[33] The Fascists attempted to prove that democracy was outmoded and on its way out of existence. But White did not think so. He consistently tried to show that the future lay in faith in the individual's ability to determine his destiny and that

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[31] Ibid., p. 177.

[32] George S. Counts, The Prospects of American Democracy (New York: John Day Company, 1938), p. 2.

[33] Ibid., p. 4.

of his nation. White's stance was a prelude to the ideological battle between democracy and autocracy during World War II.

There was nothing new in the struggle between democracy and autocracy for it occurred whenever the former appeared in history. But the disturbing feature of the between-the-war crisis was the fact that dictators so often assumed power through an appeal to the masses. In Germany, for example, Adolf Hitler constructed the most powerful political party in the Reich, used constitutional means to assume power in the government, and then destroyed the republic. But the German people did not seem to object, for they welcomed a strong ruler. They were typical of populations in a number of countries where autocracy assumed control. People seemed to have lost faith in democracy and were willing to surrender to a dictator.[34]

Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, warned that democracy suffered from a lack of imaginative leadership and for that reason was losing out to the dictatorships. In the past, individuals with great vision led the democratic movement, but there were no figures of equal stature with the Founding Fathers prominent during the 1930s. One reason for that, he believed, was that Americans demonstrated a recent inclination to pass laws to solve problems rather than rely on individual leadership. Two trends began as a by-product of that. One was the use of

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[34] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

taxation as a method of redistributing wealth. Taxation should only finance governmental operations, Butler argued. The other method was the establishment of administrative boards or commissions having the power, with legislative approval, to regulate large areas of a citizen's life. Butler labeled such schemes anti-democratic and contrary to the public welfare. Members of those commissions and boards, he said, attempted to steadily increase their area of jurisdiction, and thus moved a democratic nation closer to the form of a totalitarian one.[35]

The final aspect of the crisis of democracy centered around the worldwide depression of the 1930s. A number of analysts believed that the depression had a detrimental effect upon democracy. J. Frederick Essary, writing in 1933 for an issue of The Annals of the American Academy devoted to democracy, blamed the depression for allowing the Franklin Roosevelt administration to assume a moral power unknown to previous peacetime regimes. Particularly during the opening months of Roosevelt's rule, Congress passed laws without debate and abdicated its power; the president assumed almost dictatorial authority; and democracy declined in America, Essary said.[36]

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[35]Nicholas Murray Butler, "Democracy in Danger: Without Vision, the People Perish," Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol. IV (September 15, 1938), 708-10.

[36]J. Frederick Essary, "Democracy and the Press," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. CLXIX (September, 1933), 113.

Will Durant also cited the effect of the depression in weakening democracy's standing. Citizens living in democratic countries frequently blamed their system of government for the economic woes they suffered. Since democracy was unstable because it based its power on a majority that existed only at the time of elections and never allowed any lasting organization, it was susceptible to the strains of catastrophes such as depressions, he concluded.[37]

A British observer, William Gascoyne-Cecil, Bishop of Exeter, after a visit to the United States during the depression era, condemned the American democratic system for allowing men to go hungry while farmers plowed under their crops. He observed such scenes on a visit to Chicago and a subsequent tour of Illinois farm areas. He also criticized democracy for permitting the Chicago political machine to function. Democracy, in allowing citizens to express their desires, encouraged them to think of their own interests rather than the welfare of the community, he maintained.[38]

Doubts about the future of democracy also came from the political sector. In a 1936 speech, Herbert Hoover warned that a product of the depression, Roosevelt's New Deal, was leading America toward the European type of dictatorship. The European autocrats used the machinery of liberal

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[37]Will Durant, "Is Democracy Doomed?" Saturday Evening Post, Vol. CCVII(September 15, 1934), 78, 80.

[38]"Democracy Fails, Bishop Tells Lords," New York Times, 20 June 1935, p. 9.

institutions to rise to power, Hoover said. They promised a Utopia to people in distress, who believed them. The 1932 presidential campaign provided a good example of such tactics, Hoover argued, obviously referring to Roosevelt's side of the contest. He went on to say that once in power the European despots commanded their nations' assemblies to delegate their power and act favorably toward the rulers' plans. Then the dictators adopted a planned economy, regimenting industry and agriculture and spending huge sums of money. The New Deal practiced these same procedures, Hoover charged.[39]

Hoover argued that the Supreme Court's declaration of unconstitutionality against a number of New Deal measures supported his contention that the Roosevelt administration was opposing the principles of democracy. The Congress and executive branch, rather than protecting the rights of men, sought to usurp them, he contended. The Congress, Supreme Court, and executive were all pillars of the American system of liberty, Hoover said. When the power of one or more of them was used improperly, the democratic system was threatened.[40]

Alfred M. Landon, 1936 Republican presidential candidate, was another politician who looked at the future of democracy with alarm during the depression period. The

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[39]Herbert Hoover, "A Holy Crusade for Liberty," Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol. II (June 15, 1936), 570.

[40]Ibid., p. 571.

feeling of doubt and distrust that people all over the world held toward democracy challenged both the free enterprise economic system and the representative form of government, he said. Whereas before the onset of the depression many people thought there existed an advancing tide of democracy, after the advent of the economic crisis autocracy gained strength and democracy was in retreat. He called for a rededication to what he viewed as the American ideals of dependence on local government rather than on concentrated national power, reliance on individual initiative rather than a permanent government dole, and support for a decentralized industrial system instead of monopoly. In every crisis, there were certain timid persons who feared that a temporary setback would become permanent, Landon said. A return to basic American principles would insure that their apprehensions did not become reality.[41]

In February, 1939, the popular periodical Survey Graphic published a special issue devoted to democracy. Editor Raymond Gram Swing wrote an introduction to the number in which he characterized the status of democracy as it existed in the late 1930s, and summarized the results of two decades of crisis for democracy. American democracy enjoyed a favored childhood, he said. The North American continent, teeming with natural resources, was available to anyone possessing the strength to conquer it. Under that blessing of

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[41]Alfred M. Landon, "Our Future--New Frontiers," Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol. II (September 1, 1936), 733-34.

abundance the people of the United States enjoyed the highest living standard in the world, and democracy flourished. But by the late 1930s the situation changed, Swing argued. The economic system worked to the disadvantage of the individual. Industrialism and concentrated financial power gave an unfair advantage to a relative few, and political authority was not able to return full economic opportunity to the individual. Apparently permanent mass unemployment and the static poverty of tens of millions of Americans became a fact of life, and the goal of achieving economic democracy seemed farther away than ever.[42]

The position of the world's democracies deteriorated after the 1938 Munich conference, Swing continued. The conference placed them on the defensive and gave Germany greater potential strength than it might have hoped for even if it had fought to a draw in the World War. France, no longer military master of the continent, was only half as large as the expanded Reich, and half as strong. Britain was prepared to consider any compromise that might give it some hope of security.

The future of the free human mind and spirit was at stake, Swing argued. The crisis of democracy threatened the concept that the individual was the basic unit of society and that the welfare of the whole was contingent upon the welfare of all of its parts. Without the assured protection of that

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[42]Raymond Gram Swing, "Over Here," Survey Graphic, Vol. XXVIII (February, 1939), 56.

idea, Swing maintained, the life that Americans enjoyed, even with all of its defects, would not continue. Without its guarantee, the only possible governmental objective would be tyranny.[43]

Over a year later, Frank Aydelotte, president of Swarthmore College, in a commencement address to the school's graduating class, charged that Americans did not realize the gravity of the challenge to democracy. Many declared that they took a position of neutrality in the world crisis, he said, but actually they simply found an excuse for not analyzing the current situation. The United States newspaper press and radio made the citizens of that country the best informed people on earth, yet Americans thought about the issues of the war and their significance less than any other nationality. A democracy that refused to think and to face reality, Aydelotte charged, was in serious danger. He also contended that lack of faith in the possibility of a better future for the world was the weakest element of all the democracies. The attitude of the democracies contrasted sharply with the blind devotion the Nazis had to their creed. In the final analysis, the fate of democracy hinged on the faith and idealism of its people, he concluded.[44]

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[43] Ibid., pp. 55-56.

[44] Frank Aydelotte, "American Democracy at the Crossroads," Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol. VI (June 15, 1940), 531-32.

The preceding are a representative sample of the opinions influential Americans from various walks of life expressed during the discussion over the crisis of democracy that existed from the end of World War I to the conclusion of World War II. The sample was chosen to show that some of the most articulate observers of the period either had no faith in democracy or feared for its future. A reading of the periodical literature of the time quickly reveals that the status of democracy was one of the leading issues, and many writers with diverse backgrounds expressed trepidation about it. White's writing, by contrast, indicated that his main theme was a defense of democracy. He realized that certain Americans at times departed from its principles, but he never lost faith that the nation would realize that true democracy involved the expression of the Christian philosophy in ordinary life, and would ultimately rely on it for guidance.

The Allied victory over Germany, Italy, and Japan in 1945 brought the post-World War I crisis of democracy to a close. For a short while at least, western democracy was secure. White's defense of democracy and his answer to the assaults on it formed the bulk of his published writing during the final twenty-five years of his life and contributed heavily to his fame. One cannot fully understand White's thought and the between-the-wars era without comprehending democracy's troubled times and White's definition of democracy.

CHAPTER 4

WHITE ON THE POSTWAR PEACE

At the end of World War I, William Allen White looked upon the Allied victory as a great triumph of righteousness over tyranny and force. He argued that the Germans relied on might, used propaganda, and demonstrated their faith in materialism. He failed to recognize that the United States also depended on propaganda to further its military effort. But his thought was characteristic of many Progressives who became caught up in the war excitement and saw the mobilization as a way of imposing unity on the American people. He even became a Red Cross lieutenant colonel in 1917, donned the organization's uniform, and went to Europe as an observer in what he considered a high adventure.[1]

White contended that as the civilization of the Allies, which he thought operated primarily on an aspiration toward

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[1]Otis L. Graham, Jr., The Great Campaigns: Reform and War in America, 1900-1928 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. x; William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 535.

justice, recognized Germany's evils, it turned against that nation. The Allies based their philosophy on the belief that this was not a material world, White said, but a world in which there were forces of righteousness that were stronger than steel and dynamite, and more resolute than blood and iron. The western Christian civilization often repressed these feelings, but in a time of crisis, such as the World War, these surfaced and demonstrated their superiority over the evil in the world. Germany gave little regard to justice and righteousness, so it paid the penalty, White argued.[2]

Germany during the World War was a pagan civilization, White maintained, and was out of step with the modern movement toward democratic and spiritual progress. The western Christian world proved that Germany's philosophy, which was based on the theory that force brought progress, was wrong. Progress, White reiterated, came from the slow and unrelenting improvement in human relations, the practical application in life of the golden rule. Germany could no more conquer that rule than it could abolish the law of gravitation.[3]

White believed that not only had Germany and its philosophy of force lost the war, but that the spiritual powers of the West scored a resounding victory. He praised President Woodrow Wilson's war leadership, saying that the

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[2]William Allen White, "What the War Did for Brewer," Yale Review, Vol. VIII (January, 1919), 249-50.

[3]Ibid., p. 250.

commander in chief always kept his faith in the nobility of man. As he led America through the war, man temporarily was born again through the spirit of brotherhood.[4] This spirit was an enduring, progressive force that would live on in the world, White maintained, and Wilson used it effectively during both war and peace. Those people in America from both major parties who supported this doctrine elected Wilson in 1916, White stated. Wilson carried the traditionally Democratic states that year, but he also won in every Republican state where the liberal or Progressive movement was strong. The Midwestern states that had prohibition, women's suffrage, the initiative, the referendum, and the primary, all chose Wilson in 1916, and those were the first states to fill their volunteer army and navy quotas six months after the election.[5] Thus White saw a relationship among citizen support for America's military effort, the Progressive movement, and the spirit of brotherhood that he said Wilson used as a guideline to supervise the war.

White argued that after the war broke out in Europe in 1914, the world descended into a condition of spiritual retrenchment and reaction. Wilson was the first leader to support democracy during the war. He arose amidst a milieu

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[4]William Allen White, speech (Delivered to the Washington Wilson Association in celebration of the seventieth birthday anniversary of Woodrow Wilson, Washington, D.C., December 28, 1926), William Allen White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, 13-14.

[5]Ibid., pp. 1-2, 15.

of lying and hatred in Europe, and prompted the Allies to base their war effort on furthering the spirit of righteousness. This was the great turning point in the war and an important event in world history, White argued. For the first time democracy triumphed over the forces of war. The Central Powers surrendered to Wilson's Fourteen Points, White maintained, not to the Allied armies. Wilson, through the power of reason, dampened the enthusiasm for war behind the German lines. He offered a just peace, free from greed and revenge, and it stilled the hatred in the German heart.[6]

Interestingly, White defended the American government's restriction of liberty at home, while it was fighting a war to protect freedom abroad. He argued that in war time it was always necessary to limit freedom of speech, the press, and assembly, and that the government under Wilson did this as a legitimate part of its efforts to teach mankind to rely on justice, not force, in human relations. The important thing, in White's view, was not that the government curtailed civil liberties, but that Wilson channeled the war toward securing democracy and righteousness in the world.[7]

White's defense of the Wilson administration's limitation of civil liberties shows how deeply the hysteria of the time permeated the thinking even of democracy's great supporter. He and his Gazette staff put their full efforts

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[6] Ibid., pp. 2-4.

[7] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

behind the local mobilization for war. White confessed in his autobiography: "We treated roughly laggards who withheld their subscriptions to the war effort. We were suspicious of families with German names."[8] Yet on the same page he claimed that he sympathized with those who opposed the war! Could it be that the martial excitement of the time, and the spirit of democracy in White's heart, pulled him in opposite directions? And yet could anyone blame him for apparently being confused and not speaking out for liberty during one of freedom's darkest hours in American history.

While White maintained that Wilson directed the Allies toward a democratically-based war policy, he also argued that the writers and editors of the West spread Wilson's philosophy among the populace. In White's view, guns carried the doctrine of force, while democracy and righteousness depended on printing presses for their dissemination. Writers and editors contributed to the spirit of continual progress and to the Allied war effort because people read what those individuals wrote. Militarily the Central Powers and the Allies faced one another on even terms. But the spirit of democracy and righteousness, which the western writers and editors promoted, backed the Allied guns and this gave the West its margin of victory.[9]

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[8]White, Autobiography, p. 533.

[9]William Allen White, "As I See It: The Editor Ruler," New York Tribune, 30 July 1922.

In the spring of 1919 White traveled to Europe and while he was there he visited Germany and observed the activities of the American occupation army. What he saw convinced him that America's doctrine of brotherhood and democracy could catch hold even in Germany, if given a chance. For he noted that the Germans accepted the American occupation troops as guests, not conquerors. And the Americans responded with courtesy.[10]

White viewed America's participation in the World War as a manifestation of its Puritan spirit. This was a crusading spirit based on goodwill and a desire to settle international differences before they became chronic grievances. It led America into the European conflict and encouraged it to join the League of Nations. In White's opinion, the same Puritan spirit that motivated the nation to enter the war, also was responsible for the landing of the Pilgrims, the Boston Tea Party, the establishment of the Constitution, the abolition movement, and the nineteenth century farmers' protest.[11] Although this conclusion of White's was quite a generalization, it was defensible. Americans did enter the European war partly from a humanitarian desire to protect their allies and guard liberty in the world, despite their later disillusionment and their restriction of free expression at home. That spirit of the quest to assert

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[10]"In Germany with William Allen White," Literary Digest, Vol. LXI. (April 26, 1919), 64.

[11]William Allen White, "William Allen White to F. H.," New Republic, Vol. XIX (May 17, 1919), 88.

the principles of freedom also was in some measure responsible for the other events and movements White cited.

White argued that the World War produced a number of changes in the world. First, he believed it ended the power of monarchy. Democracy's influence, which the war strengthened he said, pushed monarchs aside. Democracy was the new spirit, kings and queens became old-fashioned.[12] It was all part of the evolutionary process.

White also attributed partial democratic advances in England to the war. The English educational system previously produced leaders only from the upper and middle classes of the country's social system, he said. But battle losses were so heavy from those groups that most of the intelligent leaders in existence after the war were from the labor class. The labor leaders understood what people from their group wanted, and they knew how to obtain it. They pushed a program that was in progress in the United Kingdom for thirty years. These leaders obtained state pensions, food for the unemployed, and regular working hours. White maintained that Britons had difficulty employing domestic servants because so many men of the serving classes were officers during the war, and that status gave them a sense of ambition. As part of the country's democratic movement, farm tenants increasingly tried to buy 100-acre tracts from the aristocratic landowners.[13] Thus

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[12]William Allen White, "Once Upon a Time," Judge, Vol. LXXXIII (July 29, 1922), 18.

[13]William Allen White, "England in Transition," Collier's, Vol. LXIV (September 27, 1919), 9-10.

White saw a movement among the English working people to assume more independence and leadership, and he praised it as democratic. But he also noticed the war's detrimental effects in England. Simply replacing the authority of the upper and middle classes with the power of labor was not totally democratic in his view. He desired a weakening of class lines and a balancing of power among the various groups. For that reason he looked unfavorably on the decline of middle and upper class leadership as a result of war losses. He felt that all nations needed the debate of various sides if they were to progress, and England with an abundance only of labor leaders, lacked that.[14]

The war's aftermath also brought a temporary irresponsibility to England which White observed while there, and of which he did not approve completely. He saw hordes of people deliberately out of work, living on unemployment allowance. White acknowledged the nation's need for rest after the long conflict, but could not understand why so many people spent their time in drinking and revelry while the daily work of the country remained undone.[15]

On the other hand, White believed some good came from all of that. For example, the refusal of the serving classes to work lessened the rigidity of the caste system. The aristocracy's country homes demanded large amounts of

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[14] Ibid., p. 40.

[15] William Allen White, "The Land of the Joy Strike," Emporia Gazette, 5 July 1919.

servant labor, White said. Fireplaces provided their heat, and each home required a half-dozen men to tend the fires and bring in wood, and a half-dozen maids to scrub them. The homes' owners needed workers to dust and polish the ornate woodwork and furniture. Since most of the aristocracy's country homes had no plumbing or electricity, servants carried water to the rooms and guests walked about at night using candlelight. Kitchens and dining rooms were a considerable distance apart so the serving of each meal required a large staff. But the dawning of the new day of economic democracy as White described it, served notice on the English aristocracy that it would have to install modern labor-saving devices in its country homes, for large servant staffs no longer were available.[16]

White compared British laborers as a class with American workers, and he rated the latter more highly. He believed the British worker was inferior mentally and physically to the American. Great Britain for generations housed, fed, educated, and paid its workers poorly, he said. The British masses depended on their leaders to direct them; they had no vision of their own goals. The ruling classes fooled them easily. The British workers' one overwhelming desire was for beer, White said. As a prohibitionist, this indicated to him a lack of responsibility. Apparently forgetting America's history of labor strife, White argued that this nation concentrated on giving the individual worker an opportunity to rise

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[16] Ibid.

in society, while the British were interested only in elevating laborers as a class.[17] Generally White preferred to relate to people as individuals rather than as classes.

All these facts pleased White. He concluded from them that the American system produced a group of workers who were more sober and better educated, fed, and paid than British workers. The potentially disruptive forces of the postwar period did not produce the changes in the United States that they did in Britain for America had such an advanced democratic order that it was not susceptible to them.

Speaking to the Honolulu Rotary Club in 1925, White noted another problem that he thought arose out of the war. He stated that the Oriental races lost faith in the white man's civilization because of the conflict. But he had trouble pinpointing the exact reason for that lack of confidence, perhaps because his opinion was more of an impression than a well-founded conclusion. He speculated that it had its origins in the differing views of property rights between whites and Orientals, and he believed the governments of the predominantly white nations were partly to blame. He called on the Christian civilization, which at that time meant to him the United States, Europe, and Australia, to determine the source of the friction between the two races. Christian civilization's system of commerce and industry promoted justice,

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[17]William Allen White, "'New Heaven and New Earth,'" Emporia Gazette, 28 June 1919.

he said, because it recognized the faith men had in one another. The task facing it then was to discover the exact reason for the Oriental lack of confidence in the white race, and to rectify it.[18]

White believed that war was an indication of human failure. It occurred only when men became too excited to think rationally. It slowed progress. War would disappear, he argued, only when the human race developed the survival faculty of common sense.[19] White's tour of the battle-scarred ruins of Europe in 1919 strengthened his dislike for war. What he saw shocked him profoundly. He described it as "an awful human cataclysm . . . the uprooting of tradition . . . the spilling of the precious social blood that makes men what they are."[20]

White feared that another major war was inevitable unless the western or Christian civilization nations banded together to prevent it. In a future war, he said, the killing of the leadership of the white race would so weaken civilization that, what he called the submerged races, would rule the earth for an era. But despite that danger the United

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[18]William Allen White, "Independence for Philippine Islands" (Speech delivered to the Honolulu Rotary Club, circa July, 1925), White Collection, Emporia, 3-6.

[19]William Allen White, "Sims Scorns the Devil," Judge, Vol. LXXXIII (July 23, 1922), 18; William Allen White, "Some Thoughts on War," Emporia Gazette, 12 Nov. 1934.

[20]William Allen White, "Repudiation a Bugbear," Emporia Gazette, 10 Apr. 1919.

States continued to build ships and guns, White lamented, because other countries did, and those nations constructed weapons because the United States did.[21] White continued to view the world in terms of superior and inferior races. It appears to be a strange stance for a democrat, from a 1970 perspective. But part of White's thought was firmly grounded in the nineteenth century when thinking in terms of a world racial hierarchy was common.

