

The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It Study Guide

The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It by Richard Hofstadter

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Plot Summary

The American Political Tradition and The Men Who Made It is the story of the major social and political figures in American history that shaped the institutions and practices of the United States. It was written by one of the most important American historians in the twentieth century, Richard Hofstadter. The book covers the period of American history ranging from the American Revolution to the end of World War II. It has twelve chapters, each of which focuses on a single great man, or, less frequently, a small group of minor characters. It is the purpose of the book to focus on character portraits, to illustrate the history, ideas, temperament and principles of the 'great figures' of American political history and the way in which their actions and thought affected the United States history.

The book is divided into twelve chapters. The first chapter covers the Founding Fathers and the second focuses specifically on Thomas Jefferson. Chapter three follows up with an analysis of Andrew Jackson, and chapter four on the South Carolina Senator, Vice-President and philosopher of Southern decentralism, John C. Calhoun. Chapter five discusses Abraham Lincoln and chapter six a prominent abolitionist named Wendell Phillips. Chapter seven centers on the late nineteenth century, particularly on the political figures during the so-called Gilded Age. The next chapter focuses on the iconoclastic orator and presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. The final four chapters discuss Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt respectively.

Several themes pervade the book. First, Hofstadter focuses on these differing figures' contrasting views on the relationship between government and the economy. Earlier figures sought to preserve economic liberty from the state and big business, while later figures tended to prefer a larger government, and believed in restricting economic liberty for the sake of the poor and the control of big business interests. Another constant theme of the book is the differing and evolving concepts of democratic life particular to each period. The American Founders were hostile to democracy, whereas Jefferson and Jackson strongly supported it. Calhoun opposed it and Lincoln defended it. A final theme of the book is Hofstadter's penchant for painting realistic and balanced pictures of the major characters in American politics. He argues that Lincoln was largely indifferent to slavery, that Theodore Roosevelt never met a war he didn't like and that FDR was a political opportunist with few political principles. Overall, the book presents a coherent story about the evolution of American political and economic institutions along side a narrative about the most important figures in American history. Hofstadter combines an analysis of ideas with a psychological analysis of those who implemented them.



Chapter 1, The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism

Chapter 1, The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism Summary and Analysis

Hofstadter begins his history of the American political tradition with the Founding Fathers. He is focused to consider not so much what happened during this period of time but on the ideas that shaped governance and policy. He begins by arguing that the Constitution was based on the Founders' particular conception of the person. They believed that most men were evil, self-interested and that they could not be changed, or at least not easily. The Constitution, in one way, was founded on experience, from the observations the Founders made about the prevalence of tyranny across the globe and history. Hofstadter argues that this attitude about human nature was largely ubiquitous among the Founders.

The Founders had a mixed attitude towards democracy, as well. Hofstadter notes that democratic ideas usually arise among unhappy and oppressed classes of persons, or rising classes, like a new middle class. Oddly, the Founders had some sympathy for democracy despite being almost exclusively members of the landed Aristocracy. The Founders thought that the input of the people was necessary but that this could be taken much too far. Democracy would lead to demagoguery, to the rule of a dictator that could win the affection of the people. Or else, democracy would decay into aristocracy or the rule of special interests. However, due to the revolution, they were hesitant to implement a monarchy as well. They wanted citizens to have a stake in their government, but not a full stake. A monarch would rule in his own interests not in the interests of citizens. Instead, they endorsed a mixture of political forms, which was common among eighteenth century republicans and ancient political thinkers such as Aristotle and Cicero.

If people are bad, how can a constitution writer design political institutions fit to govern them? The Founders developed the idea that differing interests of different classes of person should be pit against one another. Men could not be changed but institutions could be and they could be designed so as to make the most of men's natural inclinations. When it came to economics, the Founders believed that markets would use private vices to produce public benefits, but they thought that this philosophy could not apply to governments unless they were structured correctly. Correct design required two kinds of separation of powers. First, power must be separated at the federal level between presidents, legislators and judges. Next, power must be distributed vertically between the federal government and the states. Further, the legislature should only restricted democratic inputs. They aimed to keep different interests from plundering one another, particularly the rich and the poor.



Today, people often associate democracy and liberty, but the Founders did not. They aimed to create a political order that would protect liberty and they believe democracy was only a limited method of doing so. The Founders designed a constitution that would chiefly protect 'negative' liberties, or freedom from interference. They sought to protect private property, free speech, and so on. If democracy played too large a role, the Founders held that it would collapse into a poor form of government. They believed also that democratic inputs should be in proportion to property owned, as those who had more property had a larger stake in the well-being of the country and so would govern more effectively.