War impeded progress which in turn slowed democracy's advance, so White was interested greatly in the major nations establishing a viable framework to preserve the peace. He viewed Bolshevism as one of the great obstacles to his plan. It was undemocratic because it relied on the political strike, and it grew strong as a result of the war, he said. The same reliance on bloodshed, cruelty, and greed upon which men based their war psychology provided the foundation for Bolshevism. War released the powers of greed and lust, and Bolshevism continued to feed on them after the war ended.[22]

White argued that a nation with an advanced democratic system was less likely to fall to Bolshevism than one that lacked it. He used the Scandinavian countries as examples of nations in which Bolshevism had little chance of success.

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[21]White, "Sims Scorns the Devil," p. 18.

[22]White, "Repudiation a Bugbear"; William Allen White, "The European Tinder Box," Emporia Gazette, 16 Apr. 1919; William Allen White, "What Happened to Prinkipo," Metropolitan, Vol. LI (December, 1919), 70.

There the wealth was equitably distributed, he argued. Those countries had large middle classes, relatively few exploited workers, and only a small group of exploiters.

Spain was at the opposite extreme, White contended. It was ripe for Bolshevism. There was a distinct cleavage between two classes there, he said. One, composed of liberals, conservatives, evolutionary socialists, and organized skilled labor, was alarmed at the murder and chaos of Bolshevism. But the other group, made up of the unskilled unorganized labor, those nearest starvation, believed murder and theft provided a measure of justice, and it was preferable to privation. Generations of economic exploitation built up that class in Spain.[23] White argued that Spain was the least democratic nation in Europe. Therefore it naturally was the most likely to accept Bolshevism, in his view. Powers in Madrid more or less dictated the outcome of the elections there, he maintained. Often the minority party in the Spanish assembly represented the strongest public opinion. These conditions made Spain democratically backward and potentially receptive to Bolshevism.[24]

White deplored the Bolshevists' methods. They stole private property, one of the basic elements of a free society. They used force to implant their ideas because they distrusted the masses. In a democratic society the leaders should depend

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[23]White, "European Tinder Box."

[24]Ibid.

on the citizenry for guidance. The ways of the Bolshevists were not new in the world, White maintained. Their methods were the same as those of the old American plutocratic banker who used money to purchase votes at the county party convention or to install his candidates in the state legislature. This allowed him to gain so much wealth and power that he could manipulate the masses in his town.

But the Bolshevists were even more dangerous in White's eyes than the dishonest banker. For they had a crusading zeal. They sincerely believed they were right and that the entire world must eventually adopt their ways. The Bolshevists thought their creed would bring a better day. Bolshevism and any government based on force or coercion were similar. Hence White looked on Tammany Hall, Kaiser Wilhelm, Nikolai Lenin, and Leon Trotsky, as philosophical and political relatives.[25]

Between the two, White much preferred the evolutionary socialists in Russia to the Bolshevists. He viewed the socialist position as not far from his own. They believed that a prosperous society came from a strong middle class, he said. They also thought that spiritual growth came partly from shorter working hours, more pleasant shop conditions, and the distribution of additional money among the population for the purchase of comforts and luxuries. The evolutionary

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[25]William Allen White, "Russia and World Peace," Emporia Gazette, 29 Mar. 1919.

socialists, White maintained, contended just as he that improving the condition of the lower class--bringing it up to middle class status--produced more progress than pushing all people into a common low level as the Bolshevists tried to do.[26]

White did not perceive the middle class as a rigidly-defined group like a European proletariat or aristocracy; rather, he saw it as a large, open community of Americans who were dedicated to free enterprise, a system of small business, a healthful environment, equal opportunity, progress, and democracy. The middle class acted as a great stabilizing influence. Its devotion to democracy helped prevent the frequent political upheavals and labor unrest that plagued certain other countries.

White, the perpetual optimist, saw some possible good coming even from the Bolshevist revolution in Russia. Perhaps, he speculated, it was a transition stage from the tsarist system toward a type of democratic order. An expression of democracy in Russia would not be the same as that in other countries. The Russians would not hold town meetings, he said, but they might establish some democratic form unique to them.[27]

White viewed the events of the Russian situation as similar to the parts of a novel, having a beginning, development, climax, and ending. The beginning, a dramatic one, was the fall of the tsar and the overthrow of the old regime.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] William Allen White, "Litmus Papers of the Acid Test," Survey, Vol. XLIV (June 5, 1920), 343.

Next came the development, the feeble attempt of the confused middle class to take charge of the government, under the leadership of Alexander Kerensky. That period was a great opportunity for middle class democracy to become established. But that government failed, White said, not because of any shortcomings or Kerensky, but because the group around him represented such a small minority of the Russian people. The tsarist regime could not function with a large middle class, White argued, so it deliberately prevented one from forming. Thus when Kerensky came to power, he had no group to turn to for support.[28]

The fall of Kerensky and the rise of Lenin and Trotsky was the next phase, the climax, in White's view. Their ascension represented Russia's reaction to the long oppression of the tsarist regime. All of the suspicion, hatred, and desire to destroy the official power that built up in Russia during the reign of the tsars burst forth in the Bolshevik revolution and swept away the hope of a middle class democracy under Kerensky.[29] But White held out hope for the end of the story. Perhaps it would reveal the establishment of some form of democracy in Russia.

White also hoped that the results of the Versailles peace conference would promote democracy. He said that at the time of the November 11, 1918, armistice, the citizens of Christendom had an unprecedented degree of goodwill in their

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[28] Ibid., pp. 343-44.

[29] Ibid., p. 344.

hearts. They had a real desire for a just peace. The great job facing them was to institutionalize the brotherhood they felt. If they could have accomplished that, White observed later, they could have created a great world.[30]

The Allied victory provided the western nations with a chance to use the peace conference to advance democracy, White argued. If Germany had won the war, the world would have suffered paternalism, the aristocratic control of economic conditions that restricted the average man to a low economic level. But since the Allies won, the world had the opportunity to enjoy fraternalism. It offered the common man all the distinction and advancement to which his talents would carry him. It gave everyone an opportunity to struggle for justice. It did not seek a common level for all people, but did assure them that they would receive everything they earned and earn everything they received. But the peace conferees first had to write a just and righteous plan if the world was to enjoy the blessings of fraternalism.[31]

One of the problems facing the peace conference as far as White was concerned, was to find a way to satisfy the desires of those nations who were less well-developed than the Allies. The United States, Great Britain, Italy, and France were the "have" nations who collectively possessed all the needs of a modern society, including food, coal, iron, copper, wood,

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[30]White, Wilson Association speech, p. 5.

[31]White, "What the War Did for Brewer," p. 247.

highly-developed transportation systems, literate populations, middle class majorities, and fairly prosperous workers. Most of the other nations of the world were the "have nots" in White's opinion. Each lacked one or more of the essentials. Some did not have access to the sea, some lacked iron, others did not have a literate population. Russia, he said, had no middle class while China suffered from a poor working class.[32]

White viewed the "have-not" nations as a menace to world peace. He feared that several of them would organize a great rebellion to displace the four "have" countries. The Allies had to find some way at Versailles to improve the underprivileged nations. So, he said, "all over the earth the hearts of common men and women are upon that room," referring to the peace conference, and "in it is more of the fate of humanity than ever was gathered in one small space since the world began."[33]

Of all the material items in the world, White considered food the most important. The future progress of democracy hinged upon its equitable distribution. For the need of food could force nations to go to war, he argued. The American farmer produced much of the world's food supply, so future peace partially rested on his shoulders, White reasoned. The World War curtailed Europe's crop and livestock production and thus created a type of food vacuum there. So the peace conferees

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[32]William Allen White, "That Passeth Understanding," Emporia Gazette, 1 Mar. 1919.

[33]Ibid.

had to divise some way to more equitably distribute food to prevent another war.[34]

To complicate matters, White said, living standards in much of the world were higher than they once were, so many people demanded more and better quality food. He applauded the improved standards, but acknowledged that they added to the food problem. Europe for a future period of about ten years could not pay for the products of the American farmer, White said, so the countries involved would have to work out some sort of credit arrangement. America eventually would receive its agricultural payments, unless war intervened. So White saw an additional reason to consider the work of the peace conference vital to America's future. And he thought its establishment of a league of nations would be the best method to insure a just food distribution. The American farmers' steady supply of food for Europe depended upon the maintenance of stable prices, White argued. They in turn could come only from some kind of international economic agreement. And the world needed an international political pact--the league--to insure an economic contract. It was all part of an interlocking system.[35]

Although White saw a certain unity among Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, he trusted only Britain

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[34]William Allen White, "The Peace of Pork," Emporia Gazette, 5 Apr. 1919.

[35]Ibid.

completely, because its people were English-speaking. His Anglo-Saxon supremacy ideas were still alive. He was particularly cautious about France because he believed that it had dreams of power and its governing classes thought in terms of boundaries, spheres of influence, and military movements and expeditions. White saw a common bond among the world's English-speaking peoples--in which he included the British, Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, and Canadians--because he believed they advanced most toward democracy and along the path of spiritual progress. They solved or were in the process of solving the problems of social adjustment and the distribution of wealth and power. They reached a point in their economic evolution where they realized that war did not pay, White argued. They could trade more effectively than they could wage war because they possessed all of the necessities of trade--raw materials, a talent for mass production, ships, their own ports all over the world, and, White believed, the future protection of the League of Nations.[36]

White did not think that his proposed English-speaking union would require a formal treaty, for on the high level on which the English-language peoples lived, he said, political forms were no longer of real consequence. This seems overly-optimistic even for White. The United States, United

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[36]William Allen White, "Througn American Eyes," New Europe, Vol. XI (June 19, 1919), 223-24.

Kingdom, and British Empire knew the importance of internal national harmony, White stated, since their genius for large combination was their great secret. Cooperation among the nations of the English-speaking democracies would work under a common set of aims, a similarity of ideals, a commercial understanding, and a deep desire for world peace.[37]

White, always the optimist, at one time wrote that perhaps even Germany and ultimately the Scandinavian nations might join the English-speaking alliance. In that article he called the Americans, British, and Germans "the three great Northern peoples." On occasion he continued to think in terms of races or nationalities. White saw a spark of democracy in the hearts of the German people, criticizing only the leaders who pushed them into war.[38]

Increasingly as time passed, White viewed France as the chief obstacle to world harmony following the World War. Germany and Britain were tired of war, he said, and America did not have a martial spirit, but France wanted to rely on force rather than altruism to maintain the peace.[39] White could, however, understand France's viewpoint. He recognized that France felt it had to defend itself against future German attack. He argued that a barrier had to be erected to insure

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[37] Ibid., p. 225; William Allen White, "The English Tongue: An American Novelist's Plea That It May Unite Us More in Knowledge," Book Monthly, Vol. XIV (July, 1919), 547.

[38] William Allen White, "As I See It: The New Alliance," New York Tribune, 31 Dec. 1922.

[39] Ibid.

France protection from the advance of German armies, and that France should receive some of the German coal and iron fields. And the best way to guarantee French interests, White argued, was through the establishment of the League of Nations.[40]

White also believed that the League would provide justice for workers around the world. He envisioned its labor board enforcing international working standards and promoting an aspiration for more comfortable conditions among labor. He anticipated that the members would regulate competition for labor's services. With the rules of world labor competition announced, which would include a prohibition against cheap labor, child labor, long hours, and unhealthy shop conditions, the living standards of the world's workers would be maintained at least at a minimum quality level.[41]

To White, the League of Nations represented one more part of the unfolding story of spiritual progress toward democracy and righteousness. He argued that proponents of Communism and the leveling down process opposed the League while those who believed that civilized peoples were traveling a path of evolutionary progress for two thousand years supported it. The League stood for a better system growing out of the old order, he maintained. This was a typical American liberal

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[40]William Allen White, "The Reporters' Soviet," Emporia Gazette, 8 Mar. 1919.

[41]William Allen White, "Labor and the World's Peace," Emporia Gazette, 22 Mar. 1919.

opinion in the hopeful months immediately following the armistice. But the liberals, including White, soon became disillusioned.[42]

The harsh terms the peace treaty imposed on Germany and America's ultimate rejection of the League of Nations dashed White's hopes for a new era of world democracy in the war's aftermath. White argued that the treaty provisions were too severe for Germany to live under. They attempted to exterminate it as a nation. He blamed President Woodrow Wilson up to a point for not securing a more just peace. Wilson made a mistake in not demanding publicity for all meetings of the peace conference, he argued. Closed gatherings rankled White's democratic consciousness. The views that Wilson expressed during the talks could have stood the light of public scrutiny, White contended. Wilson was the only head of state at Versilles who refused to meet regularly with reporters of his own country. His lack of physical endurance was the main reason, White said, but still it hindered his efforts, for Americans were not able to interpret Wilson's ideas from his viewpoint. He also trusted his own powers too much at the conference. He set out to institutionalize the golden rule, but mistakenly thought that it would provide the power of its own argument. He overestimated

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[42]William Allen White, "The International Soviet," Emporia Gazette, 24 May 1919; Roderick Nash, The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930 (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1970), p. 39.

the level of democratic aspiration of the other conferees.[43]

But White placed most of the blame for the failure of the Versailles conference on the European representatives. He said that the European civilization differed greatly from the American. The European citizen, unlike the American, was distrustful. He looked for motives and was suspicious, fearful, and covetous. Europeans thought the United States had an ulterior motive in entering the war and attending the peace conference. They could not believe it acted in a spirit of brotherhood.[44]

Wilson came to the negotiations with a dynamic ideal, faith--faith in humanity, moral government, and the power of spiritual forces, White contended. The president argued that peace should come from goodwill rather than from force. Most Americans supported that idea because, unlike the Europeans, they had no long tradition of suspicion and fear. But the European leaders barely could contain their laughter when Wilson explained his ideas, White said. They looked upon him as a teller of fairy tales. They were only interested in boundaries, economic advantages, military guarantees, and balances of power. The European leaders thought

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[43]William Allen White, "Liberal Criticism," Nation, Vol. CVIII (May 24, 1919), 851; William Allen White, Woodrow Wilson: The Man, His Times and His Task (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), 374, 391.

[44]William Allen White, "The Peace and President Wilson," Saturday Evening Post, Vol. CXCII (August 16, 1919), 15.

in material terms while Wilson was spiritually-minded. White blamed Georges Clemenceau and the other French negotiators most of all for the failure of the peace conference. He said that the French leaders displayed a passionate nationalism, and when Wilson arrived in Europe with his academic ideals of abstract justice but no specific plans for the protection, restitution, or economic supremacy of France, they showed no interest in his plan.[45]

White stated that the American democracy could be proud that it produced a man like Wilson who offered to the world the hope of the establishment of peace through goodwill. White argued that in the final analysis Wilson lost the peace because it was unattainable. World leaders were not ready for Wilson's proposal. His plan requird more goodwill in the heart of the white race, White said, than two thousand years of Christian philosophy placed there.[46] White apparently did not consider the potential goodwill of other races.

As time passed, White grew increasingly sad about the failure of the peace conference to advance the spirit of democracy more than it had. He believed that the saga of Wilson and the peace conference was one of the great American tragedies. It was much more lamentable than the story of Abraham Lincoln, he said, for a positive result

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[45] Ibid., pp. 15, 57; White, Woodrow Wilson, p. 383; William Allen White, "As I See It: Clemenceau," New York Tribune, 3 Dec. 1922.

[46] White, Woodrow Wilson, pp. 436-37.

came from his work. But all that came from the conference and Wilson's effort was a disillusioned world.[47]

Undoubtedly White's disappointment with the outcome of the Versailles conference stemmed from the high expectations he had for it. He thought it could produce some magic formula that would cause the nations of the world to turn to his concept of democracy. Obviously his goals were unrealistic. But he was typical of many Progressives who were disillusioned by the outcome of the war.[48]

White thought that the Washington Disarmament Conference of 1921 represented a second and perhaps last chance for the Allies to establish a righteous order in the world. The destiny of every American, his children, and his grandchildren depended upon the outcome of that conference, White said. The war spirit had to be curbed, not only to protect the course of spiritual progress, but also to insure world prosperity. For war created additional taxes, he said, and should a new war break out, the foreign nations would not have sufficient surplus revenue to repay their debts to the United States.[49]

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[47]William Allen White, "As I See It: America in the World Court," New York Tribune, 12 Nov. 1922; William Allen White, "Shock Troops of Reform," Saturday Review, Vol. XIX (April 8, 1939), 3.

[48]Arthur S. Link, "What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920s?" American Historical Review, Vol. LXIV (July, 1959), 839.

[49]William Allen White, "Will They Fool Us Twice?" Collier's, Vol. LXVIII (October 15, 1921), 24-25.

White argued that after the war ended the world fell into a state of industrial debility, political reaction, and social decadence. Those were all symptoms of a spiritual disease, he said. Faith in men was dying. Faith made men work hard in industry because it assured the laborer that his toil would bring a decent wage and the manager that his planning would produce a just salary. Faith that rulers' words were dependable and that the common sense of the people could be trusted to respond to human needs under government was faltering. People were not following the golden rule, the essence of Christian philosophy and the basis of faith, White said. Pessimism was the dominant philosophy of the day.[50]

White maintained that this loss of faith came from the Treaty of Versailles. Unlike the covenant of the League of Nations, a noble document he thought, the treaty was evil because its authors drew it up in secret and filled it with avarice and intrigue. If it remained in its present form its enforcement would require billions of dollars in taxes annually for warships, aircraft, artillery, and soldiers. The Allied rulers were responsible for the creation of the treaty, White charged. The common people of Europe and America, the middle class, did not know what was going into it, for the conferees created it in secret. If the people had known, they would have rejected it, he concluded.

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[50] Ibid., p. 5.

White condemned what he considered the undemocratic way in which the treaty was formulated, as much as he did its contents. This was a reflection of his dedication to democracy. Unlike some disillusioned liberals who fled the United States after the war, White remained faithful to his country and worked to guide it along a democratic path.[51] In that way he aided his nation and the liberal cause much more effectively than if he had become an exile.

White urged that the disarmament conference be a town meeting of the world. It was the only hope for democracy, he said. A town meeting had to be open to be effective. So the conference could not be secretive as the peace negotiations were. White called on Americans, whom he said based their fortunes on democracy, to support an open conference which would promote democratic principles. He said the Europeans would arrive at the disarmament talks interested, just as at Versailles, in colonies, indemnities, commercial advantages, boundaries, spheres of influence--in other words material things. And the Americans would attend the conference, just as at Versilles, concerned with extending Christian civilization and promoting world peace. It was the duty of the American delegates to see that their position prevailed.[52]

White contended that the American people would support the disarmament issue if it was presented to them in moral

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[51]Nash, Nervous Generation, p. 42.

[52]White, "Will They Fool Us Twice?" pp. 5-6.

terms. Americans responded to that approach because of their Puritan conscience, he argued. The Puritan mind insisted that economic necessity be based on moral precepts, whether it involved abolition of slavery, prohibition of alcoholic beverages, or disarmament. These were all economic needs moralized, White said.[53]

White also hoped the Washington conference would solve what he called a "crisis of the white race." The white nations around the world--England and its white dominions, America and its European allies, and Germany and its defeated comrades--were tired of war. War placed a burden of interest and high taxes on them. But military weapons held a fascination for the nonwhite nations, White said, particularly the Japanese. He maintained that the brown races did not think the meek would inherit the earth. The brown businessman believed in trying to get the best of a bargain rather than striving to build a reputation on goodwill and develop a business from a million small profits. White said that "lusty young barbarians" who believed there was power in armament comprised the nonwhite races. The disarmament conference should try to convince those races that progress did not come from force. The black people in Africa and the yellow people in China, White said, were waiting to see if the brown people would restrain their military power.

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[53]William Allen White, "Tinting the Cold Gray Dawn," Collier's, Vol. LXVIII (December 17, 1921), 16.

The future of Christian civilization depended on their decision, he concluded.[54]

One must push through White's racial categorizing to understand the real significance of his view. He foresaw the emergence of what are now known as "third world" nations. White was not psychic, but he detected evidence that the leaders of some of these nations wished to obtain military hardware like that of the major powers, and he favored a limitation on military weapons proliferation. There is another factor to consider, however. White recognized the fact that at that time the Caucasian race ruled the world, by and large. As ruler, it had a responsibility to provide the wisest possible leadership, he argued. If violence broke out in the world, it was the fault of the white leaders.[55]

The early 1920s were a time of heightened interest in race. Madison Grant's popular book The Passing of the Great Race, first published in 1916 but then appearing in new editions in 1921 and 1923, spoke of a three-tiered hierarchy of Mediterranean, Alpine, and Nordic races. Lothrop Stoddard's The Rising Tide of Color, published in 1920, warned of danger from a rapid multiplication of the yellow and brown races.[56] At first glance

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[54]William Allen White, "Check Your Guns!" Judge, Vol. LXXXI (December 24, 1921), 18-19; William Allen White, "The Big News," Judge, Vol. LXXXI (December 31, 1921), 19.

[55]William Allen White, "The Tulsa Riot," in William Allen White, Forty Years on Main Street (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937), pp. 346-47.

[56]John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1955), pp. 271-72.

it might appear that White obtained his ideas from such authors. But actually there was a great deal of difference between their line of argument and White's way of thinking. Writers such as Grant and Stoddard were anti-democratic. They viewed non-whites as incapable of taking a position in society above a second-class status. White, on the other hand, believed that all peoples could share full citizenship if given the opportunity. Yet he recognized that such an opportunity did not exist at that time, and therefore he charged whites with the responsibility of wisely leading all races.

White was generally pleased with the results of the Washington Disarmament Conference. At the end of the first day of talks he concluded that "the Golden Rule, which is the basis of democratic philosophy, never had a more obvious application in any other world gathering. . . ."[57] He said the real task of the conference was simpler than it seemed. Its more important job was to promote attitudes of goodwill, which it did, rather than to draft treaties. The Washington conference succeeded because it tried to do too little, while the Versilles conference failed because it attempted to accomplish too mmuch.[58]

White believed that, because of the work of the conference, some of the spirit of the golden rule entered

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[57]William Allen White, "The Christian Spirit," Emporia Gazette, 14 Nov. 1921.

[58]William Allen White, "Will America's Dream Come True?" Collier's Vol. LXIX (February 18, 1922), 9; William Allen White, "Government by Conference," Judge, Vol. LXXXII (May 27, 1922), 19.

diplomacy. Perhaps the world could be made safe for democracy after all, he said. Before the conference it appeared that the sacrifices of the war were wasted. But following the talks, White thought a new era in the world's politics arrived.[59] For the first time in history, he said, the strong nations of the world formulated a policy and agreed to discard arms as a method of administration rather than to use force to implement it. Ten years earlier it would have been unthinkable. It might yet fail, White remarked.[60] But at least it was a beginning toward improved relations among nations.

White urged American leaders to support the worldwide goodwill and the disarmament plans that came out of the Washington conference, for he said they represented the culmination of two thousand years of spiritual growth. Originally force held together each human unit--the family, tribe, clan, state, nation, and international alliance. As each unit grew strong, force gave way to faith as a binding element. White argued that the results of the Washington conference proved that force was disappearing from the relations of the strong nations. The first world compact based on goodwill and faith in humanity was a reality, he said.

America, as the world's spiritual leader, had the duty to see that this compact succeeded, White argued. Europeans

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[59]William Allen White, "'Bringing in the Sheaves,'" Judge, Vol. LXXXII (January 28, 1922), 19.

[60]William Allen White, "Those Heartbreaks in Washington," Collier's, Vol. LXVIII (December 31, 1921), 19.

doubted whether it could last, and Asians had serious reservations, but only Americans had faith in the agrreements based on goodwill. The compact was flimsy, it had no constitution or parliamentary organization, White remarked. Yet human progress for the next era depended on it. Americans had a difficult task to perform. "The miracle of the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea was a parlor trick compared with the awful trial lying before us," White cautioned.[61] Yet it had to be done.

Despite his hope that a more peaceful world would develop out of the war and the postwar conferences, White, looking back from the perspective of the 1930s, was disappointed in the overall results. He charged that the European leaders shamelessly traded the principles of democracy and faith in humanity for colonies. He did not label the goodwill that came from the Washington conference a waste, but he did term the war futile. It was a meaningless slaughter. The war did not promote democracy; it only produced a huge debt that retarded social progress. Moreover, America would have been a nobler country had it not become involved in the brutality.[62]

So White went full circle in his thinking about the World War. At the beginning of the conflict he argued that the world descended into a condition of spiritual retrenchment.

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[61] Ibid.

[62] William Allen White, "Thoughts on July Fourth," Emporia Gazette, 4 July 1934; William Allen White, "Ramsey MadDonald," Emporia Gazette, 10 Nov. 1937.

Then he expressed hope that a great democratic revival would arise out of the war. But finally he returned to his original position. War was simply mindless brutality. It was the enemy of democracy.

CHAPTER 5

WHITE ON THE 1920s

The 1920s were a strange time in American history. They were an era of great change, and whenever changes occur rapidly, tensions arise and reactions develop. During the 1920s, immigrants clamored to enter the United States while many Americans pressed for restrictions against them. The new medium of motion pictures and some novels popularized less restrictive moral standards at the same time that supporters of prohibition, a few diehard Progressives, and at the extreme fringe the Ku Klux Klan, attempted to sustain morality. Some intellectuals attacked democracy during the decade, perhaps as a reaction against the crusade for it during World War I, while its defenders, including William Allen White, upheld it. Many people looked to the growing urban centers as places where their dreams could be fulfilled, yet others such as White championed the virtues of the small town.[1]

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[1]Paul A. Carter, The Twenties in America (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), pp. 71-76; Roderick Nash, The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930 (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1970), pp. 56, 63, 143-46.

World War I smashed the dreams of a number of Progressives, particularly in relation to their romantic view of the world. It eroded the belief in a theory of progress for many, and made them drift into the 1920s devoid of much of their traditional ideology.[2] White came to share this disillusionment to a degree, but seldom wavered far from his long-held progressive principles. White's responses to the issues of the 1920s reveal the ways in which an old western Progressive viewed that turbulent period. White originally believed that the 1920s would be an era of great progress. At the beginning of the decade he argued that the war, revolution, and political upheaval which the world just passed through would produce an equally strong progressive reaction which would more than compensate for the trials of the preceding years. No one should question the basic sanity of the American people or the strength of the United States government, he said.[3]

But as the decade unfolded, White found much wrong in the world. Democracy appeared to be in trouble in America. Political graft was rampant, White charged. And the responsibility for the situation lay with what he called a "moron majority."[4] This group supported the idea that America was

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[2]David W. Noble, The Paradox of Progressive Thought (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 248.

[3]William Allen White, "What 1920 Holds for Us All," Collier's, Vol. LXV (January 3, 1920), 7.

[4]William Allen White, "What's the Matter with America," Collier's, Vol. LXX (July 1, 1922), 3.

a land of opportunity where the individual could use any means, including graft and corruption, to better himself materially. The "moron majority" backed the type of candidate whose popularity came only from the fact that he was a good handshaker, a smiler, and sometimes an orator. The moron group liked that kind of candidate because he did not try to make it think, only made it hate and laugh. And if he were elected, it did not object to his obtaining special privileges, for it believed there was no point in holding office if the politician did not receive some advantage, such as having a friend in the courts. The "moron majority," White said, was interested only in obtaining playgrounds, being allowed to gamble and buy liquor despite the laws, watch parades, and see politicians ride in shiny cars. It was not concerned with the issues important to a democracy. It had a child's mind and was content with childish things.[5] This aspect of White's thought did not indicate an elitist tendency but rather underscored his sincere desire for an educated electorate that would support a government dedicated to justice and democracy.

White saw the newspapers, ministers, chambers of commerce, and what he called "traditional Americans," meaning the middle class, as a minority united against the moron group. Despite their opposition, he believed that the childish voters outnumbered them and allowed graft and boss rule to flourish in the cities. The immature person in the United States had

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[5] Ibid., p. 4.

a greater influence on political affairs than did his counterpart in Europe. The Founding Fathers constructed the American government on the assumption that the nation would be composed of mentally-mature adults, and gave each individual an equal voice, White said. He also argued that the influx of European immigrants added to the immature majority. Those people did not have the same respect for the Constitution and United States institutions as the Americans of older stock did, he contended.

White, continuing his emphasis on ethnic determinism, argued that only the English-speaking peoples and, in general, the Teutonic and Scandinavian groups, supported the idea that government should be free from special privilege. The Anglo-Saxons originated that concept, he said. Anglo-Saxons settled colonial America, dominated its political thought, and planted their institutions there. That group's descendants, whom White labeled a "puzzled minority," still thought American institutions were secure. They continued to believe that a melting pot operated in America where, what they called lower racial groups, could be purified and exalted. But American institutions were not secure, White argued, for immigrants from southeastern Europe who had no respect for them were pouring into the United States. And there no longer was a melting pot.[6]

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[6] Ibid.

White maintained that Americans of the older stock had a duty to teach the incoming non-Anglo-Saxons that American ways were superior to theirs. The United States would undergo a permanent change unless the southeast European immigrants adopted the Puritan outlook. White cautioned old-stock Americans against attacking the machinery of democracy which gave the new arrivals the right to try to change the nation, and instead urged them to examine themselves to see how they failed to promote American ideals. He warned that if Anglo-Saxon Americans were unsuccessful in that task, their country no longer would be the land of the Pilgrim's pride, but would become the pride of Italy, Greece, or the Balkans.[7]

White maintained that throughout their history Americans placed their faith in education and a rising economic status. They believed that the low-grade stock of Europe could be educated, given modern household conveniences, fresh air, and a living wage, in other words "Americanized," and they would be fit for a self-governing democracy. But that plan no longer worked. The older Americans were partly to blame, White said, because they educated the children of the immigrants but did not teach them what good citizens had to know about proper conduct in a democracy. Responsible citizens had to understand what acts were social and what were antisocial, why a bribe was a felony, and why it was wrong

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[7] Ibid., pp. 4, 18.

for a public service corporation to evade a contract through legal technicalities.[8]

White thought that the influx of southeast European immigrants and the resultant increase of the "moron majority" primarily affected the large American cities. In the rural parts of the Middle West and Pacific Coast areas, for example, children still learned the precepts of the Puritan ideal. There the English, Teutons, and Scandinavians dominated the population, and the teaching of the old American virtues produced a dependable public opinion. There, unlike in the large cities, the moron element did not inbreed but instead melted and fused with the dominant strains of the population.[9]

White believed that most motion pictures produced during the 1920s promoted the "moron majority." The people who viewed them received only low-grade entertainment and doses of mental pabulum. The movies appealed to the senses, not to the intellect. But if producers intentionally added intelligent subjects to their movies, White admitted, the intellectually immature, who made up the bulk of the audiences, no longer would attend.[10]

White's charge that there was a "moron majority" in the United States was a serious indictment coming from him. Although he always realized that some Americans did not

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[8] Ibid., p. 18.

[9] Ibid.

[10] William Allen White, "Clean Up the Movies," Judge, Vol. LXXXIII (July 8, 1922), 17.

have the intelligence or spiritual sensitivity to promote democracy, he faithfully clung to the belief that most citizens were responsible and well-informed on the vital issues in America, and if given the opportunity to express their opinions at the polls and through free discussion, could lead the nation along its path of ever-advancing progress. Yet in White's eyes, in the 1920s, most individuals did not have the intelligence to sustain the democratic movement. Democracy clearly was in trouble.

Americans no longer were interested in improving their society, White lamented. Injustices in the 1920s did not seem important to most citizens. Part of the reason for this, White believed, was that so much progress was made in the preceding decades that the problems of the 1920s did not appear so serious by comparison. The poor received more necessities, comforts, and even luxuries than they once did. They did not get enough, White said, but their standard of living was sufficiently high that it was difficult to make a cause out of their situation.[11]

White also feared that the world was losing confidence in the effectiveness of parliamentary government. This occurred because for too long parliaments, congresses, and legislatures around the world looked upon the passage of laws as ends in themselves, he said. Elected representatives often

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[11]William Allen White, "Where Are the Pre-War Radicals?" Survey, Vol. LV (February 1, 1926), 556.

approved a new law just to receive the thrill of consummating a legislative act. Kentucky, White said, had the best child labor law in the world, and yet only three inspectors enforced it.[12]

White argued that as people lost faith in elected bodies they turned to extra-governmental organizations for leadership. Associations, leagues, trade councils, federations, and similar groups dominated public sentiment and controlled Congress and presidents.[13] He said the executive secretaries and legislative agents of such organizations as the Anti-Saloon League, American Farm Bureau, League of Women Voters, United Railway Presidents, and American Federation of Labor were more powerful in directing legislation in Washington than were senators and representatives. Those secretaries and agents used Congress as the machinery through which they ruled.[14] Each person who joined an organized minority group representing his profession or some other special interest actually had at least two votes in directing national policy--his regular political vote and the vote in his organization. The latter was more powerful, White thought.[15]

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[12]White, "Why Maintain a Congress?"

[13][William Allen White], "The Confessions of a Politician," New Republic, Vol. XLIX (November 24, 1926), 11.

[14]William Allen White, "The American Soviet," Judge, Vol. LXXXII (March 11, 1922), 18.

[15]William Allen White, "As I See It: Publicity Sought for 'Wet' and 'Dry' Backers," New York Tribune, 22 Oct. 1922.

White traced the trend toward reliance on extra-governmental movements back to the early nineteenth century. At that time, he said, factions within parties and organizations outside of them formed to spread ideas the political parties were not yet ready to accept. The Anti-Slavery Society was the first of these. Its members became powerful because as a compact, organized minority of like-minded voters they helped choose candidates for the parties. Thus the situation by which each man had at least two votes arose because of a growing population and the diversified interests of a young and expanding country.[16]

By the 1840s and 1850s, White stated, the interests of the population and communication among neighbors and between states became increasingly complex. So other minorities formed--the Loco-Focos, the Know Nothings, and the Free Soilers. Then after the Civil War there were two great parties which had internal factions. The Grand Army of the Republic arose within the Republican ranks and Tammany Hall and the confederate Veterans were prominent in the Democratic party. As the country grew in population, people in one section did not know those in another, but these organized minorities allowed people of similar interests to work for common goals, even if they were far apart physically.[17]

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[16]William Allen White, Politics: The Citizen's Business (New York: Macmillan Company, 1924), pp. 4-5.

[17]Ibid., pp. 5-7.

This growth of organized minorities continued into the 1920s, White thought. At that time there were two governments--the constitutional government and the government of the minorities. And there were four types of minority organizations. The most powerful in the 1920s were the craft organizations, White argued, such as the American Federation of Labor, the National Chamber of Commerce, the Farm Bureau, the Farmers' Union, and the Grange. White thought that too often the national officers of these and similar organizations formed an oligarchy which directed the political activities and sometimes the political thinking of a craft. The officers' power came from the fact that they spoke with authority about their craft's relationship to society in general. Craft organizations tended to be static and conservative, White asserted.[18]

The second type of extra-governmental organization common in the 1920s was that which formed around an idea. White cited as an example the kind of group in a community that bonded together to protect child labor. They in turn united into a state society and then started a national organization for the protection of child labor. White believed that the members of organizations formed around an idea managed the activities of their national headquarters more directly than did the craft organization members, and so the idea groups operated more democratically.[19]

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[18] Ibid., pp. 8-10.

[19] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

The third type of political minority group that White identified was the one that formed when an organization based upon an idea employed a paid organizer--an idea salesman. White argued that such a person always found that he could sell suspicion, bigotry, and fear more easily than the basic idea of the organization; so he did, and as a result added large numbers of members who had only a secondary interest in the group's philosophy. White listed the Non-Partisan League and particularly the Ku Klux Klan as examples of that type of minority group. Typically those bodies were very powerful while they lasted, White observed, but were short-lived.[20]

The fourth type of minority group that White described was the one that worked through political channels to affect private interests rather than public policy. The best examples of members of that kind of organization, White said, were the railroad lawyers of the late nineteenth century who named senators, governors, and congressmen, and who were allies with city bosses and were on close terms with presidents, supreme court justices, and cabinet members. Actually those lawyers did not have such great power, but White thought they did and that idea was necessary for his arguemnt. The railroads, packing companies, insurance companies, and trusts generally controlled politics at that time, White contended. The primary system and the direct election of United States

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[20] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

senators took the power from those groups and thereby destroyed an important trend toward plutocracy in America, he assered. During the 1920s, corporation attorneys and lobbyists still tried to influence politics, but they were weak compared to the representatives of the other organized minorities.[21]

White saw both positive and negative aspects to the power of the organized minorities during the 1920s. He liked the fact that they allowed citizens to participate more directly in governmental affairs. Americans, as stockholders in the great corporation of the United States, White said, should work to become as influential in their party organizations as possible, but he urged them to remember that the parties did not control public policy themselves, but were only the servants of the interest groups.

Yet despite the fact that White thought the minority interest groups prompted democratic participation, he also believed they were so powerful and spent such large sums of money that they should come under some kind of public supervision. He warned that it was dangerous to have men and women in the country with almost unlimited funds at their command, who could attack Congress and yet be responsible to only a small number of people. White suggested that government require the minority organizations to incorporate and furnish complete statements about the sources of their income,

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[21] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

their expenditures, lists of members and officers, and their purpose for existence.[22] As an old Progressive, not many years removed from the struggles against the power of concentrated wealth, White saw potential danger in the political activities of large organizations.

Another aspect of the 1920s that White did not like was its writing. Specifically he decried what he saw as the writers' lack of spiritual sensitivity. Only two decades earlier, he said, it was fashionable for authors to write stories depicting the wisdom of the ages as reflected in the Ten Commandments, beatitudes, and golden rule. Virtue merited rewards, either spiritual or material, and vice brought punishment through death, remorse, or spiritual atrophy. But the writers of the 1920s, White stated, cast those concepts aside. They were not interested in nice people. They were careful not to express sorrow for anyone, particularly the poor. They tried not to show pride in a town, state, country, democracy, or man's search for justice. Pity was the only emotion they looked upon as more despicable than pride.[23]

White viewed the history of writing as a microcosm of the struggle between the forces of altruism and egoism.

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[22] Ibid., pp. 17-19.

[23] William Allen White, "'We Who Are About to Die,'" New Republic, Vol. XXVI (March 9, 1921), 37-38,

And he used two characters from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," Tiny Tim and Scrooge, to illustrate. White interpreted Tiny Tim's request that God bless everyone as evidence of Tim's basic altruism, a vital element in democracy. The writers of the first decade of the twentieth century, and earlier, generally subscribed to that faith, White thought. Scrooge, the egoist, represented the new breed of author that gained prominence during the 1920s. White observed that Scrooge had no concern for the underprivileged.[24]

White thought that the literature of the 1920s lacked an appreciation for the virtues of American life, particularly its spiritual values. As an example he cited Main Street, by Sinclair Lewis. It was a great book, White said, except that it did not recognize the forces of righteousness in country towns. White conceded that the American country town was not a utopia, but it did possess what he called "collective neighborliness."[25] This was an institutionalized goodwill based upon the belief that if a person is kind to his neighbor, his neighbor will treat him well. In other words, it was an expression of the golden rule. That neighborliness developed because Americans did not have to spend all of their time in economic pursuits and that enabled

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[24]William Allen White, "Tiny Tim," Judge, Vol. LXXXI (December 17, 1921), 14.

[25]William Allen White, "An Antidote to 'Main Street,'" Literary Digest, Vol. LIX (August 13, 1921), 24.

them to give some attention to the needs of their fellow men. Organizations which promoted that philosophy included the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Elks, Masons, and Knights of Columbus. No one was excessively rich or poor in a country town for any length of time, White argued. But Main Street did not show that, he maintained.[26]

White contended that one of the shortcomings of the 1920s writers was their preoccupation with sex. He argued that "too many young men in the business of writing, painting, sculpture or music get so impressed with the fact that sex is a physical endowment of man that they forget all about man's spiritual endowment."[27] Modern novelists had no concept of sin, he lamented. The characters of novels written during the 1920s operated mechanically, without the divine impulse that moved everyone. The philosophy of the Sermon on the Mount was out of vogue in the novels of the 1920s, and the characters had no concern for righteousness.[28] Of course the problem in White's eyes, was that the novelists did not promote the spiritual sensitivity vital for the growth of a democracy.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] William Allen White, "The Boys--God Bless Them!" Judge, Vol. LXXXII (January 21, 1922), 14.

[28] William Allen White, "As I See It: The Fleeting Villain," New York Tribune, 20 Aug. 1922; William Allen White, "As I See It: The Revival of Old Stuff," New York Tribune, 3 Sept. 1922.

The method of approach was at the heart of the issue. Like White, many of the writers of the 1920s wanted to promote "spiritual sensitivity," But they were interested in individual feelings while he considered a person's relationship to society most important. They must have looked upon him as a traditionalist who refused to break away from old values. He thought they abandoned the proven merits of the nation's Puritan heritage of concern for one's neighbors. Many Americans agreed with White and gave him their loyal support.

White argued that the decline of quality writing in the 1920s was part of a broader decay of the arts all over Christendom which resulted from the disillusionment following the World War. Art in its various forms reflected the mood of a people, White contended. A civilization's attitude toward beauty was a measurement of its spiritual awareness. Western civilization lost much of its faith in the importance of spiritual matters since the war, so its artists depicted ugliness and decadence rather than beauty and righteousness. Thus democracy suffered. The artists of the time, however, thought they evoked beauty and truth. What White called "crashing colors" and "springing angles," became popular in art. Sculptors depicted the bestial side of man. The people on painters' canvasses appeared ruthless, cunning, greedy, and brutal. The tonal combinations in

music were primarily strident. Profanity and obscene ideas characterized the writing of the era, White said.[29]

White reiterated what he staunchly maintained was a cornerstone precept of democracy: this was not a material world but a spiritual one, and human life was not simply a mechanical process. Convince man that only his physical functions were important and you rob him of his faith, hope, and love, White insisted. The purpose of art was to "keep man's faith in his destiny alive through the creation of beauty, and so to urge man on to the Kingdom of God. . . ."[30] An artist, whether he was a writer, sculptor, painter, or musician, must first learn to use his tools skillfully, then reflect faith, hope, and love in his work.

White believed that the prominent women authors of the 1920s--Willa Cather, Edna Ferber, Zona Gale, and Dorothy Canfield--shouldered much of the spiritual leadership of the time. He singled out Booth Tarkington among the male writers as the one who best promoted the qualities that supported the development of democracy. White wrote that Tarkington had ". . . held his banner high proclaiming his belief that man is fundamentally decent. . . ."[31]

White proposed what he called "the doctrine of a democratic theory in criticism," as a way of improving the

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[29]William Allen White, "This Business of Writing," Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. III (December 4, 1926), 355.

[30]Ibid., p. 356.

[31]Ibid.

quality of writing in America. He argued that novels could be classified into three separate groups--those that emphasized the dark side of life, those that concentrated on the happiness in life, and those that struck an average between the two. Readers could be broken into three groups, each of which catered to one of the novel classifications. What White proposed was a sort of free market among novels. No rigid standards should be established by which to judge them. Instead, each type of novel should be evaluated on how it reflected the author's point of view. This was the democratic way, he said. There was room for all types of novels. Let each merit its own level of popularity.[32] That was a demonstration of White's faith in the masses. He believed that, at least in time, the majority of Americans would choose novels that reflected spiritual values. He viewed what he saw as a preoccupation with the physical and base sides of life as only a temporary phenomenon. He had confidence that America soon would return to its concern for spiritual progress.