Hofstadter transitions to analyzing the ideological nature of the Founders. He argues that, contrary to Charles Beard's view, the Founders were simply not self-interested men seeking to build a constitution that furthered the interests of their class. He also argues against the then European view that the United States was an experiment in radical leftism. Instead, the reality was as the Founders saw it - they were attempting a moderate balance between democracy and monarchy. Finally, Hofstadter points out that there was a tension within the ideology of the Founders. They wanted selfish, wicked men to be free. They accepted a merchant's view of social life, where social life is largely competitive but they didn't want to end this 'war' but merely to control it. They knew that people were self-interested, but refused to control self-interest with government control.



Chapter 2, Thomas Jefferson: the Aristocrat as Democrat

Chapter 2, Thomas Jefferson: the Aristocrat as Democrat Summary and Analysis

Chapter II concerns the life, politics and temperament of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson is an important figure, not only for his historic role in shaping American political institutions, but because he contained many of the foundational American ideals within his own thought, even those that we think are in tension with one another.

Hofstadter begins by emphasizing that Jefferson has a certain mythology that surrounds him, much of which is simple nonsense. Jefferson has his flaws and complexities, unlike the worshipful attitude of many historians. He did not, for instance, revolutionize social life in Virginia but made some important but modest reforms. He did secure freedom of religion by disestablishing the Anglican Church in Virginia as well. Jefferson was an enormous proponent of the agrarian mode of economic life. He was appalled by industrial life in Britain and France and the wide expanses of wealth produced by the focus on industry in these countries.

Jefferson had no systematic political theory; instead, he was eclectic in his interests. He was interested in everything, from architecture to art to cataloguing plant species. For this reason, his political tracts were short and unsystematic. On the one hand, he found Locke's political theory congenial and liked various features of the Constitution, but he gave no grand political theory to justify them. He was moderate as a politician and a consensus builder. Despite his stronger preference for democracy in contrast to the other founders, he still worked as a coalition builder as governor of Virginia and as president.

Jefferson was a radical democrat in principle, however. He feared power concentrated in the hands of anyone but the people. He particularly distrusted commercial and merchant interests. He wanted a well-educated agrarian constituency of commoner landowners. Jefferson, while preferring democratic institutions, believed that suffrage should be limited to property owners and he preferred that these property owners be farmers. Jefferson's political vision was deeply tied to an agrarian conception of economic life.

Jefferson's party, the Democratic-Republicans, opposed the interests of the Federalists, like Hamilton. Hamilton's party sought to promote the interests of industry and commerce, whereas Jefferson's party sought to protect landowners and farmers. The two parties differed largely in which interests they were beholden to and less over principles. As president, Jefferson did little to undermine Washington and Adams' Federalist policies. Perhaps his most significant action was letting Hamilton's first bank of the United States expire.



His economic policies were strongly libertarian. He believed that laissez-faire and property rights were the key to a stable natural order. However, he did not realize that these institutions rarely led to property widely distributed and a move away from an agrarian economy. Jefferson was therefore not anti-capitalist. Instead he was anti-mercantilist.

Finally, Hofstadter turns to Jefferson's foreign policy. He was an ardent non-interventionist abroad and sought to handle France and England's harassment of American naval trading through withdrawing American ships from trade, which was a disaster for him politically. Jefferson saw the need for an increase in revenue and many of his party members became friendlier to the idea of a national bank when they saw the need for it. Again, Jefferson was more pragmatic than ideological. Hofstadter rounds out the chapter by arguing that Jefferson's temperament left him peaceful, without regret and partly surprised and uninterested in all the fame he acquired later in life.



Chapter 3, Andrew Jackson and the Rise of Liberal Capitalism

Chapter 3, Andrew Jackson and the Rise of Liberal Capitalism Summary and Analysis

Andrew Jackson is often depicted as a wild man and populist opponent of aristocratic privilege. There is some truth to this, but Andrew Jackson was an aristocrat in Tennessee. Elite classes in the frontier were successful businessmen and lawyers who often were as rough around the edges as anyone else. The only form of social hierarchy among whites was in terms of accomplishment. Andrew Jackson grew up in this milieu, quickly moving up the social ladder. And while he may have felt alienated from Northeastern elites, he had his own kind of aristocratic demeanor.