Reading White's evaluations of literature in the 1920s provides a somewhat distorted picture of the writing of the decade. Actually, much of the most popular works of the time upheld traditional values such as hard work, honesty, thrift, and respect for nature. The flaming youth novels did not

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[32]William Allen White, "Splitting Fiction Three Ways," New Republic, Vol. XXX (April 12, 1922), 24.

enjoy nearly as much acclaim as did those which championed old-fashioned virtues. The books of Gene Stratton-Porter, Harold Bell Wright, Zane Grey, and Edgar Rice Burroughs achieved great popularity during the 1920s supporting many of the concepts White admired.[33]

White believed that the general intolerance of the 1920s was an obstacle to the growth of democracy. He viewed the Ku Klux Klan as one of the greatest evils of the decade. Referring to the Klan when it made its first appearance in the early 1920s, White stated that ". . . upon the face of the stagnant waters of public opinion has appeared a poisonous scum." The Klan came into American life, White said, because no important issue stirred the American people following the World War. The organization filled an ideological vacuum.

The Klan appealed primarily to youth, White argued. Young men had a yearning for action, and when it became misdirected it often fell to the service of the Klan. Those attracted to the organization were not the intelligent youth. They were the misguided ones who grew up in the generation after 1924 when the war overshadowed all other issues in American politics. Not working for any cause, they joined a group whose only foundation was bigotry, race prejudice, hatred, suspicion, and fear.[34]

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[33]Nash, Nervous Generation. pp. 137-41.

[34]William Allen White, "As I See It: Prohibition and Ku-Klux," New York Tribune, 5 Nov. 1922.

The blame for that situation lay with America's leaders, not the wayward youths, White maintained. The leaders wasted their energy debating non-essential topics, such as the tariff, and ignored the issues that might inspire those eager youths into some type of useful service.[35] White seemed to be remembering his younger days as an active Progressive when vital causes spurred him to action. He regretted the fact that the youth of the 1920s apparently found no similar issues to excite them, and too many turned to the Klan to satisfy their urge for adventure. Democracy suffered because the young people of the nation wasted their talents.

White compared the role of the Klan in America with that of the Fascists in Italy and the Catholic church in Mexico. All three were ultra-nationalist organizations based on bigotry and intolerance, he said. All three relied on force and coercion to stem anti-nationalist sentiments in their respective countries. They were a carry-over of the war spirit which was based on the premise that force was the answer to any problem.[36]

White complained that the Klan closed the hearts of many people to the influence of altruism. He wrote:

> If the powerful, conscious, egoistic forces that control our Government and control governments internationally had employed their wisest publicity men, their shrewdest psychologists,

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[35] Ibid.

[36] William Allen White, "As I See It: The Fascisti and the Ku-Klux," New York Tribune, 31 Dec. 1922.

> their most fiendish and devilish agencies to corrupt and mislead and cauterize the hearts of humanity for the purpose of making the third- and fourth-raters in life immune to altruistic ideals, these great sinister ruling forces could have hit upon nothing more perfectly fitted for their purposes than the Ku Klux Klan. So long as the Ku Klux Klan is operating in any considerable minority in any American State, that State will be absolutely closed to liberal ideals.[37]

White saw two major evils in the Klan's operations. First, anyone could join, regardless of his motives or level of intelligence. And second, there was no check on the irresponsible activities of factions of the membership. The Klan leaders seldom sanctioned or had knowledge of the crimes their members committed, White argued. The plans for violent action rarely formed at the organization's regular meetings. Generally such plans grew out of secret conclaves, or as White called them, "barnyard intrigues." The mixture of second and third-rate minds with the power of a group and the courage of the Klan oath produced violent results, White concluded.[38]

White believed that America's strained race relations in the 1920s were a product of the general spirit of intolerance during the period. The American white race considered

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[37]William Allen White, "Annihilate the Klan!" Nation, Vol. CXX (January 7, 1925), 7.

[38]William Allen White, "As I See It: The Root of the Klan Evil," New York Tribune, 11 Feb. 1923.

all non-whites to be animals rather than humans, he argued.[39] Prejudice was particularly strong in the South. There whites maneuvered to keep blacks in debt so they would be bound to their work. Southern agriculture operated its labor system on the fear motive, White said, and the use of fear as an incentive was on its way out eslewhere in Christendom. The motive of hope for a better future was replacing it. Hope prompted white laborers during the previous two decades to rise to an unprecedented standard of living. But no one offered the blacks of the deep South such a hope.[40]

In the summer of 1925, White attended a conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations in Hawaii. There he found a mixture of races living in peace, and he was highly impressed. He attributed the harmony there to the attitude of the white industrial and political leaders. They were the descendants of missionaries who arrived there in the nineteenth century. Those missionaries brought with them Puritanism and the Congregational theology, which White said was a broad concept of God as the impersonal governing principle of the universe. They and their descendants, the islands' white leaders at the time White was there, also worked to advance Christian ideals. And, he said, they expressed those ideals through a spirit of altruism--providing

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[39]William Allen White, "As I See It: A Negro Golf Club," New York Tribune, 23 July 1922.

[40]William Allen White, "The Sunny Southland," Emporia Gazette, 1 Feb. 1928.

clinics, hospitals, schools, playgrounds, a minimum wage, and fair trading at the company stores.[41] So altruism, a main ingredient in White's concept of democracy, achieved racial harmony. It was another example of democracy's power.

During the 1920s, White also mourned what he saw as the passing of the progressive spirit. The 1890s and the first two decades of the twentieth century comprised an era of liberalism which began with the farmers' protest and ended with the decline of Woodrow Wilson. During that period, White said, the American people began to realize that the civilization they constructed after the Civil War was ugly, wicked, and unjust toward the common man. Even worse, the rulers who ascended after the War Between the States boasted of their corruption, and made a virtue of oppression and antisocial ideals. But under the leadership of men such as William Jennings Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, Robert La Follette, and Woodrow Wilson, Americans overthrew that system. They developed a process through which the affluent retained most of their wealth, but the poor received many more benefits from American society. By the end of the World War, the formerly impoverished enjoyed previously undreamed of comforts, they drove cars, and their children attended high schools and colleges. And, said White, they received all of that but still were conservative rather

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[41]William Allen White, "The Last of the Magic Isles," Survey, Vol. LVI (May 1, 1926), 176-78.

than class-conscious. The Americans who fought for the progressive ideals made a practical application of the golden rule to America, and brought a better life to the masses.[42]

Although apparently forgetting that he once formulated a racially-deterministic interpretation of the settlement of North America, White sadly acknowledged the decline of faith, during the 1920s, in the idea that environment was more important than heredity in determining the character of man. This was a cornerstone of the Progressive movement, so White's view of its passing was a sad reflection on the times. In the preceding half century, he said, the reform parties of the world directed their efforts toward improving humanity's environment. They brought more food, clothing, books, and shorter working hours to the masses. They secured universal education. But because a new group of scientists decided that life cells transmitted immutable characteristics and that blood sealed a person's fate, White said, the theory of the effect of environment no longer was in vogue.[43]

White attributed the general loss of faith in progressive ideas during the 1920s to the postwar reaction. The strength of both the extreme left and right, he said, was responsible for a lack of middle-of-the-road liberalism.

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[42]William Allen White, "The End of an Epoch," Scribner's Magazine, Vol. LXXIX (June, 1926), 570.

[43]William Allen White, "As I See It: Biology in Politics," New York Tribune, 27 Aug. 1922.

Progressivism was essential for the survival of western civilization. He feared the reactionary right wing more than the extreme left because, he said, the right appealed to the Americans who wanted to become plutocrats. Their sympathy toward plutocracy was the price the nation paid for its maintenance of liberty.[44]

White's lament at the retardation of Progressivism is not surprising. By 1920 most of America's Progressives had lost much of the leadership and ambition they once enjoyed. The early 1920s was a time when some of the loyal, such as White, took stock of their movement. The general diagnosis was not good. Progressives spent too much time criticizing and not enough offering remedies to problems; Progressive appeals were not persuasive enough to attract the support of most citizens; and too many Progressives did not believe in a common fundamental principle that could hold their movement together.[45] White spent a good deal of his post-World War I life addressing himself, either directly or indirectly, to these and similar problems.

White argued that Americans were afraid to move forward or backward during the 1920s. He blamed that apprehension partly on the inflation of war hopes and the subsequent

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[44]William Allen White, "Why I am a Progressive," Saturday Evening Post, Vol. CXCIII (April 23, 1921), 4.

[45]Daniel Aaron, Men of Good Hope: A Story of American Progressives (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 287-88.

letdown that followed. Never had altruistic promises so excited a group of people as they had Americans during the World War, he said. As White put it, "President Wilson had Billy Sundayed us into a millennial ecstacy."[46] After the peace negotiations ended, the realization that the dream of world harmony and a better civilization was no longer possible came as a sobering experience to Americans.

Following the war, America turned away from its earlier idealism, White said. The only improvement that survived was the self-respect of the skilled laborer who lived in a bungalow instead of a tenement, except in the large cities, and who often drove his own automobile. The job of the Progressive of the 1920s, White said, was to protect the self-respect of the skilled worker through the maintenance of reasonably high wages, and use it as a base from which to expand liberalism. Also the farmer should receive a profit that would allow him to live on a higher economic level. That would promote loyalty to America. White stated that loyalty to one's society produced progress in the world during the period since the fall of feudalism, and that it was the essence of Christianity and democracy.[47]

In order to preserve self-respect and loyalty among workers and raise farm profits, White argued that it would be necessary to curtail rent, interest, and industrial

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[46]White, "Why I am a Progressive," p. 4.

[47]Ibid., pp. 4, 52, 54.

profits. If that could not be accomplished, White said, the laborer and farmer would be forced back to prewar conditions, and that would be unacceptable. Progressives generally were not optimistic about prospects for life in America during the 1920s, he observed, because the chances for limiting rent, interest, and industrial profits appeared slim.[48] Yet White staunchly defended his progressivism in the face of counter forces around him. In 1921 he wrote that he was a Progressive because he believed in a continuous orderly growth of human institutions. Those institutions grew only as individuals dedicated their lives to the task of replacing human wrongs with human rights and promoted deeper levels of fellowship with other people. Finally, White concluded, fellowship developed only when those who enjoyed a prosperous life surrendered some of their special privileges in service to their fellow man.[49]

Despite his generally pessimistic view toward the 1920s, White did see some reasons for optimism. He consoled himself with the faith that even though the world suffered a reaction to the war, progress was still at work. Mankind's steady improvement was the most dependable force in the world, he argued, harking back to views he earlier expressed in A Theory of Spiritual Progress. Man's upward climb was so

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[48] Ibid., pp. 52, 54.

[49] Ibid., p. 3.

slow even though it was sure, that it could be measured only in terms of centuries, not years or decades.[50]

White also believed that the progressive accomplishments of Theodore Roosevelt lived on somewhat in the world. In the same way that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution put special caste out of political power in America, he maintained, Roosevelt destroyed economic caste in the political and social structure. The power of the merchant prince, railroad king, trust magnate, and wool baron was not conducive to the preservation of democracy. So Roosevelt destroyed their excess power. When Roosevelt entered the White House America was a plutocracy, but when he left it the nation was a republic again. His job as president was to provide political, social, and economic self-respect for the common man, White argued. Roosevelt accomplished his task, and much of that spirit survived.[51]

White believed that democracy was stronger in his home region, the American West, than it was in the East or South. He defined his region as the area west of the Alleghenies, excluding the South. The West was the leader in supporting Progressive measures. It backed prohibition because Westerners realized the evils of the saloon, whereas Easterners gave little attention to it. The West supported direct legislation movements, White said, while only Massachusetts in the East backed them, and the South was completely unreceptive. The West experienced steady progress,

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[50]William Allen White, "In Which We 'Ring in the New!'" Judge, Vol. LXXXI (December 31), 18.

[51]William Allen White, "In Days of Old When Knights were Bold," Judge, Vol. LXXXII (January 14, 1922), 12.

but the South did not because one section of its population was not ready for democracy and the other section was unwilling to extend democracy to the first and risk jeopardizing its position.[52]

The South was an unchanging region, White argued, and the East was consistently conservative. Only the West was liberal. Its citizens used any party that offered a progressive program. Politically, Westerners were free, he said. Large numbers were actually independent voters, but they regularly entered a party primary to influence policy. That rarely occurred in the East. But Westerners valued progress above party regularity, he said, in spite of the fact that he usually supported a straight Republican ticket.

White contended that the great Progressives came out of the West. Massachusetts never produced anyone to equal Robert La Follette, and no one like William Borah came from New York. Those men, and others like them, for fifty years supported liberal programs that included the establishment of democratic political tools, prohibition, and a system of credit, transportation, and marketing organized in a way that gave the average man a chance to prosper. Westerners supported that type of program, and a majority of them backed any candidate or party who advocated it.[53]

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[52]William Allen White, "The Solid West--Free and Proud Of It," Collier's, Vol. LXX (December 30, 1922), 5.

[53]Ibid., pp. 5, 24.

White argued that during the 1920s a group of Congressmen, mostly Westerners, from both parties who supported liberal measures constituted a type of third party in Washington. They cared nothing for their own parties, only their liberal program. Yet because actual third parties were not successful in the West, they did not formally put one together. The Greenbackers, Populists, and Bull Moosers--all third parties--failed in that region. Westerners simply did not need formal third parties because of the strength of the liberals in the West, and because they were more successful in playing one major party against the other in order to put through their program. So, White said, Westerners supported the group of congressional liberals who opposed the conservative Democrats of the South and the conservative Republicans of the East, yet who technically were not a distinct party.[54]

White also commended Westerners on what he believed was their general support of prohibition, a fundamental element in his conception of an ideal democracy. He believed that Westerners were enthusiastic for outlawing alcoholic beverages, even light wines and beer, because they viewed the topic in the correct way--as an economic issue. The saloon, the alcoholic distribution center, was a place where liquor sellers created an unhealthy appetite for the purpose of encouraging their customers to buy increasing amounts of

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[54] Ibid., p. 24.

their product. Westerners recognized that evil. But Easterners did not, so in many instances they favored at least the legalization of light wines and beer.[55] The existence of prohibition in America proved that the nation was maturing, White argued. Westerners demonstrated their advanced thinking in recognizing prohibition as an economic measure, while Easterners thought of it only as morally acceptable or wrong, depending on their point of view. The dominant Western prohibitionists were businessmen, railroad presidents, bankers, and industrial leaders, not preachers and women, White said. The former group recognized that about ten percent of the population could not control its consumption of alcohol. Industry operated on a six-day week, so a drunken Saturday night and Sunday produced a poor Monday worker. Prohibition improved the quality of life in the home, where it promoted better relationships, and it increased work output. So it was a progressive measure. It uplifted the lives of those who formerly could not control their use of liquor.[56]

White argued that Kansas was a splendid example of a state where prohibition was a success. Most Americans assumed that a law prevented the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, White said, but that was not true.

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[55]William Allen White, "As I See It: The Phantom Huggers," New York Tribune, 20 Aug. 1922.

[56]William Allen White, "As I See It: America is Playing," New York Tribune, 10 Sept. 1922; William Allen White, "As Kansas Sees Prohibition," Collier's, Vol. LXXVII (July 3, 1926), 23.

Only the sentiment of the people could actually do that, and that was exactly what happened in Kansas. White reiterated his belief in the importance of what he perceived as the New England ancestry of Kansas in explaining that movement. During the Kansas territorial period, people from New England and the South competed for supremacy in the new area. The New Englanders won. Pioneers from the Ohio Valley, most of whom were only one generation removed from New England, came next. Then after the Civil War, Union veterans in large numbers settled in Kansas. Few foreign-born came. So, White maintained, a New England community sprang up in Kansas that was interested in home building, not gold seeking or adventure. Desiring good homes above all, New England-Kansans adopted prohibition in 1880 because they knew that the saloon devoured money, men, and time, and destroyed good morals.[57]

Generally speaking, the foreign-born did not settle in Kansas because of its prohibition law, White stated. They did not understand the evil of the saloon because they came from countries where, unlike the United States, people did not abuse liquor. So while large numbers of Bohemians, Poles, Norwegians, Swedes, Germans, and Irish migrated to the West, few made their homes in Kansas. The absence of sizable groups of foreign-born in Kansas, where eighty-five

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[57]William Allen White, "A Dry West Warns the Thirsty East," Collier's, Vol. LXX (September 2, 1922), 3.

or ninety percent of the population were of American-born parents or at least American-born themselves, helped the state make prohibition a success there, White concluded. In every community, hundreds of respectable middle class men and women, inspired by the oldest traditions of the Anglo-Saxon people, donated their time and energy in support of prohibition.

White was correct in his belief that Kansas had a relatively small foreign-born population, although that was more descriptive of his native eastern Kansas than of areas further west where there were some significant settlements of the foreign-born. But while one citizen, in a letter to a Topeka newspaper, argued like White that prohibition prevented an influx of foreign immigration into the state, there is no solid evidence to either prove or refute that argument.[58]

Support for prohibition was a natural stance for an old Progressive like White. Progressives were among the staunchest promoters of prohibition. They championed the ability of citizens to govern themselves, and recognized that liquor impaired the individual judgment necessary to the process. They were concerned about improving efficiency in business and government, and alcoholic beverages offered no help in making a person more efficient. The Progressive movement sought to arrest the power of the industrial and financial

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[58] Ibid., pp. 4, 19; Topeka Commonwealth, 16 July 1881.

plutocracy, while the movement for prohibition attempted to remove the corrupting influence of one arm of that plutocracy, the liquor industry.[59]

White saw a contest between many of the forces of good and evil of the 1920s in the presidential election of 1928. Alfred Smith and the Democrats generally represented what he did not like about the decade, and Herbert Hoover and the Republicans stood for much of what he supported. First of all, the Democratic party underwent a change from a spokesman for rural America to a representative primarily of the urban sector, White said. The change reflected the nation's growing industrialization and urbanization. Americans who questioned the Puritan ideal flocked to the Democratic party. That group frightened White, for it threatened a basic element in his conception of a democratic society.

White maintained that Puritanism comprised the foundation of the American government. The basic major premise of Puritanism was, he said, that conscience was the ultimate authority in human conduct. The ballot box registered the conscience of the majority which in turn governed the life of the minority. Under democratic Puritanism, moral authority rested with the state, not with the individual or the church. For about three hundred years this Puritanism was the

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[59]James H. Timberlake, Prohibition and the Progressive Movement, 1900-1920 (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 2.

American ideal and was accepted as the basis of democratic government.[60]

White argued that the revolt against the Puritan concept, which found a home in the Democratic party, directed its strongest attack against prohibition, a major issue of the 1928 campaign. Opposition to prohibition was a symbol of the rebellion of the new American, whose cause the Democrats championed, against the American of the old order, whose sentiment the Republicans supported. Those older-styled Americans believed the use of liquor contributed to the number of industrial accidents, kept workers off the job, encouraged laborers to waste their wages, and in general lowered the standard of living. The new Americans saw prohibition as an attempt to restrict personal liberty through the institutionalized conscience of the majority rather than to have the church or the individual regulate conduct. Herbert Hoover, White said, subscribed to the Puritan ideal and therefore saw nobility in prohibition, while Al Smith believed that not conscience but the authority of the church was the basis for moral guidance, no matter what the economic consequences, and thus he opposed prohibition.[61]

Smith's nomination came as the result of a conflict, White said. Two forces competed at the 1928 Democratic

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[60]William Allen White, "Battle Hum of the Republic," Collier's, Vol. LXXXII (August 18, 1928), 9.

[61]Ibid., pp. 9, 32.

convention--those of the stern, rural, Puritanical South and West, versus the carefree, urban, Catholic northeast. The former group, which represented the agricultural sector of America that dominated the nation until the 1920s, lost out to the new industrial, urban America of which Al Smith was a part.[62]

Whereas once the successful politician took pride in saying that he came from a log cabin and the backwoods, the politician of the new America did not mind admitting that he was city-bred. The urban majority identified more with alleys and streets than it did with log cabins and woods. Al Smith was the product of the city environment, White argued. Instead of playing in fields and forests, as most of the politicians of the old America did, he grew up frolicking around Brooklyn Bridge. He attended public and parochial schools for a time, then left to work as a clerk at a fish market. In his late teens he entered Tammany and at twenty-one he was an officeholder serving summonses for jurors in the local court of the waterfront district. He worked his way up through the precinct into the ward and finally to the New York Assembly.

But through all of his political development, Al Smith never became concerned with idealism in politics, White contended. Smith knew the routine of public business; he saw

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[62]William Allen White, "Al Smith, City Feller," Collier's, Vol. LXXVIII (August 21, 1926), 42.

how taxes were levied, collected, and disbursed; he learned how political appointments were made; and he discovered what ambitions governed men. He developed a sense of party regularity, for example voting with the Tammany group against the direct primary and certain welfare legislation.[63] But in a progressive democratic society it took more than just a knowledge of governmental mechanics and a sense of party loyalty to lead effectively. Smith's main weakness was that he lacked the spiritual sensitivity and the idealistic awareness necessary to promote democracy.

In describing Hoover, White painted a picture of a man who was virtuous partly because of his lack of political experience. Here was an untarnished citizen who emerged from his democratic society to offer his leadership services. White saw in Hoover many of the opposites of Smith. Hoover did not sell his political soul to Tammany or a similar organization. His skills lay not in a knowledge of political maneuvering, but in serving humanity as he did in his Belgian relief work. Hoover was not "one of the boys" and the expert of the wisecrack, as Smith was. And he did not speak with the flair and affability that usually characterized a politician. White saw in him many of the simple virtues he admired.[64]

White looked on Hoover as a self-sacrificing individual whose unselfish attitude qualified him well for service

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[63] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[64] William Allen White, "The Education of Herbert Hoover," Collier's, Vol. LXXXI (June 9, 1928), 8-9, 42, 44.

in a democracy. He stressed that Hoover passed up a chance to earn a large salary from mining in order to direct the Belgian relief work and later the Food Administration. White argued that Hoover's actions proved his faith that, under honest administration, man was more unselfish than selfish and more decent than acquisitive. He was a man who was deeply democratic, White said.[65]

Not only did White think that Hoover faced in Al Smith a candidate who represented the new America, but he also thought the Republican contender opposed a changed party, the Democratic. The old Democracy of the 1890s, under the domination of Populist thinking, viewed government as an agency of human welfare. But with the urbanites in control, that concept disappeared. The passing of William Jennings Bryan symbolized the change in the party, White argued. He was the one man who for so many years kept the party rural and Protestant-oriented. In his absence, White said, Smith and the urban groups with their carefree philosophy, continental Sabbaths, and belief that the authority for conduct rested with the church rather than the state, moved in.[66]

Hoover's victory in the 1928 presidential election provided a note of optimism for White as the decade drew to a close. He found a few hopeful signs during the period that America was continuing in its spiritual progress. But generally it was not a happy time for him. The spirit of

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[65] Ibid., pp. 42, 44.

[66] William Allen White, "Editorial Correspondence," Emporia Gazette, 25 June 1928.

righteousness that promoted his concept of democracy seemed to be losing out to the forces of greed, intolerance, and cynicism. Probably he reasoned that the 1930s had to be better.

White's main fear during the 1920s was that the forces effecting changes then--immigration, urbanization, literary realism, the influence of minority groups, and the revolt against prohibition--would destroy the Progressive accomplishments of the previous two decades. He was apprehensive that those forces might break down the sense of community that he believed Americans developed in the twentieth century. His position was somewhat understandable for a man who was moving into his sixties and looking back fondly on the golden age of Progressivism.

White feared the arrival of foreign immigrants because he did not know what effect they might have on American democracy. It was the uncertainty that bothered him. Of course immigrants came to America before, but White had no way of knowing what the results of a new influx might be. He felt comfortable with those people of the middle class that he referred to as "traditional Americans," but he was not kindly disposed toward those he considered part of the "moron majority," the people that cared nothing for democracy. And he thought the advent of immigrants accounted in part for the growth of the latter group. White's immigration stand therefore was based primarily on a concern for democracy, not on racial bias.

Fear of change and what it might do to Progressive gains motivated White in his stance against urbanism. His apprehension in this case was rather vague and was unfounded. From his standpoint, the continued growth of cities in the 1920s threatened the strength of small-town America, the bastion of democracy in his opinion. Yet he provided no concrete evidence that the city and the country town could not coexist. It was just a feeling, or an emotional reaction to change. It was not a well-reasoned position.

White's mistrust of organized minorities came from his concern that they might thwart legitimate democratic processes. His position on the issue was related to his attitude toward urbanization since in both cases a dread of size shaped his view. He recoiled from a large pressure group just as he did from a big city. But his ideas on the minority organizations came from a much more clearly-reasoned analysis. This was not simply a vague fear. White recognized both virtues and faults in the minorities. He applauded their encouragement of more active citizen participation in public affairs, but he also realized that their financial resources gave them a potential power that might someday threaten democratic processes. As a Progressive he fought the abuses of the power of organized wealth. He did not want to wage the same battle against the strength of organized minorities.

White's position on the literature of the 1920s overemphasized one segment of the total writing output. His

stance reflected his belief that in any time period, within any society, writers could concentrate on the base side of life or its pleasant aspects. White chided a group of the writers of the 1920s for leaning toward the former under the guise of literary realism. Naturally he left himself open for criticism on the grounds that he could not accept, in literature, life as it really existed. But he maintained that there were many facets to existence, and authors could shape their society toward the "spiritual sensitivity" that promoted democracy, if they emphasized the pleasant ones.

Finally, White's stand in defense of prohibition was a natural one for him. He was a prohibitionist all of his adult life, for he was sensitive to the misery which the abuse of alcohol brought to society. He pointed out the economic loss that liquor laid upon American industry. As a boy he noted the debilitating effect that the saloon had upon his frontier community. White simply wanted to show America that it could live better without liquor than with it. In the face of a contrary public opinion he fought a brave battle but, in the end, a losing one.

White's views on the 1920s are so interesting because they show how a western, small-town Progressive viewed the changes in American life during the 1920s. Critics of his position charged that he dealt in old cliches that had no importance to the modern world. White and his defenders argued that he upheld traditional values that had continuing merit.

CHAPTER 6

WHITE ON THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Progressives and New Dealers shared several ideas, including a concern for the underprivileged and a desire to establish a balance between the public good and private gain. Both groups talked about democracy and the "positive use of government." Progressives, however, expressed more strongly a determination to preserve individualism within an organizing world.[1] William Allen White's thought generally was consistent with that Progressive orientation. He supported much of the New Deal, and usually balked only at aspects of it that seemed to promote what he considered an unnecessarily regimented society. His position showed how an old Progressive reacted to the New Deal and the Great Depression in general.

White argued that the global Great Depression of the 1920s was the climax of a conflict between the forces of altruism and egoism that started with the World War.

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[1]Otis L. Graham, Jr., An Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 5-6, 13.

That conflict continued after the war in the form of a struggle between the League of Nations and World Court on the one hand and the demands for increased armament from the militant nationalists on the other. It then persisted as an economic crisis that started at the end of the 1920s. White feared the effects of the depression because he said that if western civilization could not maintain its economic vitality under a weakened condition, it would fall to the forces of brute strength, egoism, and nationalism, the same powers that threatened democracy since the beginning of the World War.[2]

White blamed the 1920s stock speculation and the expansion of credit for causing the stock market crash of 1929. Speculation and easy credit over-stimulated the market. Republicans, in control of the national government, allowed that situation to develop, White argued, but they were not really to blame. The American people would have pressured whatever party had been in office to support those policies. Under the United States system of democracy a government could only rule to the limits of the wisdom of its people, White said, and they failed to see any danger in rapid economic expansion. If the Republicans had slowed the economy, the voters would have removed them from office at the next election. No group of people was perfect in knowledge, and in a democracy

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[2]William Allen White, "Peace and Civilization," League of Nations News, Vol. VIII (October, 1931), 2.

they transferred both their wisdom and follies into action. "It is the price of liberty," he said, "but liberty is worth the price."[3]

White saw the 1932 presidential election as crucial for the future of democracy. Americans needed a restoration of faith in their system to end the unemployment problem because industry required credit to hire additional workers and faith was the foundation of credit. White believed that the economic crisis threatened American capitalism and he feared that irresponsible political leaders might fuse groups of minorities into majorities that could destroy the nation's financial and economic structure.[4] It is interesting that political minority groups made White so uneasy. He feared that through various means they might wield more than their share of influence. His ideal was a system in which each citizen was well-informed, voted regularly, and cheerfully abided by the will of the majority since that will obviously, to White, reflected wisdom.

Herbert Hoover was the best-qualified candidate to lead the country out of the depression, White argued. Hoover was honest, courageous, and wise. With all of the pressures surrounding him--millions of unemployed, pickets

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[3]William Allen White, "Republicans and Prosperity," Emporia Gazette, 20 Feb. 1936.

[4]William Allen White, "Herbert Hoover and the Republican Party," (Speech delivered over NBC radio, October 3, 1932), William Allen White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia State University, 5-6.

at the White House, closing banks, striking farmers--he remained calm and pushed forward with unfailing determination in an effort to end the depression. Hoover, White contended, worked harder than any president since Theodore Roosevelt to perpetuate middle class ideals in America. He was committed to preserving the American system of justice in human relations that developed for 300 years and was the essence of the middle class way. That system was dedicated to the curtailment of plutocratic greed and to the elevation of the disadvantaged classes. It was the creed of George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and finally Hoover, White said. Hoover was pledged to preserve American institutions intact out of the stress of depression.[5] Significantly, White was very concerned about protecting the American system. America and the world were changing rapidly, too rapidly for him. He longed to hold on to the way of life he had known, though he still wanted to make improvements. But a greater concern than the need for reforms began to take shape in his mind during the 1930s. Could the American system he supported for over sixty years be preserved?

Hoover opposed the use of a federal dole--the distribution of relief funds without a contingent work plan--as a

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[5] Ibid., pp. 3, 7; William Allen White, "Herbert Hoover--The Last of the Old Presidents or the First of the New?" Saturday Evening Post, Vol. CCV (March 4, 1933), 53-55.

means of solving the depression because he realized it was not a democratic method, White argued. It would divide America into classes and ultimately result in an overthrow of the American political system. The dole would pit the proletariat against the plutocracy, and the American middle class, which normally acted as a shield between the two, would be destroyed. Hoover held fast to his faith in the American philosophy of equal opportunity, fair play, and maintenance of a chance for the individual to advance. Yet despite his exemplary performance in office, he did not receive support from large numbers of Americans because he could not dramatize his position properly, White thought.

While Hoover maintained the gold standard and preserved banks, railroads, insurance companies, and savings institutions, many felt he funneled money into large businesses at the same time that millions of people fell into poverty, White argued. Those selfish American who wanted a government dole also turned against Hoover, reducing his strength in the nation. The president rejected their pleas for gifts to the victims of the depression because he knew that such a plan would require regimentation under government bureaucracies, and that would threaten liberty. White believed that Hoover acting in the best interests of the nation, thus had to sacrifice his political life to save his country.[6]

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[6]White, "Herbert Hoover," p. 55.

Despite White's disappointment with Hoover's loss in the 1932 presidential election and his support of most of the Hoover program, the editor generally approved of President Franklin Roosevelt's recovery plans and usually believed his efforts buttressed the democratic system. But White thought the depression itself presented an enormous challenge, both to the American economic system and to democracy. The United States in a weakened condition was susceptible to the rule of the plutocracy who favored the leadership of unrestrained business or of certain politicians who had no regard for liberty and desired to establish a system of Socialism. The only other alternative was to make a fight for freedom along a middle-of-the-road path, White said, and that was Roosevelt's course of action.

The plutocrats, composed primarily of stockholders, controlled the physical assets of business--the factories, railroads, and mines, and all other components of production. White characterized them as despots, sometimes benevolent but often greedy. A growing class consciousness and the arrogance that came with power welded them together. They organized a financial fascism and threatened to abolish the nation's cherished liberties. If there were no restraints blocking them from instituting their plans they would restrict the right of trial by jury and the writ of habeas corpus, under the guise of the necessary suppression of demagogues and agitators, White warned. Thus he

continued to wage his old Progressive battle against the plutocracy, even into the 1930s.

The politicians did not represent the best of American talent, White thought. They usually were ordinary men, typical and therefore not threatening in the eyes of the average voter. Politicians seldom were evil, but they generally were second or third-rate individuals, White said. He was concerned lest those Americans who supported socialistic plans would turn the industrial system over to politicians acting in behalf of government, either for control or ownership. With such power in their hands, the politicians might destroy liberty in America.[7]

As mentioned, White generally favored the New Deal program for he believed it charted a middle course, avoiding the evils of both unrestrained business power and pure Socialism. It was neither Communist nor Fascist and much of it produced long overdue progressive reforms. In addition, White approved of the fact that it brought experts such as Rexford Tugwell into government service to direct policies. Men like Tugwell would be welcomed into industry because of their training and talent, and were an equal asset to the government. Yet many politicians made personal attacks on them in an attempt to hamper their efforts because the politicians did not have the knowledge to debate them

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[7]William Allen White, "Fifty Years Before--And After," Graduate Magazine, University of Kansas, Vol. XXXII (June, 1934), 14.

on basic issues, White said. Tugwell was not all right or all wrong. He was simply a patriotic American seeking a logical solution to the depression dilemma and attempting to implement many of the ideals Theodore Roosevelt promoted earlier in the century.[8]

White saw other threats to American institutions during the depression period which he thought the New Deal would check. He feared that in their panic to overcome the economic crisis, Americans might throw aside their cherished liberties and traditions in favor of Communism or Fascism, hoping one of them might bring a return of prosperity. Speaking to the Northwestern University graduating class of 1937 he said, ". . . a new challenge has appeared in the world, a challenge aimed at democracy, a challenge which scorns these lowly neighborly virtues that have held our world together."[9]

That challenge influenced America's thought, White maintained. An alarming number of citizens argued that in times of crisis one part of the population should be able to oppress the rest of the people or ignore their rights if the former felt certain it was correct. Those ideas led to dictatorship in Europe, and they threatened America's freedoms, White maintained. American capitalists scorned labor leaders

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[8]Ibid.; William Allen White, "Certain Alternatives," Emporia Gazette, 7 May 1934.

[9]"Challenge to Youth Expressed by White," Topeka Daily Capital, 13 June 1937.

and labor distrusted and hated capitalists. American leaders had to try to create a balance between the power of owners and the power of labor, White stated.[10]

Although White feared the force of unrestrained capitalism throughout his life, he did not really consider labor union strength a problem until the 1930s. The new element in the labor movement that caused him so much concern was the sit-down strike. The Bill of Rights protected the picket who used a sidewalk as a forum of free assembly and free speech to argue labor's case in an industrial dispute. But when a worker took charge of a factory to further his position, that was a violation of the owner's property rights, White said.[11]

White feared that if the sit-down strikers grew into a majority in America, government would have to confront them and risk pitting force against a majority opinion. That situation never had developed in America, he said. He dreaded to think about the resulting violence, and yet was the nation ready to grant workers a property right to their job equal to an owner's right to his physical assets?[12]

White believed that the new industrial unions created the sit-down strike crisis. The craft unions primarily promoted the wage rights of skilled workers, making sure

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[10] Ibid.

[11] William Allen White, "The Labor Row," Emporia Gazette, 31 Mar. 1937.

[12] Ibid.

that they had special privileges which the common laborers did not enjoy. And the craft workers supported their unions since their loyalty was to their fellow craftsmen and not to labor as a whole. But the industrial unionists believed that their ties were with every kind of worker. They felt a class-consciousness among all laborers. The guarantee of their right to organize and function as a class organization was equitable, though, since the industrial owners did likewise, White said. And the New Deal labor program supported that right.

But White did have reservations about labor class-consciousness. It potentially threatened the cornerstone of American democracy, the middle class, which was not really a "class" from White's viewpoint because it was open to anyone who supported the institutionalization of the Christian philosophy. The middle class abhorred class-consciousness for it thought its own group was the only body that could be considered a "class" in America. The typical middle class American believed everyone had the opportunity to rise as high as his talents would boost him or sink as far as his lack of initiative and ability would lower him. But no one should ever be placed in a static class, particularly a working class. As White put it, "the word 'proletarian' makes the American middle-class citizen's blood run cold."[13] He

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[13]William Allen White, "A New Labor Goal," Emporia Gazette, 30 Mar. 1937.

was torn between his sympathy for the downtrodden, in this case labor, and his support of the middle class.[14] Forced to choose he sided with the latter, the group of which he was a member.

While White recognized the danger class-consciousness might bring, he believed that American laborers, through their industrial unions, actually tried to achieve a place for themselves in the middle class. The workers rebelled against the machine age, White said. They disliked their forced submission to the regimen of machines and desired instead the right of individualism that the middle class enjoyed. Laborers could receive it, White said, if they could convince middle class citizens of the fairness of their demands. And he believed they could because of the middle class's tradition of equity and righteousness.[15] The effects of mechanization on American society concerned White a great deal over the years. He tried to determine some way that the machine and the spiritual advance of modern man could coexist, but he never seemed able to arrive at a solution that staisfied him.

White warned organized labor not to go too far. It should not try to dominate a political party in an effort to reach its goals. If it did, it would forget any union's

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[14]Graham, Encore for Reform, p. 98.

[15]William Allen White, "The Challenge to the Middle Class," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. CLX (August, 1937), 201.

major goal, to insure high wages, short hours, and acceptable working conditions, and concentrate only on party welfare. The individual worker under such a situation would not be able to pursue a higher status for labor but would have to devote all his energies toward promoting his political boss. The boss in turn would ask labor to support a straight party ticket and democracy would suffer since the union would have spoken out against free electoral choice. Probably under such a situation, White said, industrial owners would control an opposing party and so each election would pit the proletariat against the plutocracy. With two immovable political forces confronting one another, the proletariat and the plutocracy, the middle class would not have an opportunity to chart a moderate course and democracy would be weakened. And White believed that if labor dominated one party, the middle class would not support it and allow it to reach its objectives.[16]

As a solution to the labor dilemma, White proposed the abolition of the commodity status of workers in which they sold their toil for the best price offered. That would require government intervention in the business affairs of industrial owners, but it would have to be done. Owners should think of workers as consumers, paying them higher wages and giving them additional leisure time so they could

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[16]William Allen White, "Speaking for the Consumer," Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol. V (November 1, 1938), 48.

buy more products. And if the owners met some of the workers' demands, White said, Communism and Nazism would not have a chance to succeed in America, for labor would be contented and not susceptible to their enticements. Treating labor as a consumer, elevating its wages and working conditions and shortening its hours, would push it into the middle class, White argued. Freeing labor from its commodity status would be comparable to the Civil War's emancipating the slaves from their property standing.[17]

White believed that workers probably would eventually obtain a contractual right to a job. Under that system an employee, after completing a stated term of service for a company, would receive a guarantee to a job as long as he was diligent, loyal, and maintained an average capacity to produce for his firm. The employer would lose the right to hire and fire indiscriminately.[18] Whatever solution Americans developed to the question of the status of labor, White was confident it would boost democracy and promote progress. In defending his contention he said that ".... the democratic spirit still is the dominant ideal in American life and in the end whatever temporary upset we may be facing, the final

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[17]William Allen White, "Lincoln's Political Philosophy," in Addresses Delivered at the Annual Dinners of the Lincoln Club of Los Angeles, 1921-1940 (n.p., 1940), pp. 227, 229-30.

[18]White, "New Labor Goal."

solution will be a democratic solution, an answer involving give and take!"[19]

White believed the radical farm movements of the 1930s posed the same type of potential danger to democracy as class-conscious labor did. The modern farmers' protest began, White said, in 1927 when a joint meeting of several farm groups in Des Moines, Iowa, issued a resolution which stated that they would withhold commodities from the market for which buyers did not offer at least the cost of production, if they could not obtain relief through legislation. That was the farmers' first post-World War threat to abandon government as an agency of justice in favor of force, he argued. Over the following five years members of farm organizations discussed ways of implementing that threat. Then in July of 1932, the Farmers' Holiday Association in Iowa called a strike. They established road blocks in Iowa in August of that year to stop the flow of farm products to market. While farmers manned the barricades there was little violence. But after a time the unemployed from the cities came out to join them, and they were in a mood to start trouble. Fights between picketers and sheriffs' deputies broke out, and at that point, White said, a revolution threatened to explode out of the farmers' movement. City dwellers apparently were more likely to create disturbances than were rural people, from his viewpoint. That anti-urban position was consistent with the

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[19]White, "Labor Row."

thought of many old Progressives who often favored small town and rural life in the belief that extremes of wealth were least common there.[20]

White was certain that the protesters did not constitute a majority of farmers, but they did represent a significant group who lost faith in democratic institutions and tried to take direct action to solve their problems. They felt hate and suspicion, and even though they knew force would bring little gain, they pushed on with their methods out of desperation.

White contended that the agricultural problem from which the democracy-threatening protest arose, had its roots in the fact that so many farms were mortgaged and faced foreclosure. Farmers over the preceding fifty years watched the living standards of nearly everyone rise and they refused to fall behind and settle for a peasant status. Therefore they used credit in an attempt to expand their operations and increase their income. They could not return to a simpler life (again the problem of mechanization) so they had to try to meet their expenses and produce a profit on their farms. When they were unable to pay their expenses and taxes and when their purchasing power did not rise, they revolted,

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[20]William Allen White, "The Farmer Takes His Holiday," Saturday Evening Post, Vol. CCV (November 26, 1932), 6; Graham, Encore for Reform, p. 71.

White said. They used what he called a new weapon in democracy, direct action.[21]

White thought the farm mortgage problem could be traced most directly back to the World War. At that time, he said, American leaders encouraged farmers to produce more food as a contribution to the war effort. Farm prices soared. Then the leaders continued urging farmers to plant large acreages after the war. Prices leveled off for awhile because Europe was still concerned primarily with military matters and had not yet returned to normal agricultural production, White stated. Next farm prices once again began to increase and land prices jumped correspondingly. Then came new mortgages, White said. Throughout the 1920s farmers were shackled with those debts and when the depression struck they still were laboring under that burden.[22] A group of them turned to radical action, which White thought had no place in a democracy as a solution. This was another threat to liberty during the 1930s which, after March 1933, he hoped the New Deal could suppress.

White believed that various pressure groups posed a danger to democracy during 1930s. They were minorities and wanted to use government to force certain ideals on the majority before it was ready. Some of those ideals were

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[21] Ibid., pp. 7, 66.

[22] Ibid., p. 68; William Allen White, "The Farmer's Votes and Problems," Yale Review, Vol. XXVIII (March, 1939), 440.

lofty and worthy of realization, but force should not be used to implement any concept. An ideal, White said, no matter how benevolent, must wait for conditions to be proper before it can be established, and the situation was not right unless a majority approved. White placed great emphasis on majority opinion.