Andrew Jackson's fame came primarily from his military victory at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, but for a long time he languished in quasi-obscure due to enormous debts he accumulated from land speculation. This was in fact not an uncommon occurrence in the early 1820s, as the Bank of the United States had funneled credit into the hands of land speculators. They then bought more land than they could sell and found themselves in enormous debt (much like the housing crisis of today). The reaction of land speculators like Jackson to their debts was to seek the abolition of the Bank of the United States or to force it to inflate further, to reduce the debt burden on land speculators. This produced contradictory pressures within the populist uprising that helped to bring Andrew Jackson into prominence. Southwesterners (those living in Kentucky, Tennessee and so on at the time) began to see themselves as being imprisoned by a banking elite and began to pressure local and state governments not only to provide debt relief but to resist the actions of the Bank of the United States. Partly for this reason, these Southwestern populists came to see the Bank as an undemocratic institution. They were already strong democrats, hostile to traditional elites, and eagerly in favor of expanding suffrage to non-property owners. The Bank provided fuel for their political rise. During the election of 1824, Jackson denounced the Bank and accumulated a vast number of votes. However, in that election, no one candidate accumulated a majority of electoral votes, and the election was pushed into Congress, where John Quincy Adams came to power partly through the help of rival Henry Clay. Both men favored the mercantile policies conducive to the flourishing of the Northeast and were supporters of the national bank. Jackson argued that he had been robbed and campaigned against Adams for four solid years until the election of 1828. At that time, furor against the bank had died down, so Jackson's platform became a vague populism in favor of universal manhood suffrage and nationalism. Yet in office, Jackson still destroyed the Bank of the United States by depriving it of its power. This created some economic instability and led to inflation in the hands of local banks. Jackson was caught in a double-bind between those who pushed for a hard money standard to reduce inflation and inflation advocates.



Jackson's economic policies generally were the policies of a rising capitalistic, small business middle class. He strongly opposed the combination of government and business and his policies as president aimed at undoing this association. He attempted to use democratic fervor to bring about more laissez-faire policies and prevent the government from being used to assign businesses special privilege. It was on these issues and the Bank that Jackson was reelected in 1832. Jackson's five Supreme Court appointees continued to pursue these anti big-business, populist and democratic policies long after Jackson left office. Broadly speaking, Jacksonian democrats brought about more liberal capitalist institutions in the United States and saw the social order as properly competitive, fluid and egalitarian.



Chapter 4, John C. Calhoun: The Marx of the Master Class

Chapter 4, John C. Calhoun: The Marx of the Master Class Summary and Analysis

John C. Calhoun was a senator from South Carolina and Andrew Jackson's vice-president who later had to resign. He possessed an abstract intellect and a mind built for philosophy. He represented the thought of the Southern minority that sought to preserve the slave economy and extend it throughout the union. He was also a strong federalist, developing in detail the idea of nullification of federal laws and the idea of rule by concurrent majorities (where the federal government would be run by the major votes of major regional interests).

Calhoun had no real childhood to speak of and was not close to his parents. He was secretary of war in Monroe's second term. Calhoun was not a personable man, yet this was not due to ill-temper but to his lack of social skills and abstract intellect. He began as a nationalist but later became a sectionalist and defender of the South, particularly South Carolina. The reason he was forced to resign as vice-president is because he opposed Jackson's "Tariff of Abominations" on South Carolina's cotton exports. South Carolina nullified the law partly under Calhoun's leadership but Jackson threatened to conquer South Carolina and brought it under submission.

Calhoun was a slavemaster and he believed in the natural inferiority of African Americans and that whites did them good by caring for them. He in fact followed this philosophy to its natural conclusion, rejecting the Declaration of Independence when it states that all men are created equal. He believed that slave ownership was necessary because it was the only way whites and blacks could safely relate to one another. He even believed that the submission of black persons helped to create equality among whites, an odd defense of an inconsistent application of equality. Calhoun opposed what he perceived to be oppression in other parts of the United States, however. He believed that the North and the federal government oppressed the South with high tariffs. He believed that the North was trying to gain political control over new states by forcing them to not have slavery, and he even was an early critic of capitalism because he widely criticized 'wage slavery' in the North, which one him some affection with the Northern white working classes.

Oddly, Calhoun's attitude towards capitalism was a bit like that of Karl Marx. He believed that social progress under free markets would lead to exploitation and class struggle. Calhoun had a labor theory of value and surplus value theory of capitalism, where capitalists stole the value produced by laborers in the standard capitalist work environment. He believed the rich would grow richer under capitalism and the poor poorer and he even believed that the poor would revolt against the rich. Unlike Marx,

however, he deplored his predictions as he preferred a pre-capitalist agrarian order with slavery as a core institution.

In the end, Calhoun's political campaigns failed. Hofstadter attributes this to Calhoun's uncharismatic and excessively abstract personality. He lacked the moral sense to know that the conclusions of his logic were abominable. In the end, he was a defender of the Southern propertied minority and led the development of Southern political theory, which along with other factors precipitated the Civil War.