American democracy had deep roots, White said, but it was not immune to the threat of autocracy, and pressure groups increased that menace. America's situation in the 1930s was similar to that of Europe immediately after the World War. The challenge in each place was to establish an equitable system of income for both the individual of exceptional talent and the common man of ordinary abilities. That was a major theme both in White's thinking and throughout American history. The pressure groups threatened to take an extreme position on that question and upset the slow but steady progress that Christendom made toward the problem, White said. By the 1930s, seventy to ninety percent of the American people enjoyed a self-respecting standard of living. The American system guaranteed the exceptional person the right to rise according to his talents, but it did not insure that he would return genuine service to society for the consideration that he received and did not prevent his seizing an unfair reward simply because he was in a place of power.[23]

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[23]William Allen White, "The Challenge to Democracy," Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol. IV (June 1, 1938), 495.

But the problem of the common man whose talents were slightly below average created tension in America which the pressure groups and the demagogues who led them used as an issue to gain influence, White argued. This common man did not receive all of the material comforts to which he believed he was entitled. The demagogues promised him panaceas, legal ukases, and destruction of the social structure, White said, as methods that would provide more material benefits. White believed Americans could not furnish the common man's needs immediately but had to accomplish it as a gradual process. And it was impossible unless the nation's best minds applied themselves to the problem. Yet he feared that in the emergency of the depression the suffering of underprivileged citizens would create an emotional stress that might cause a destructive hysteria among a majority of Americans. They then would experiment with short cuts, forget their ordered ways, and trade their liberties in exchange for security for the poor. This was the way tyrants came to power in Europe, White said, and Americans were not immune to such a danger.

White maintained hope that what he called "the brakes of our democracy" would curb any citizen desire to abandon freedom for the promises of an autocrat. Business, politics, and "the ethical sense of the people" were the three elements of American democracy that he believed would insure a continuation of America's commitment to liberty. Politics,

which he called "government by the common sense of the people known as their morals, public and private, their idea of the decent neighborly conduct," controlled institutions, while free education and current information disbursed widely, constituted the foundation of public ethics. So in reality politics and ethics, vital parts of American democracy, provided a steadying influence for the nation's progress.[24]

White also thought that America's heterogeneous population and large size helped to steer it away from the influence of pressure groups and demagogues. Diversity of opinion prevented the nation from going too far in a radical direction. In addition, a potential dictator would have difficulty subduing all of the country because of its great size. Politicians often found an enthusiastic following in one section, yet received only a lukewarm reception in another. The love of liberty and the fear of losing it were the ideas that bound the nation together. They were stronger than any party, more influential than any leader, and White was almost certain they would prevent a dictator from assuming power. As he stated it, "that fear of losing liberty would chase a dictator up an alley over night."[25] Contrary to White's opinion, some argued that the size and diversity of America led people to form pressure groups as their only way of obtaining power.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

The continued American dedication to liberty depended on the maintenance of a broad middle class, White said. The man who had no home, whose family suffered from lack of necessities, who had no job or lived in the fear of losing it, was indifferent toward civil liberties. Freedom disappeared in countries where the economic depression produced a sharp decline in the middle class. Americans who were unemployed showed little concern for their liberties. By contrast, working citizens in the United States led the fight to preserve free processes. They enjoyed certain privileges as a result of their standing, and a governmental leader would go to great lengths to please them because of their capacity for organization, thrift, industry, and foresight. So when the middle class registered its opinion it obtained results in a democracy. The way to insure liberty in America, White said, was to broaden social and economic opportunity and bring more people into the middle class.[26]

White believed that kindness, an important element in democracy, flourished most in a society of prosperous individuals. The best way to reform the world was to give everyone a chance to enjoy economic plenty. That was one of the main reasons the depression of the 1930s disturbed him so--he feared that programs instituted to end it would endanger democracy. He had confidence that a democracy,

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[26] Ibid., pp. 495-96.

using modern technological advances, could feed its workers, house them comfortably, and keep them contented. But machines needed bosses to supervise those who ran them, and White feared that those industrial leaders would become greedy and attempt to assume more power than they should have. "The boss is the problem child of the machine age," he said.[27]

White thought that the ideas of the old Progressives of the early twentieth century would go a long way toward solving the problems of the depression era, but he feared that those concepts had gone out of vogue in the hearts of many Americans during the 1930s. The Progressives believed that if they changed the environment of the under-privileged citizens, gave them better housing, higher wages with which they could purchase an improved quality of food and clothing, better schooling, and proper recreation they could solve the problem of poverty, he said. They sought social salvation through the promotion of greater self-respect. The uplifting of the human spirit was their main objective, and the emphasis on the environment was a means to that end.[28]

The Progressives did not bring on a revolution in the first three decades of the twentieth century, White said,

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[27]William Allen White, "Can We Democratize Our Machines?" Carnegie Magazine, Vol. XXII (September, 1938), 108-109.

[28]William Allen White, "A Yip from the Doghouse," New Republic, Vol. XCIII (December 15, 1937), 160.

but they achieved many of the goals they sought in their battle with the possessive and acquisitive forces of the nation. Public opinion accounted for many of their advances for it encouraged workers to demand more of the rewards of society and it shamed the greedy business leaders into concentrating on obtaining justice in their affairs rather than amassing greater wealth. That same public opinion created a more equitable distribution of products, but the Pregressives began putting too much faith in material goods and started neglecting the needs of the spirit, White argued. They fell into the error of thinking that all they need do to establish justice in the nation was to distribute "toothpaste, automobiles, radios, bathtubs, parks, playgrounds, high schools, libraries, extension courses and canned soups to those who hitherto had been denied those sweet boons."[29] So when the depression came and the financial structure disintegrated, Americans turned away from the Progressives.

The Progressives of the 1930s still held to their original concern for man's spiritual requirements, White said. But the sit-down strikes, the class-conscious appeal of the big unions, and the tyrannies of the world's dictatorships shocked them, for those influences represented a faith in the use of force that was abhorrent to a Progressive.

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[29] Ibid.

Society's advancement could come only through evolutionary processes under a democratic government. Yet the Progressives' theory that the gradual improvement of the environment would produce an elevation of society did not seem workable under a system in which 10,000,000 people were jobless, White maintained. But on the other hand the proletariat's reliance on force would not improve the situation either.[30]

White saw a decline in the quality of life during the 1930s coupled with the turning away from the teachings of the old Progressives. He noted that citizens of his state showed less interest in reading good literature than they once had, and displayed a lack of pride in the accomplishments of Kansas artists. Kansas pioneers worked hard, suffered much privation, exalted their political leaders, and praised famous Kansans. By contrast, White said, the people of the 1930s looked more to national publications and nationally-known artists. They did not have the pride in their region that their ancestors had. White inadvertently pointed to the homogenization of society as a result of modern communications, although he was not able to recognize the significance of his observation at the time. The modern Kansans were not so concerned about the evils of alcoholic beverages either, White said, as reflected in their softening attitude toward prohibition. They opposed the saloon with its sales of hard liquor,

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[30] Ibid.

but they were willing to allow the consumption of beer. Yet taverns selling beer had some of the same evils as the old saloon, White maintained. They were havens for bootleggers, and certain high school and college students patronized them.[31] Reduced public interest in good literature and a weakening attitude toward prohibition were signs of a declining society, White argued.

For the most part White was disappointed with the response of the Republican party to the many problems he saw arising from the depression era, even though he supported its presidential candidates. Republicans were in power so often during the past seventy-two years, White wrote in 1933, that they lacked humility. They took their power for granted, and in their snobbishness they overlooked the welfare of the common man. The election of 1932 proved that they no longer could do that, White said. That year they neglected the progressive interests of the region west of the Allegheny Mountains, north of the Ohio River, and on to the Pacific and they suffered defeat. That area often provided the strength for a political party or movement, White maintained. The Populists gained their power there in the early 1890s; Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressives relied most heavily on that area for support; and in the 1916 presidential election Charles

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[31]William Allen White, "Just Wondering," Kansas Magazine, 1934, 86-88; William Allen White, "Kansas and Prohibition," Kansas Magazine, 1937, 50-52.

Evans Hughes carried the populous state of New York, but lost to Woodrow Wilson who won the backing of the Middle West. The Republicans had to please the interests of that region if they intended to regain their strength. They took an overly conservative position in 1932, and they needed to attract more liberals if they were to meet the nation's changing needs.[32]

White generally thought that President Franklin Roosevelt was erecting a system of justice that would counteract some of the disturbing trends of the 1930s. He believed that the New Deal provided a structure of strict regulation, but one that was based, for the most part, on democratic principles. The European dictators controlled their populations in much the same way, he said, yet they were unacceptable because they scorned democracy. Roosevelt worked to preserve Americans' political liberties such as the right of parliamentary debate, free speech, free assembly, majority rule, and trial by jury. The nation could come under the control of tight regulation yet still enjoy basic freedoms. White thought Roosevelt was attempting to curb the arrogance of big business through the control of capital, and supervise the activities of agriculture and labor. The president's plan consisted of regulating agriculture, corporate investments, wages, and working conditions. Thus, White said, Roosevelt sought to create a form of state capitalism. He wanted to

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[32]"William Allen White Advises Liberalism for Republicans," Review of Reviews and World's Work, Vol. LXXXVII (January, 1933), 11.

bring the nation's entire social and economic system under some type of benevolent federal supervision. The Tennessee Valley Authority was a good example of that approach. It was designed not only to electrify the Tennessee Valley, but also to regulate the lives of the people there, both for their own good and the good of the nation. And the marvel of Roosevelt's peaceful revolution, White said, was that he did it under democratic principles, preserving Americans' basic rights while at the same time curbing the power of money, all for the common benefit. Democracy was more deeply rooted in America than in Europe, White said, so the nation probably could make that strange revolution succeed, guaranteeing individual freedom while at the same time shackling wealth.[33]

Not only did White think that Roosevelt's regulation of capital controlled the editor's old enemy plutocracy, but he also believed that the president posed a good defense against another of democracy's foes, the radical left. Roosevelt was concerned about the power of that group, White said, because he believed that the ultra-conservative element in America could turn against him and he could regain their support, but if someone from the radical left such as Huey Long attracted supporters away from him, he would have difficulty recovering their backing. The reason was that the

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[33]William Allen White, "Roosevelt's First Year," Emporia Gazette, 3 Mar. 1934.

individuals to whom the radical left appealed were what White called the political "moron mind." They comprised one-fourth to one-third of the American voting public in the 1930s. Politically they were unstable, White said, and no public leader could depend upon their lasting support. He feared that they might form an independent party under a demagogue's leadership and take charge of the presidency through a legitimate election process. But he had confidence that Roosevelt would stand by democracy even in the face of such a threat and offer the voter a clear choice.[34]

White believed that Roosevelt desired to use government as an agency to advance human welfare and even favorably compared the president's efforts in that direction with those of Theodore Roosevelt. That was a strong compliment because White so admired the earlier president. Franklin Roosevelt was confident that using government in that manner and maintaining a commitment to democracy would steer America away from the dangers of Communism and Fascism, White said. A person who suffered privation in America might easily lose faith in the democratic system and turn to totalitarianism. White described the president as a brave, generous, kind, and honest leader who guided Americans out of a troubled past into a brighter future.[35] White also generally supported

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[34]William Allen White, "Washington in the Fog," Emporia Gazette, 4 Feb. 1935.

[35]William Allen White, "The President's New Book," Emporia Gazette, 13 Apr. 1934.

Roosevelt's New Deal because the editor felt it took action to end the hardships of the depression. Of course it preserved an orderly civilization and safeguarded democratic institutions in America, he said, but it also prevented businesses from collapsing while it revived others, supported the agricultural economy, and returned the unemployed to work.[36]

White supported farm relief programs including the Agricultural Adjustment Administration because he felt they elevated the farmer's economic position. He differentiated programs such as the AAA from welfare or "dole" proposals in which recipients would not have to work for the main portion of their incomes. Farmers should receive a government subsidy so they would not have to live on a peasant level, he said. They liked such assistance and received considerable benefit from it. When the Supreme Court invalidated the AAA, White favored passage of a constitutional amendment that would restore it if that was the only workable solution. The Constitution should serve the changing needs of the people, he maintained.[37]

Even though he supported the New Deal, White had some reservations about it. He was concerned about how it might

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[36][William Allen White], "If Not, Then What," Emporia Gazette, 23 Nov. 1933; [William Allen White], "Thanksgiving," Emporia Gazette, 30 Nov. 1933.

[37]William Allen White, "In Kansas, the Landon Home State," Review of Reviews, Vol. XCIII (April, 1936), 55; William Allen White, "AAA and the Constitution," Selma (CA) Irrigator, 6 Feb. 1936; "Kansas Editor Calls for Farmer Subsidy," Fresno (CA) Bee & Republican, 27 Jan. 1936.

evolve. The New Deal's regimentation made him uneasy in a way, for he thought if it were expanded and intensified it might threaten both the liberties that the Declaration of Independence supported and the social progress gained during the post-Civil War era. He feared that if the controls the Roosevelt administration placed on the economy spread to other areas of life, America might depart from its dedication to free speech, press, and assembly, and trial by jury, majority rule, and parliamentary government. The New Deal was not unique in its emphasis on a controlled society, White said, for that was a worldwide phenomenon. But because it was, did not make that aspect of it less alarming.[38] White saw from his past the specter of the financial baron and the way he controlled people. The Emporian did not want the New Dealers to assume, and then abuse, the power that the old industrial bosses wielded.

White noted a shift in the Democratic party toward a commitment to regimentation. It was a party of three parts: the Old South, the large cities, and farmer-labor radicalism. Franklin Roosevelt constructed its new character. But White thought it might promote a modern-day feudalism, which at best would be what he termed a benevolent despotic paternalism, because its three divisions already were individually involved

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[38]William Allen White, "Thoughts on July Fourth," Emporia Gazette, 4 July 1934; William Allen White, "Hoover's New Book," Emporia Gazette, 28 Sept. 1934.

in feudal relationships. The landed aristocrats of the South maintained feudal relationships with their sharecroppers, he said. The urban bosses ruled through their own form of feudalism over the masses of the poor. And the farmer-labor group sought feudal ties with an omnipotent, omniscient government. White could not see a neo-feudalism fitting into his concept of democracy, for the two systems were incapable of coexisting.[39]

In a 1934 editorial, White praised Herbert Hoover's recently published book, The Challenge to Liberty, in which the ex-president delineated some of the fears he had about the future of democracy under a climate of political regimentation. White expressed those same fears. He said Hoover "goes on record for democracy." White argued that he and Hoover both approved of the New Deal's goal of readjusting national income to produce modern ideals of justice that would guarantee economic security to the average person who lacked acquisitive talents. It also would insure that the person of many talents would have a chance to rise as far as his ability would take him, provided he followed what White called a redefinition of industrial honesty. But White applauded Hoover for coming out in favor of retention of the profit system as an incentive to individual

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[39]William Allen White, "Birth of a New Party," Emporia Gazette, 26 June 1936.

initiative, for the editor was not convinced that the New Dealers were pledged to support that scheme.[40]

White argued that Hoover was preparing to establish a New Deal-like program before he left office, but along more democratic lines than President Roosevelt did. Hoover had assembled "more college professors, more Ph.D.'s, more sociological experts than even President Roosevelt has gathered about him." White believed if Hoover had constructed a program similar to the NRA he would have used "persuasion, not the ballyhoo of a war-time psychology," to get it established. A Hoover-run NRA would have been operated on "reason, persuasion and common consent. . . ." The Hoover administration, had it continued in power, would have relied on experts just as the New Deal did, but as advisers, not administrators, White argued. Hoover would have used the information that his experts gathered as the "wellspring which would give democratic government its wisdom and its strength," rather than as absolute rules to guide governmental administration.[41] White's evaluation of Franklin Roosevelt versus Herbert Hoover as promoters of democracy was a matter of degree. He felt that Roosevelt and the New Deal favored preservation of democracy as opposed to totalitarianism, but he believed Hoover would have used methods that relied more on freedom of choice, rather than regimentation, in pursuing the same goal.

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[40] White, "Hoover's New Book."

[41] Ibid.

Roosevelt's proposed Supreme Court reorganization greatly upset White, who thought the use of presidential power to alter the make-up of such a basic institution had no place in a democracy. White believed that the Court performed a unique function in such a diverse nation as the United States. All sorts of questions arose in America that would never appear in a more homogeneous country. For example, there were regional conflicts, he said, that required a compromise. The rural, aristocratic culture of the Southern states had immediate and ultimate goals distinct from the urban, industrial North. People living at various economic levels had different needs and viewpoints which sometimes clashed. On some occasions racial or religious problems required a solution. That was when the Supreme Court, an outside arbiter, came onto the scene to seek a solution fair to all parties.[42]

White contended that various economic, regional, and racial interests could form alliances at election time that would constitute a majority. The danger of such a situation was that after they united and elected their candidate, they might find that they made a mistake. Such a mistake must be retrievable, White said. America should allow time for "public clamor to settle into public opinion and public opinion to crystallize into a definite national policy," so the nation could remain united despite

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[42]William Allen White, "Supreme Court—or 'Rule By Impulses,'" New York Times Magazine (April 25, 1937), 3.

its heterogeneity. But if the people realized they made an error, they should be able to turn to the Supreme Court to obtain help in finding a solution, White argued. He termed the Supreme Court's role as an arbiter of disputes a "splendid example of the growth of the evolutionary impulse of the American democracy, adjusting itself to its peculiar political environment."[43]

White cited the Supreme Court's five-to-four decision upholding the Wagner Act as a good example of its effectiveness. The closeness of the vote in the Court indicated that there was a strong minority against it, he said. But the majority legal opinion enforced its view on a question that would affect interstate commerce for 100 years or more. The Court's function as arbiter worked well. And yet the Roosevelt administration wanted to change the theory and system of the Supreme Court from that of an arbiter of clashing interests to that of a legalizer of, what White called, public clamor for the party in power. If a party won control of both the Congress and the executive branch and then under the proposed system automatically gained control of the Supreme Court, America would have what White called "government by impulse." Many irrelevant ideas and prejudices that produced votes and sometimes even majorities, would become national policy without the guidance of the Supreme Court.[44]

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[43] Ibid., pp. 3, 23.

[44] Ibid., p. 23.

White thought the Supreme Court gave the nation stability, the chief difference between North American democracy and South American democracy. He said that Roosevelt and his supporters could not understand why, since they won two presidential elections, they should not be able to do as they wished with the Court. They should pause though before embarking on any new plan, in the interest of stability. If what they wanted for America was in the nation's best interest, he stated, their proposal would become law sooner or later.

In South American democracies, White said, a president received the power to alter the economic and social systems to fit his own ideas. That often created an unstable situation in which institutions changed frequently. By contrast, the North American system depended upon patience to guide its course. While regimes rapidly rose and fell around the world, the United States government remained strong. A defeated minority never felt the need in this nation to resort to assassination to advance its viewpoint because it knew it would have another chance to win an election and implement its ideas. And the Supreme Court helped preserve the stability that gave minorities a chance to make known their opinions. It delayed a final decision on any important topic until all sentiments were registered.[45] "When America becomes volatile, emotional, impulsive and gauges her institutions to respond to her whims," White said, "the ideals of the

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[45]William Allen White, "The Balance Wheel," Emporia Gazette, 25 Mar. 1937.

founders will have passed . . . and we shall be adrift in a world where democracy is being challenged and tyrants are waiting to seize power."[46]

White feared that when Roosevelt left office a reactionary administration would come to power as a backlash against New Deal policies. White was not so concerned that Roosevelt would abuse any new power he might receive if Congress approved a plan to alter or weaken the Supreme Court, but the Emporian was apprehensive that a future executive might. Again, he saw the Court functioning as a safeguard for democracy in such a situation. A reactionary administration would try to abolish basic American freedoms if its goal was to establish dictatorial power, he said. If it had the support of a reactionary Congress behind it, the Supreme Court would be the only possible barrier between it and the demise of American democracy.[47]

Writing in 1939 and looking back on the nation's struggles of the past decade, White, unlike Frederick Jackson Turner, argued that the settlement of the American frontier ended in the first one-third of the twentieth century. White saw a connection between that event and the economic depression of

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[46]White, "Supreme Court," p. 25.

[47]Ibid.

the 1930s. He believed that the constant expansion of the frontier and the accompanying rise in land values coming from the development of virgin prairies and forests and the opening of mines produced a fund a fluid capital that promoted the nation's economic growth. The democratic process, which offered equal opportunity to all people, furthered the availability of that capital throughout America and led to the creation of an expanded system of credit which increased man's industrial and agricultural output and further enlarged his wealth. The American system of credit that the settlement of the frontier created was an example of the philosophy of Jesus at work, White said, a philosophy based on the doctrine of human goodness. Credit was applied optimism, White stated, and it was faith, "faith that men will keep their promises."[48]

While this position may seen bizarre, it reallly was consistent with White's Christian modernist viewpoint. As a modernist he believed that society was moving slowly toward the establishment of what he considered the Kingdom of God on earth--a time of perfect peace and happiness.[49] The expanded use of credit represented one more step toward that objective, in his opinion, for it seemed to prove that man could trust his neighbor to repay a debt and therefore maintain tranquility rather than create tension. White saw the American

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[48] Ibid., p. 17.

[49] William R. Hutchison, The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 2.

credit system as a practical application of faith and the golden rule.

White maintained that democracy and the capitalism of the twentieth century which reformers placed under some degree of governmental control, were mutually supportive. As he said it, "political democracy, capitalism and the so-called Christian ethics are all off one piece of goods." The settlement of the Western frontier provided funds for the strengthening of American capitalism and promoted democracy. White argued that two institutions prominent in the West supported democracy there--the church and the school. The church promoted morality in a community, which White said was man's yearning for justice and his striving toward an ideal of human relations. The Western pioneers established schools to check the power of the church and prevent the formation of a theocracy, and to attempt to disseminate the information necessary to a citizen living in a democracy.[50]

In White's view the Great Depression signified at least a temporary halting of the economic progress America enjoyed as a result of the frontier settlement process, and it threatened the accompanying system of democracy. America's westward expansion allowed democracy and capitalism to flourish, but their future was in serious doubt for the first time in the 1930s. Despite White's reservations about some of

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[50]White, Changing West, pp. 9, 11, 17, 20.