Chapter 5, Abraham Lincoln and the Self-Made Myth

Chapter 5, Abraham Lincoln and the Self-Made Myth Summary and Analysis

Hofstadter begins by repeating the high adulation that American culture and American historians have given to Lincoln. Americans have elevated Lincoln to the status of a religious figure. But it is arguable that this is a myth and that Lincoln was always the consummate politician, a moderate conservative, and only incidentally interested in the deep moral question of slavery. Lincoln grew up in Kentucky and hated his chores. He was rather lazy and preferred to give stump speeches. He read primarily in order to hone his speech-giving skills, which is why he preferred to read aloud. Apparently Lincoln had great political ambitions and talents, rising from obscurity at age twenty-four to speaker of the house in Illinois four years later. Politically, Lincoln was a moderate Whig, meaning that he stood for manufacturing interests, industrial laborers, stable currency, internal improvements by government and a strong protective tariff on exports. He largely side-stepped the issue of slavery and frequently waffled on the issue. He clearly had no unvarnished opposition to slavery, instead worrying about the justice of it but believing that it was inexpedient to end it. Lincoln even participated in a recolonization society that sought to send the slaves back to Africa, Liberia specifically. Lincoln did worry about poor working conditions for white laborers and sought to maintain good, free conditions for whites, but his interest in the slave population was mild at best.

Political circumstances forced Lincoln to struggle with slavery. The Kansas-Nebraska Act gave him the opportunity to use slavery as a political issue. The act concerned the extension of slavery into Kansas and Nebraska. He used it to unite the new Republican Party, as the extension of slavery extended Southern power and reduced Northern power. He was able to bring abolitionists and other interests under the same tent. He always emphasized that he was not an abolitionist and that he aimed at expanding the reach of free white states (many of which, incidentally, did not allow freed slaves to enter or have residence there). Whites did not want to work labor jobs in slave states because slave labor was free labor, labor they could not possibly compete with. Thus white laborers could be brought into a coalition that aimed to limit the reach of slavery. Lincoln had white Northern laborers concerned that slavery would become a nationwide institution.

Lincoln took office immediately after seven states had already seceded. There was an ambiguity over where secession was legal and Lincoln wanted to avoid war. He was also unsure as to whether the North would support the war if Lincoln initiated it. He found a way to force the South into the position of aggressor by blockading Fort Sumter, and the strategy worked. Initially, he expected the war to end within three months, but

the resources of the South's slave economy were greater than the North expected. Lincoln ended slavery to undermine the Southern economy. The Emancipation Proclamation did not free slaves outside of Southern states. He was happy to end slavery, but his overall aim, overwhelmingly, was to preserve the Union. In the end, Lincoln's ambitions paid off. But after an incredibly destructive and long war, Lincoln was weary and tired, reflecting on whether his accomplishments and ambitions were worthwhile.



Chapter 6, Wendell Phillips: the Patrician as Agitator

Chapter 6, Wendell Phillips: the Patrician as Agitator Summary and Analysis

Wendell Phillips is relatively unknown in comparison with the other figures in the book. He was one of the most famous members of the abolitionist movement, next to William Lloyd Garrison. He was an organizer and agitator against slavery. He saw his role as an agitator as buttressing republican institutions and preventing people from becoming indifferent. Phillips believed strongly in moral progress and that the end of slavery was inevitable. He also gave a likeable and sensible face to the abolitionist movement, in contrast to Garrison. He helped to gain the abolitionist movement legitimacy. Phillips and his wife were wealthy, so they were able to devote themselves full time to advocating the abolition of slavery. However, agitation was dangerous and Phillips was constantly followed by mobs.

Abolitionism was not about economics; instead, it was a kind of 'moral fervor'. Abolitionists had a radical philosophy of natural rights and human equality, believing that slavery was inherently illegitimate as humans were equal. However, they had trouble convincing Northerners to press for the end of slavery based on such an abstract idea. Further, they were highly unpractical. They had no concrete proposals for how to end slavery, nor did they have any particular strategy for how to arm and employ freed slaves, much less teach them how to be free.

Overtime, Garrison's radicalism alienated Phillips. He became focused more on practical methods of ending slavery. He advocated secession from the South in order to help slaves escape and to be separate from Southern immorality. As time moved forward, he became increasingly convinced that slavery was not the only form of oppression that had to be ended, as wage slavery in the North was also morally problematic. Phillips became a non-violent socialist. He wanted to avoid war and undermine both slavery and capitalism. He came to reject an economic system based on profit. He also came to see the Civil War as a war between bourgeois and feudal civilization, with the North representing the first and the South the latter. Both forms of civilization had problems, although the North was morally and culturally superior. Despite being a socialist, he had no true economic philosophy to speak of but became a critic of capitalism in the Gilded Age.