Roosevelt's methods, he believed the New Deal was essentially a liberal program that promoted the evolutionary progress he admired. If the frontier settlement taught the United States anything, White argued, it was to trust the evolutionary processes of American democracy. The spirit of that evolutionary democracy appeared, among other times, in the American Revolution, the Civil War, the Progressive movement, and finally in the New Deal.[51] White had faith that the basically democratic nature of the Roosevelt administration's program would outweigh its few elements that seemed to threaten liberty.

In one of his last analyses of the Great Depression, White compared it with the problem of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1860 there were millions of blacks living under legal slavery, while in the 1930s there were millions of unemployed living under the slavery of a depressed economy. The unemployed were chained to public work, which they had to accept or starve, just as the slaves of the South were bound to their masters. The unemployed person on a made-work program had little free will socially, politically, or economically, White argued.[52]

The nation could not continue indefinitely with such a large group of unemployed, White stated, but Americans should

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[51] Ibid., pp. 57-58, 104-106.

[52] William Allen White, "We Are Coming, Father Abraham!" Abraham Lincoln Quarterly, Vol. I (June, 1940), 74-75.

move slowly in settling the problem. "Patience is . . . the first virtue of democracy," he declared. A patiently-developed solution would be the most lasting. Such a plan would re-employ the idle and return them to the middle class--that broad base of support for democracy composed of people who had comfortable incomes, were not greedy, and possessed a major interest in the quality of life in their society. Some nations tried the hasty approach to the unemployment dilemma, White said, putting the jobless to work making munitions, but those workers were tied to a war economy just as much as many Americans were bound to a work-relief program. Americans needed to look to their traditions of initiative, ingenuity, universal education and, most of all, democracy to lead them out of their unemployment problem. Only with a firm dedication to those principles could they avoid the pitfalls of totalitarianism, White concluded.[53]

White saw the Great Depression as a crisis period for democracy. Under the pressure of a world economic emergency he feared that Americans might abandon their democratic tradition in favor of an autocrat who would promise to restore prosperity without regard to the methods employed. Given a choice, White would have selected democracy over affluence. But he did not think a choice was mandatory. In fact, he believed a society economically depressed for a long period of time could not provide the proper foundation for a stable

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[53] Ibid., pp. 76, 78-79.

democracy. Thus he desired a depression recovery program committed both to prosperity and democracy. Interestingly he thought such a program began under the administration of his friend Hoover, and then came to fruition through Roosevelt's New Deal. White constantly exhorted the nation to oppose the few undemocratic tendencies he detected in the Roosevelt policies, such as the proposed Supreme Court reorganization. For the most part he supported the New Deal and believed that it would fulfill many of the dreams he held decades earlier as a Bull Moose Progressive.

Materialism played a more important role in White's thinking during the depression than it did at any other time in his life after World War I. And yet his outlook on this subject was paradoxical. On the one hand he thought only the financially comfortable individual could concentrate on improving society and thereby promote democracy, because such a person did not have to spend all of his time working for necessities. So White generally approved of New Deal programs that worked to insure financial security. And yet he criticized New Dealers at other times as too materialistic, too committed to what he saw as regimentation, and not interested enough in social uplift.

The problem was that White brought Progressive-era thinking into the depression period. He considered the New Deal to be a reform movement, but reform to him meant moral crusades. Economic concerns were important only as they promoted spiritual

advancement. New Dealers, by necessity, concentrated on economic issues first and worked for social or moral advances only secondarily. In the press of the nation-wide financial crisis they used what White and a number of old Progressives viewed as excessive regimentation.[54]

Yet the surprising fact is that unlike many Progressives, White supported most of the New Deal. He recognized that if America's way of life could not be preserved, a new system most likely would not embrace democratic principles. So White was pragmatic. Even if the New Deal at times seemed coercive and despite the fact that it considered economic issues of paramount importance, it still was committed to preservation of the American system, of which democracy was a part. White therefore viewed the New Deal as the best hope to save democracy.

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[54]Graham, Encore for Reform, pp. 178-80.

CHAPTER 7

WHITE ON THE DICTATORS' THREAT

The Bolshevik revolution of November, 1917, inaugurated a new era in the history of democratic thought. For combined with the later establishment of totalitarian governments in Italy and Germany, the Bolshevik triumph raised the two-faceted question: had democracy failed and was the dictatorship the way of the future?[1]

White viewed the rise of dictators Benito Mussolini, Joseph Stalin, and Adolf Hitler as one of the most serious threats to democracy. In an overly-simplified analysis of post-World War I European developments, he argued that their appearance was an inevitable result of the fact that twentieth century man was unable to adjust properly to modern inventions. The world was capable of producing enough to feed and clothe all of its inhabitants, he said, but it did not. The problem of poverty was not a new one. But public information was available to all persons as it never

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[1]Edward A. Purcell, Jr., The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism & the Problem of Value (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), p. 117.

was previously, and the poor realized their plight more acutely. The development of steam and electricity provided a great hope to the masses that those new energy sources would satisfy their needs, White contended, so they were even more disappointed when they continued to want. People in various nations rebelled against their underprivileged status and turned to dictators for help.[2]

Simply destroying the dictators would not solve the problem of tyranny in the world, White argued. The root of the issue was society's denial of justice to millions. Those people no longer accepted want as the natural course of their existence. Democratic liberties meant little to them, White contended, because material desires were their first concern. Their frame of mind made them vulnerable to exploitation, and the despots of the world quickly saw that they could gain power from an appeal to those distressed masses.[3]

White believed that the desire for security was another reason for the rise of dictators. That need was a worldwide phenomenon, he said. It affected not only Europe but the United States as well. Yet citizens of some European countries, such as Russia, Italy, and Germany, turned to an autocrat in their search for security, while Americans relied on education, science, and commercial

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[2]William Allen White, "Welding New Weapons of Democracy," Churchman, Vol. CLV (March 1, 1941), 10.

[3]Ibid.

enterprise for it. The programs of the Greenbackers, Populists, Progressives, and New Dealers were directed toward providing security for Americans. Under the guidance of leaders of groups such as those, the nation channeled tax funds toward aiding the public welfare in the interest of security. Statesmen in the United States used tax revenues for improved roads, better educational facilities, rural electrification, public power plants, public health systems, regulation of utilities, and inspection of food. All of those contributed to the security of America and satisfied the wants of its citizens. The European countries that fell to dictatorships failed to provide for citizens' needs, White maintained.[4] This line of reasoning was consistent with White's earlier thought. He believed everyone should have the opportunity to obtain a comfortable income and thereby a sense of security. White maintained that when a person was secure, he was free to promote democracy and spiritual progress and in that way improve his society.

White argued that if America was to remain strong and not fall to the tyranny of dictatorship as some European nations had, it would have to continue to try to give the common man the same privileges the wealthy individual enjoyed. To accomplish that, government would have to maintain its supervision of human affairs, yet make sure it did not

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[4]William Allen White, "Airplanes and Security," Graduate Magazine, University of Kansas, Vol. XL (May-June, 1942), 8.

regulate conduct so much that it would violate democratic liberties. Democracy in the era of the dictator required public servants who could properly administer the portion of tax money set aside for the general welfare.[5]

White contended that another reason for the advent of the dictatorships was the growth of extreme nationalism in the world. The countries that supported autocrats saw only their own point of view. They lacked a sense of understanding toward neighboring nations. The result, in addition to the spread of dictatorship, was a growing feeling of envy and rancor among the countries of the world. The spirit of harmony that Wilson tried to promote at Versailles was almost gone.[6]

White was convinced that the spirit of extreme nationalism in the autocratic countries could be traced to a lack of what he called social faith, which was composed of tolerance, patience, and a sense of duty. Those qualities grew out of the Beatitudes, he argued, and were major factors in the preservation of America's strength. White thought that the people of the United States were committed to a noble purpose in life and for that reason maintained a basically kind society while other countries turned to dictatorship. America's citizens supported the democratic philosophy, he said, which produced

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[5]Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[6]William Allen White, "The Eternal Bounce in Man," Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol. III (July 15, 1937), 607.

faith, hope, love, and man's self-respect. So in essence it was America's dedication to democracy that separated it from the autocratic countries, White argued.[7]

White believed that the terms of the Versailles treaty were largely responsible for Adolf Hitler's ascendance in Germany. It penalized that nation beyond what it could endure, he contended, humiliating it and imposing an unreasonable financial burden. Hitler came to power as a reaction to those terms. The treaty simply was a declaration of a future war, White argued, for it represented the vengeance of the Allies toward Germany, and vengeance always brought disaster for its perpetrator.

Hitler was the personification of the vengeful spirit that grew out of the Treaty of Versailles, White said. The free nations faced a terrific challenge in trying to overcome his effect on the world, and that of other dictators. Force of arms provided no lasting solution, for no one obtained anything from a war, White argued. Any kind of force would be futile, for it was force as embodied in the treaty, that was partially responsible for plunging the world into the dictators' crisis that it suffered. No, there was only one solution, White said. "Not to the generals . . . not to the business men with their self-interest should the democracies of the world turn today. But on their marrow-bones they should

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[7] Ibid., pp. 607-608.

pray . . . for the guidance of the great mind that preached the great Sermon on the Mount."[8]

The rise of the dictators constituted a worldwide revolution, White stated. It began in Russia with the establishment of a Communism as pure and undefiled as Lenin and Trotsky could make it, and then evolved into a type of state capitalism under Stalin that he directed, at least in theory although not in practice, toward the common good. Then Mussolini set up his "corporate state" in which he rigidly controlled capital and labor. Hitler constructed a state capitalism that was nearly as strong as Stalin's. While the others made at least a pretense of benevolence, Hitler soon after he came to power schemed to have Germany rule over a set of vassal nations. And even in theory, White argued, Hitler took a benevolent attitude only toward people of the Germanic groups.[9]

White maintained that Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler believed in the use of a levelling-down process to attempt to create economic equality among their citizens. Each had to establish an economy of scarcity because for various reasons they were unable to set up one of abundance. Stalin tried to transform a feudal economy into an industrial system, but White believed that "an adverse psychology" and a

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[8]William Allen White, "Hitler's Defi," Emporia Gazette, 21 Feb. 1938.

[9]William Allen White, "Thoughts After the Election," Yale Review, Vol. XXX (December, 1940), 221.

lack of knowledge and technical skill hampered the dictator's efforts. Mussolini did not have sufficient coal and iron to create an economy of abundance. A shortage of raw materials, restricted access to the seas, and the encirclement of a group of democracies limited Hitler's economy, White maintained. Hitler realized that the democracies bordering Germany on the Atlantic side were freer and generally more prosperous than his nation so he viewed conquest as essential to provide Germany with more raw materials and improved maritime facilities, White contended. He could not live among neighbors such as the Scandinavian nations, Holland, Belgium, France, and Great Britain.[10]

White argued that the worldwide revolution, of which Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler were a part, came to the United States in the late nineteenth century in the form of a new awareness of the dangers of unrestricted capitalism, but Americans handled it differently than the European dictatorships did. The Populists and Progressives faced the problem in America, but they dealt with a country that had the raw materials and technical skills to maintain a state of abundance. So their benevolent attack on capitalism did not require them to formulate a theory of economic scarcity, White argued. The American reformers concentrated on directing the nation's mass production toward an equitable system of distribution. America's revolution of the late

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[10]Ibid., pp. 221-22.

nineteenth and the twentieth centuries was peaceful, White stated, because of the country's abundance and because a majority of Americans sanctioned the changes. It was another example of the benefits of democracy to America.[11]

From the late nineteenth century through the 1930s, American statesmen appeared who tried to harness capitalism so its rewards could be distributed upon a broader base, White said. William Jennings Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, Robert La Follette, and Woodrow Wilson fought for those goals. But whereas the European dictators sought a levelling-down process, the American leaders worked for a levelling-up, attempting to insure that everyone had a chance to enter the middle class. To accomplish that the Americans extended the opportunity for democratic expression more broadly through such devices as the primary system, the direct election of United States Senators, the initiative, the referendum, and women's suffrage. So in White's opinion, the United States, Russia, Italy, and Germany faced similar challenges from their economic systems. But the methods they employed to solve those problems were different. America generally used democratic techniques while the other three nations turned to dictatorships.[12]

White pointed out that in addition to the American Populist and Progressive leaders, the world witnessed the

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[11] Ibid., p. 222.

[12] Ibid., pp. 222-23.

rise of responsible reformers in England and the Scandinavian countries, and moderate Socialists in France, Belgium, and Holland. Mussolini and Hitler started their reigns with the same objectives as those leaders, White argued. But then they grew impatient. They began to take short cuts. Finally they came to the point of a major decision in their careers. They could choose the model of Stalin and commit themselves to autocracy or they could follow the example of the Western nations and select democracy. They decided in favor of dictatorship, White argued, and thus plunged their countries into the darkness of repression.[13]

White oversimplified considerably and made some outright errors. Unrestrained capitalism did not characterize Tsarist Russia, for example. But White interpreted history and current affairs as good versus evil, the greedy versus the altruistic, capitalists versus Progressives. If the facts did not fit into his pattern, he tried to force them.

One of the reasons White feared the dictatorships so much was that he believed they threatened democracy, and if it was once crushed, there would be a long interval before it could rise again. "The long story of man's slow progress holds one hard lesson: Peace and love and faith and justice, once stricken do not soon know a resurrection."[14] Another reason for White's abhorrence of autocracy was his distaste

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[13] Ibid., p. 224.

[14] White, "Eternal Bounce," p. 608.

for its reliance on force, which he believed was anathema to democracy. The ruler who depended on force to implement his ideas, White argued, always suspended or modified the liberty necessary for the functioning of an orderly democratic government. No matter how appealing a compromise with democracy the dictator offered, White insisted, he still established tyranny. Force never improved the common welfare of a people, which consisted of more than material comforts. The main purpose for the establishment of the American democracy was not the guarantee of physical rewards but the assurance of the self-respect that came from freedom, White argued.[15]

White believed that the system of reason, capitalism, and Christianity were directly opposed to the powers of force, a Socialistic economy, and anti-Christianity. Reason represented the democratic way, force the method of tyranny. Capitalism allowed the individual to freely express his talents while Socialism stifled economic liberty. "Democracy, Christianity, and capitalism are one in three, three in one, the trinity of the modern world," White said. Freedom for the Christian faith could not exist with dictatorship, he maintained, for the autocratic ruler always attacked it. The first thing the Bolshevists did was attack the church, he stated. Hitler persecuted first the Protestants, then the

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[15]William Allen White, "Fifty Years Before--And After," Graduate Magazine, University of Kansas, Vol. XXXII (June, 1934), 15.

Catholics. And Mussolini planned to "have a quarrel with the Pope, but the heavy Catholic majority in Italy slowed him down." Force, the denial of freedom, and the repression of debate characterized autocracy.[16]

Several years after making a tour of Russia, White wrote an article in which he described the difference between what he believed was a dominant element of the Russian mind and the American mind. He told the story of a visit he made to a Russian factory. He ate lunch there with a group of the best workers, and after his meal while on an inspection of the facilities, he saw several people reading a blackboard with an obvious look of scorn or disdain on their faces. Inquiring about the reason for their attitude, his guide informed him that on the board there was a notice that one of the workers at the factory contracted a venereal disease and his fellow workers were angry with him, not for a moral reason, but because the illness curtailed his production output. He was not a good member of the manufacturing team because he allowed something to interfere with his work. Under the Soviet dictatorship, each citizen was expected to place his personal life in a secondary position to the needs of the

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[16]William Allen White, "Capital in Democracy," Red Bluff (CA) News, 5 Apr. 1939.

state.[17] The Russian state, unlike the American government, was not a government of the people but rather was a self-perpetuating entity.

White then went on to describe by contrast what would happen if a worker contracted a venereal disease in his own home town, Emporia. There the community would register its disapproval of the person, not because of the disease's effect on him or his work output, but for the grief it would cause his family. Under the Soviet dictatorship, White argued, the state's interests were paramount, while under the American democratic system the individual's interests were most important. Granted that in a democracy the individual should consider the interest of his neighbors, but the democratic system was based on the premise that if each person's needs were considered significant, then collectively individual justice would blend into a common welfare. White did not see how two such widely divergent sets of national opinions as those of the Russian autocracy and the American democracy could coexist peacefully in the world.[18]

Another criticism that White had of dictatorship was its restriction of information. As a dedicated newspaperman, the free flow of knowledge was one of his most

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[17]William Allen White, "Moscow and Emporia," New Republic, Vol. XCVI (September 21, 1938), 179.

[18]Ibid., pp. 179-80.

cherished ideals. Unlike autocracies, democracies had no desire to hide the truth from their citizens, White argued. Even in wartime a democratic nation would acknowledge a military defeat rather than mislead its people. The extent to which a population received information determined its government's commitment to democracy, he stated.[19]

White believed that the totalitarian state was doomed to failure ultimately because of its denial of democracy, but he feared the havoc it would bring to the world in the meantime. Dictatorships restricted the rise of the talented individual and thus nullified the potentially creative leadership of the society. The gifted inventor, entrepreneur, statesman, or financier could use his talents freely in a democracy, but the dictator would call on him only if in the ruler's opinion the individual would make a contribution to the state. In a dictatorship, White argued, whether it was of the proletariat, the plutocracy, or through the strength of the military, the arrogant, ruthless, and cunning individual had the best chance of obtaining a position of responsibility. So the totalitarian state had no chance of lasting success because it did not allow the person who could most help the society to freely participate in its important work.[20]

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[19]William Allen White, "The Sporting British," Current History, Vol. LI (June, 1940), 51.

[20]"Challenge of the New Frontier is Read by William Allen White," Kansas City Star, 6 June 1939; William Allen White, The Changing West: An Economic Theory About Our Golden Age (New York: Macmillan Company, 1939), p. 125.

Ideally White did not think military force should be used to destroy dictatorships but rather preferred the strengthening of democracies to help overcome the influence of totalitarianism in the world. So he supported arms limitation policies during the 1930s in the hope that they would prevent an outbreak of war between the two ways of life.[21] Writing in 1937, and admitting that he might change his mind at a future date, White argued that whenever a war broke out between two or more nations in which the United States was not involved, Americans should immediately declare that they would not send out of their harbors during the hostilities anything that could be considered military materials, which would include food, chemicals, and textiles as well as munitions. In such a situation White favored prohibiting American bankers from extending credit to any belligerent, regardless of the purpose. The only commercial relations with a warring country that White would permit would be through a "cash and carry" offering of non-contraband items.[22] The memory of World War I was fresh in his mind.

When World War II broke out and Hitler began his attack on Britain, White shifted his opinion somewhat in favor of military and economic aid to the British. He felt

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[21]William Allen White, "The New Treaty," Capper's, Vol. XII (September, 1930), 10.

[22]William Allen White, "How to Stay Out of War," Forum and Century, Vol. XCVII (February, 1937), 91.

that German advances threatened both British, and ultimately, American democracy, and he believed it was in the interest of liberty and the protection of western civilization to stop Hitler as soon as possible. Therefore he helped organize the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, the CDAAA, an organization dedicated to promoting the view White held, in hopes that the United States would not have to become involved militarily in the war. In justifying the aims of the group, White argued that America had a vital stake in the conflict since totalitarianism attacked British democracy. If Britain should fall, a despotic civilization would become established in Western Europe, he said. The war as he saw it was not simply a question of one form of government opposing another. Rather it represented a life and death struggle between two opposite ways of living and thinking, two distinct social orders. White maintained that the world could not survive half slave and half free. Democracy's high standard of living, which was the product of free men, free enterprise, a free press, and the initiative and wisdom that came from a free conscience, could not live alongside a system of starving men, slave-manned industry, and peasants ground into poverty and indentured on the land.[23]

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[23]William Allen White, "Home Made Broadcast," Emporia Gazette, 23 Aug. 1940; William Allen White, "Aid to Great Britain," Emporia Gazette, 31 Oct. 1940.

White believed that the main reason for the existence of the CDAAA, of which he was chairman, was to defend democracy.[24] He viewed his position with the CDAAA as an organizer of public opinion. There was an abundance of sentiment in America favoring aid to Britain short of direct military intervention, he argued, and his job was to mobilize it and convey it to the national leaders. He was assisting the democratic process, helping citizens to collectively express their views on a subject of vital importance to western civilization. Yet White did not think of his national activities as much different from his efforts in state and local affairs. It was just like collecting funds to attract a new cheese factory for his home town, he said, gathering support to make the Community Chest drive a success, organizing citizens to urge the county commissioners to provide better health facilities, or pressuring the mayor to clean up the parks. His CDAAA function was simply part of his public duty to promote democracy.[25] It was as though he returned to his early twentieth-century position of muckraker, although this time he attacked democracy's enemy totalitarianism rather than its twin foes of political corruption and uncontrolled wealth.

White supported Wendell Willkie in the 1940 presidential election. The editor generally approved of Franklin Roosevelt's

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[24]White, "Home Made Broadcast."

[25]William Allen White, "Between Ourselves," Emporia Gazette, 3 Jan. 1941.

policies, but he thought Willkie had a deeper commitment to defending American democracy. "There is something fundamentally democratic about Wendell Willkie that is no political veneer," White said, and "as a political liberal, favoring the use of weapons of political democracy in the interest of human progress, he is also as intransigeant as a hungry wolf."[26] White believed that both Willkie and Roosevelt favored aid to Britain short of war as a way of protecting the United States from Hitler's menace. He thought they supported such progressive measures as collective bargaining, regulation of public utilities, and control of the stock exchange. But he felt Willkie was somewhat more cautious than Roosevelt, and that he liked. White always feared that Roosevelt might extend government regulation too far and thus menace liberty. In Wendell Willkie he finally found a presidential opponent whom he thought would promote progressive measures and defend democracy yet at the same time proceed cautiously with reforms. White believed that the nation would be safer in Willkie's hands than in Roosevelt's.[27]

Several months before the 1940 presidential election, White visited for an hour in private with President Roosevelt at the White House. White observed that he lacked the vigor he once displayed, and seemed to have grown a bit stale

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[26]William Allen White, "Some Thoughts on N. Y.," Emporia Gazette, 6 May 1940.

[27]William Allen White, "'Amid Encircling Gloom,'" Emporia Gazette, 5 July 1940.

through his strenuous two terms. He did not think Roosevelt wanted to seek a third term, and he hoped that the president did not want to, for White believed that eight years was long enough for anyone to shoulder the tremendous responsibilities of the chief executive. Four additional years would wear him down, White said. It would "take the zest from his mind, the grace from his eye, the energy from his great big second base hands."[28]

White thought that if Roosevelt would definitely renounce a third term his popularity would soar in the nation and he could lead more effectively in his final months. After leaving office early in 1941, White surmised, Roosevelt could work as a great liberal, summoning other liberals from both parties to cooperate with him in promoting progressive programs. If Roosevelt did not attempt to gain a third term, White argued, he would prove that he had no selfish motivations.[29] White, to the end of his life, often judged a man on his ability and willingness to support progressive measures.

White contended that a Roosevelt renouncement of another term would indicate the president's commitment to democracy. If he sought reelection he would be saying that American democracy failed and that the nation could find no suitable replacement for him, White argued. But if Roosevelt adhered

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[28] Ibid.

[29] William Allen White, "Candidates in the Spring," Yale Review, Vol. XXIX (March, 1940), 442-43.

to the two-term tradition he would be expressing his faith in the democratic process.[30]

But Roosevelt did campaign successfully for a third term. After the election White did not let his endorsement of Willkie interfere with his support of Roosevelt's foreign policy as war seemed to be approaching closer to the United States daily in 1941. White not only acknowledged his own feelings in doing so, but he also believed he supported the democratic process for he thought a majority of Americans approved the president's foreign affairs position. White scolded congressmen and senators who did not want to strengthen the armed forces as much as Roosevelt did. If the nation became involved in war and its military power was not sufficient to defend the nation, those elected representatives would not be able to justify their actions, White argued.[31]

As war intensified around the world in 1941, all of White's fears about its detrimental effect on democracy and western civilization began to surface in his writing. In the spring of 1940 he had written: "As one democracy after another crumbles . . . it becomes evident that the future of western civilization is being decided upon the battlefield of Europe."[32]

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[30] Ibid., p. 443.

[31] William Allen White, "To Kansas Congressmen," Emporia Gazette, 21 July 1941.

[32] William Allen White, "A Forward Move," Emporia Gazette, 18 May 1940.

White began 1941 on an even more pessimistic note. In an editorial entitled "Happy New Year," in which he expressed little happiness, White predicted that 1941 would be much worse than 1940. The war leaders would become desperate and engage in "deeper deviltries," he said. War stripped aggressors and sometimes defenders of humane attitudes, White argued. They dismissed all thoughts of mercy, threw away the Ten Commandments, and despised the golden rule. War received its motivation from greed, cowardice, and cruelty, so naturally it was futile, White declared.[33]

White argued that the warring nations really did not know why they were fighting. They were caught in a series of circumstances that threw them into battle. In an overly-simplified analysis he contended that the multiplication of machines increased the number of unemployed all over the world. As small nations matured they found themselves depressed when machines kept large segments of their populations out of work. Society had no way of solving the problem of mass production because it did not know how to establish a workable system of distribution. The human race of 1939 was not aware of the fact that justice was necessary to socialize the machinery of the twentieth century, White explained; in too many places there were no political institutions set up that could do the job. The world's stunted

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[33]William Allen White, "Happy New Year," Emporia Gazette, 1 Jan. 1941.

growth in moral intelligence that might lead it to a commitment of a spirit of neighborly equity was responsible for that situation, White argued. "We have not become Christian enough to establish a Christian civilization," he said. The fact that the world could resort to war, "a vast organized idiocy," proved that the injustice that prevented a lasting peace from coming out of the Treaty of Versailles was still at work in the world, White argued.[34]

War was the result of man's excess pride, White said, an unhealthy abundance of pride in his race and his nation. It was significant that White, who emphasized racial themes in some of his writing, thought race pride was a cause of war. War came because so many people were afraid to apply to their national affairs the neighborly kindness that they knew worked well in their family life, White stated. So in countries where kindness was not institutionalized, avarice, the lust of power, hatred, cruelty, and brutality became prominent. The totalitarian states, using those emotions as their guide, sent out armies "marching like insane, imbecile, mechanized wrath and hungry malice to enslave the world." The United States, on the other hand, relied on kindness and a yearning for justice to avoid falling into the error of a national policy of hatred and cruelty, White contended.[35]

Under the inspiration of greed and wrath, man instinctively directed his wickedness into the greatest evil of all,

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

war, White said. But until all people learned how to organize their good will to promote peace, war would continue to haunt the world. Men mastered the art of dying nobly for their country but did not have the skill to live wisely for it. Their mass killing, love of revenge, and embittered spirit always hampered any search for a postwar peace through justice.[36]

White believed that the advance of the totalitarian system of force would halt the slow but steady spiritual and physical progress that the United States developed throughout its history. But he also foresaw other more concrete effects. With the Nazis conquering all of Europe the American businessman would lose many of his foreign sales opportunities. Deprived of world markets, the United States government would have to restrict his production, regulate his sales, allocate his supply of raw materials, and fix his prices. White cringed again at the prospect of regimentation. In a curtailed economy the worker would have to go wherever the government might send him in response to industrial demands, he said, for there would not be enough manufacturing activity for labor to choose its location. In a world in which force dominated, the minister would not be able to preach humility, kindness, and the golden rule, for the powers that used brutality as a way

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[36]William Allen White, "As Sherman Said," Emporia Gazette, 12 May 1941.

of governing would feel that such statements threatened them, and so they would silence him.[37]

White thought a force-dominated world would produce other unpleasant changes. The scientist would have to direct his research solely toward increasing the power of the state. He could no longer indulge himself in an inquiry into pure science, and he could not work under the motivation that his efforts, coupled with the discoveries of other scientists, might someday bring healing or greater comfort to his fellow man. In a force-ruled world the attorney would not be able to use the proven democratic rules of justice to insure his client a fair trial, White said. Teachers would not be able to expound the doctrine that man was a free agent who had inalienable rights with which no government should tamper. Finally, White believed that the advance of the totalitarian nations would destroy what he termed the positive effects of the philosophical influences Jesus' death on the cross created.[38]

White feared that Americans were apathetic about the totalitarian threat to their democracy. The system of democracy itself was partly responsible, he said, because it was based on the theory that even among large groups of people,

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[37]William Allen White, "The General Motors Show," Emporia Gazette, 19 Nov. 1941; William Allen White, ed., Defense for America (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940), pp. vi-vii.

[38]White, Defense, pp. vii, xiii-xiv.

no one was evil enough to oppose the good will of the majority. So in a democratic country, such as the United States, the citizens denied the danger of war and would not believe that other men or nations were as bad as observers described them. The democrat is accustomed to tolerating others rather than fearing or hating them, White said.[39]

Democracies also were traditionally unprepared to fight wars for they seldom maintained a sizable armed force. Again, the psychology of democracy provided an explanation, White contended. Citizens with a democratic spirit could not hate, and neither had much racial pride nor sought conquest. White apparently forgot the emphasis he often placed on race. He argued that democratically-minded citizens generally admired a gentleman and turned away from a bully, so the leader they chose to direct them seldom had any ambitions of dictatorship. Therefore the democratic citizen rarely took an autocrat seriously, White said. The democrat had nothing but scorn for the "pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war." He was bored with the pretense of a military leader since he believed in the idea of brotherhood and abhorred the concept of caste, White argued, despite the fact that he once idolized Theodore Roosevelt, one of the leading spokesmen for the martial spirit. For those

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[39]William Allen White, "Is Our Way of Life Doomed?" New York Times Magazine (September 8, 1940), 3, 20.

reasons the democratic nations of the world did not realize the impact a leader such as Hitler could make, before he amassed tremendous power.[40]

White contended that to protect themselves better in the future, democracies should "harden and create defense faculties . . . not known before." The failure to properly prepare was disastrous to France and seriously weakened Britain. Democracies also should purge themselves of corruption and waste to strengthen their systems internally, he argued. Yet they could both build up their defenses and eliminate corruption and waste without endangering liberty. America could protect the Bill of Rights and still reform its institutions to adjust to mechanical changes in the modern world, White argued.[41] This last statement points up his insistence that improvements in machine technology were a major cause of the problems of the twentieth century. Mechanical advances did require adjustments, but the implication in some of White's writing was that life would become blissful if the world returned to the horse and buggy days of the nineteenth century.

Despite his fear for the future of democracy in a world of dictators, White characteristically had faith that the philosophy would triumph ultimately. For democracy's slow

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[40] Ibid., p. 20.

[41] Ibid., p. 21.

but steady progress was too strong for mere physical forces to stop.[42] White believed that the one encouraging thought in the war-torn world was that no one could steal the spirit of hope from a free man. When a person once experienced freedom and enjoyed its blessings of self-respect, he said, no one could ever completely enslave him or control his mind. There was some vital force in a society of free people which resisted retrogressive change, whether it came in the social, political, or economic realm, for it abhorred a lowered living standard. White called that force "the final guarantee against a totalitarian world."[43]

White did not like the changes World War II brought to the world, particularly to the United States after it became involved. He feared the effects of inflation. The nation borrowed as much as it safely could carry during the depression period, he said. If it printed more money to increase its purchasing ability it would gamble with the economic stability of the nation. A new issue of currency, with no gold backing, would simply be fiat money similar to the type some farmers' groups wanted in the nineteenth century, White argued.[44]

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[42]William Allen White, "The Final Hope of Democracy," Kansas City Times, 17 Sept. 1940.

[43]Ibid.

[44]William Allen White, "Out and Around III," Emporia Gazette, 20 Feb. 1943; [William Allen White], "Unleashing the Dollar," Emporia Gazette, 4 Jan. 1941.

White also thought the war, and the industries it generated, adversely affected Kansas. Those industries attracted out-of-state migratory workers and their families who had no interest in buying property or establishing roots there. They simply moved in because of the attraction of new defense jobs. Yet they could vote and their children could attend Kansas schools, so they would have an impact on the state. Those migratory workers would be of many different nationalities, White said, and would destroy the homogeneous, predominantly Anglo-Saxon population that built Kansas. They would be the sons and grandsons of the exploited laborers from Central Europe who poured into the factories of America's large cities, and they would fail to elect many of the old leaders who toiled so hard for the state, White argued. After the new workers arrived, Kansas would lose its distinctive nature, he lamented, for it then would be no different than Illinois, West Virginia, or Massachusetts.[45] While White did recognize the unsettling effects a transient population might have, he continued to base much of his judgment on ethnic factors. His opposition to the influx of workers was predicated mostly on the fact that they were "outsiders," and hence apparently threatening.

White stated that he particularly despised two developments that accompanied the World War II period--the widespread

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[45]William Allen White, "Kansas on the Move," Kansas Magazine, 1942, 7.

use of the airplane and the worldwide longing for security. He believed that the airplane would decidedly alter men's lives in the years to come. The advent of the modern bomber meant that nations would have to be armed heavily on a permanent basis. He thought that by the middle 1940s airplanes would transport most of the intercity passengers and much of the freight in America. Aviation would bind the world into a more closely-knit community which would magnify the effect of both humanity's virtues and its evils. As part of the worldwide longing for security, many people turned to dictators to fill their needs, White maintained. The problem with that longing was that it motivated populations to accept any type of government, democratic or not, if it furthered security.[46]

Out of the misery of war, White hoped that the United States could take the lead in establishing an organization of nations that would arbitrate differences among various countries. If the peace-loving nations of the world did not build such a body, the threat of war would continue to face them, he argued. The question in White's mind was: had mankind progressed spiritually far enough that it would put as much energy into efforts for peace as it had into a

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[46]William Allen White, "Airplanes and Security," Graduate Magazine, University of Kansas, Vol. XL (May-June, 1942), 8-9.

system of war?[47] Much of the future of the world depended on the answer to that question.

But White was confident that after the war the United States could lead the democracies of the world into some kind of equitable, worldwide police force that would patrol the countries having dictatorial tendencies. Above all, America should not pull out of European affairs as it had following World War I. The world was drawing so close together that only two methods could successfully rule it, White said, "international force under Hitler or international reason and conciliation under the leadership of the United States."[48]

Peace in the postwar era depended on the world learning what the United States came to realize up to a point over the years, White said, the lesson of unity under compromise and the importance of neighborly conduct, in other words, democracy. White admonished Americans to be patient since they could not teach the world overnight what they learned about democracy throughout their long history. For every nation had its internal stresses requiring the balm of democratic principles, especially compromise.

White hoped that in the confusion of a postwar settlement, the peoples of the world might forget their differences long enough to organize the system of justice necessary for

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[47]William Allen White, "In Memoriam," Emporia Gazette, 30 May 1942.

[48]William Allen White, "Enter the Russian Bear," Emporia Gazette, 12 June 1942.

peace. He thought that humanity was so distraught over war that it had a new desire for liberty in its heart. The United States was the logical nation to lead that movement toward a new order of justice for it was the richest and most powerful in the world, White said. America might need to maintain that leadership for a decade, a generation, or possibly even into the next century. And it would have to develop its intelligence and Christian virtues to bolster its leadership. But White was confident that the nation could perform the task successfully and provide the "magic catalyst of democratic purpose in the new confederation after the victory is won."[49]

White did not live to see the end of World War II, for he died in Emporia on Kansas Day, January 29, 1944. Had he lived, the problems of the conflict between the Communist bloc and the free nations that developed after the war would have elicited his close study, and he would have had counsel for American leaders as they tried to guide the nation in the postwar period. But that was another era--it did not belong to William Allen White. The period of the rise of the dictators and the subsequent war marked the final phase of his battle for his kind of democracy.

White's reaction to the rise of the dictators was quite typically that of an old Progressive. Before World

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[49]William Allen White, "Unity and American Leadership," Yale Review, Vol. XXXII (September, 1942), 3-4, 10-11, 14-15.

War I, democratic political systems both in the United States and abroad seemed secure. But developments in Europe after the war cast a shadow over the future of democratic governments generally and weakened the Progressives' faith in the positive application of the power of the state.

In their writings, the Progressives, including White, frequently expressed alarm about the activities of Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler. Progressives contended that the advance of totalitarianism proved what happened when a government obtained too much power. Oswald Garrison Villard, for example, maintained that Hitler's ascendance provided strong evidence against Roosevelt's Supreme Court plan. He thought a court reorganization could lead to dictatorship. Amos Pinchot wrote in 1937 that European totalitarianism proved that when a leader pursued bureaucratic regimentation of industry and agriculture he had to move on to dictatorship whether he really wanted to or not.[50] These examples thus point to the fact that William Allen White did not develop his thought in a vacuum. It was quite characteristic of an old Progressive.

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[50]Otis L. Graham, Jr., An Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 48-49.

CHAPTER 8

AN EVALUATION

William Allen White was an important Western spokesman for two significant intellectual movements of the first half of the twentieth century--neodemocracy and Christian modernism. Neodemocracy equated the term "democracy" with the good society. It was essentially a conservative ideology for its supporters attempted to preserve traditional values in the face of newer ideals. Neodemocracy also was a revolt from an opposite, pessimistic doctrine of the day, naturalism, which emphasized the despair and hopelessness of life.[1] In addition, neodemocracy represented a reaction against the rise of totalitarianism, a phenomenon which seemed to add weight to the naturalistic viewpoint. Finally, a union of traditional democratic ideology with nationalistic sentiment was an important feature of neodemocracy. Its American supporters, such as White, believed that the United States, because of its previous experience with democracy,

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[1]Edward A. Purcell, Jr., The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism & the Problem of Value (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), p. 11.

was better suited than other nations to assume the democratic leadership of the world.

Christian modernism, which not only White but also such individuals as Disciple Edward Scribner Ames and Baptist Shailer Mathews championed, was the most characteristic religious manifestation of the neodemocratic movement. It reached its highest level of popularity in the first three decades of the twentieth century and thus overlapped White's period of greatest prominence. The movement affected many Protestant denominations, but was particularly strong in the larger ones such as the Congregationalist, which was White's affiliation.

Modernists emphasized the application of Christian philosophy to secular affairs, but denied or at least de-emphasized the doctrines of the Trinity, Christ's virgin birth and deity, His future bodily return to earth, and the divine inspiration of the Bible. They contended that through dedicated human effort, man could build a society of righteousness, justice, and love. They also maintained that history pointed to a gradual emergence of reason and refinement in human values, an increasing abundance of material comforts, and an emancipation of supressed classes. Finally, the modernists insisted on a complete merger of the spiritual and secular segments of life.[2]

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[2]William R. Hutchison, The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 265.

Democracy was the theme of White's writing from 1919 to 1944, and his emphasis on it indicates his place within the neodemocratic movement. It is important to remember how he defined democracy. He argued that it was primarily a social order which encouraged the kindly impulses of humanity. In a democracy, he said, all of man's affairs were directed toward making life enjoyable for the decent person. A democratic society steadily progressed so that the man who yielded to the altruism in his heart enjoyed an increasingly more pleasant existence. And the United States, despite its defects, was still the world leader of democracy in White's eyes. Whatever challenge the nation faced, White was confident that its commitment to democracy would insure its triumph over the obstacle.

This was a classic example of the neodemocratic position. From the end of World War I until White's death, democracy faced many trials in the United States. A sizable body of public opinion turned against it after World War I. Various intellectuals and political observers denounced democracy in the 1920s and maintained that the average citizen lacked the necessary intelligence to properly contribute to it. New dictators of the 1920s and 1930s argued that it was out-of-date and no longer a viable system. Finally, some of President Franklin Roosevelt's proposals, such as his court

packing plan, hinted at the possible rise of an authoritarian spirit in America.

In the face of all of these threats to democracy, White maintained his faith in it. He constantly urged Americans to hold fast to the democratic tradition of their ancestors. Thus, his neodemocracy was a conservative position. He was trying to preserve faith in an ideology that received considerable support in the past but seemed to be losing out in the fast-changing post-World War I era. This marked a shift in his standing since his days as a Bull Moose Progressive in the early years of the twentieth century. For then White urged Americans to change and accept measures such as the direct election of United States senators, the primary, the referendum, and the recall, all designed to provide America's citizens closer participation in the nation's political system. At that time, advocacy of such plans constituted a liberal posture for it was a proposed departure from the status quo. Then by the time of World War I the Progressives secured many of the democracy-extending measures they promoted. Support for such devices no longer represented a liberal stand. Developments in the United States and throughout the world that supported a movement away from democracy in the post-World War I period, made White's defense of it a conservative position. From the first decade of the twentieth century into

the 1920s and beyond, the world changed, but White essentially did not.

Christian modernism was an important sub-theme of White's democratic creed. To him, democracy and Christian philosophy were inseparable. The foundation of the thought he presented to Americans through his speeches and writing was summarized in his statement that "democracy is the institutionalized expression of the Christian philosophy in ordinary life."[3] White repeatedly affirmed modernistic doctrines. He could not support the historic beliefs of literal Biblical Christianity including Christ's virgin birth, His deity, and the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. White maintained that man was reborn into a different nature through his spirit of brotherhood, not through Christ's death on the cross. Sin was not a spiritual ailment, White argued, but was simply human selfishness.

White contended that mankind was on a slowly improving evolutionary path and through dedicated effort could reach its goal of righteousness, justice, and love. He saw no separation between the spiritual and secular segments of life. That was why his writing on human affairs contained so many allusions to Biblical terminology. When he used the term "spiritual," as in his discussion of spiritual progress, he referred to the evolution of human attitudes, not to matters of a divine nature.

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[3]William Allen White, "What Democracy Means to Me," Scholastic, Vol. XXXI (October 23, 1937), 9.

Unlike neodemocracy, Christian modernism was a liberal doctrine. It was a departure from the historic tenets of Christianity and was an attempt, from the viewpoint of its followers, to move on to a more advanced level of thought. So White was part of two major intellectual movements of the twentieth century, one liberal the other conservative. Although modernism was a common religious expression for neodemocrats, one which White used, in temper it conflicted with neodemocracy for it was essentially liberal, moving into an exploration of a new area of Christian thought, while neodemocracy was basically conservative since it attempted to hold on to the democratic tradition.

Perhaps that conflict offers some explanation for White's biographers' difficulty in categorizing his position. For example, Walter Johnson titled a chapter that dealt with White in the late 1930s "Conservative Liberal." Everett Rich called a chapter on White and the Franklin Roosevelt administration "The New Deal—Yes and No." And John McKee wrote that White "insisted on his inconsistency, and his contemporaries ran themselves ragged at the base line, trying to return his volleys, now to the right of them, now to the left."[4]

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[4]Walter Johnson, William Allen White's America (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), pp. 452-74; Everett Rich, William Allen White: The Man from Emporia (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941), pp. 277-86; John DeWitt McKee, William Allen White: Maverick on Main Street (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 4.

The American people viewed William Allen White's thought on the basis of his public speeches and writing. The defense of his concept of democracy with overtones of Christian modernism was the theme on which he concentrated during the last twenty-five years of his life, the period of his greatest prominence. It is not surprising that he rose to such an exalted position for he addressed himself to one of the most important areas of discussion of that time. In an age when democracy seemed in danger of extinction, Americans turned to White for guidance and they were not disappointed.

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