Chapter 7, The Spoilsmen: An Age of Cynicism

Chapter 7, The Spoilsmen: An Age of Cynicism Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 concerns the "Gilded Age" or late nineteenth century capitalism. Between Appomattox and Theodore Roosevelt, there were few great political figures. Instead, economic growth spurred forward and politics became largely irrelevant. Americans colonized the entire continent, built railroads across the country and the United States became an industrialized nation, perhaps the most economically powerful country in the world, save Britain. Men accumulated massive sums of wealth, beyond what anyone had ever seen in private hands. Politics became corrupt and largely reflected the attempts of the great entrepreneurs to secure private benefits for themselves at the expense of the market economy. This and other abuses led to some backlash, but the backlash would not successfully organize until nearly the end of the century.

The business barons based the justification for their great wealth on the fact that they had come by it honestly, through their own hard work. They preached that the United States provided opportunity for all and that they were not to blame for major social ills. Hofstadter argues that even the ideology of the time suited them, steeped as the country was in Darwinian approaches to economic life.

Politics after the Civil War was dominated largely by the Republican Party, as the party of the South - the Democrats - had been more or less strangled by the North. Corruption ran rampant and the Republican presidents of the day, Grant and Arthur, were notoriously scandal ridden. Hofstadter covers a variety of minor, but equally corrupt political figures that characterized an age of economic progress without political glory.

Indeed, reform arose, and it developed out of the corruption of democratic institutions and the putative exploitation of the working class. Further, gentle deflation prevailed, locking farmers into debts that increased in size over time. There were also a number of 'panics' or brief, sharp depressions that produced a great deal of economic turmoil. Grover Cleveland is the closest thing the late nineteenth century had to a great politician. He opposed the use of government to privilege business interests. And while he was an honest, humble and uncorrupt man, he was a strong proponent of laissez-faire capitalism and refused to intervene in the workings of the market. He even held firmly to the gold standard, which tied the dollar to gold bullion, which in turn kept inflation down. This became increasingly unpopular as the Populist movement organized, as it was particularly damaging to those in debt. Cleveland denied that the government had the responsibility of bailing out farmers. Hofstadter calls him "dogmatic, obtuse and insensitive" in contrast to his many merits.



Chapter 8, William Jennings Bryan: The Democrat as Revivalist

Chapter 8, William Jennings Bryan: The Democrat as Revivalist Summary and Analysis

William Jennings Bryan was never president, but was one of the most important figures in American history for the role he played in leading and embodying Populist sentiment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He combined many distinct views - support for inflation through 'free silver', free trade, anti-imperialism, nationalization of the railroads and banning the teaching of evolution - and had no distinct political principles for tying them together. Instead, his powerful speaking voice and role in popular American religion gave him a platform which he used primarily to be heard and not to bring about positive political change.

Bryan's constituents were the farming people of the West and South. He somewhat represented those who survived Reconstruction in the South. They were often in deep debt and wanted to increase the money supply to reduce their debt. Bryan rode this 'free silver' issue to prominence. He saw this as a mode of rebelling against the control of the money supply by bankers and political and social elites, that they were strangling the poor farmer. This was, in many ways, a continuation of Jacksonian democratic politics eighty years later. Bryan's social philosophy was in line with that of the nineteenth century Democratic Party - strongly in favor of extending democratic institutions and strongly in favor of laissez-faire capitalism, while opposing concentrations of business power and special interests dominating and corrupting government. Bryan strongly supported rewarding hard work, laws that would improve the virtue of the populace, preventing evolutionary theory from corrupting the populace, universal suffrage, and so on. He later became a socialist of a mild sort, but in the late nineteenth century he was not particularly in favor of government control. He originally worked to preserve American individualism.

Bryan was often denounced by Eastern elites as a rebel. But he was far from this. His only major break with his father was to become a Presbyterian rather than a Baptist. He quickly rose to power in Congress through his powerful oratorical skill. But free silver lost its political popularity and Bryan seized on opposing the conquest of the Philippines. Yet by the time Bryan became prominent on this issue, no one cared about it anymore. He then took a trip to Europe and observed the public ownership of utilities, which he partly feared. But he came to support the government ownership of railroads in part to avoid socialism. He supported the income tax, but not to redistribute wealth, but instead to force the rich to pay for the government services they were using anyway.

Woodrow Wilson appointed Bryan as Secretary of War in 1912. Bryan continued to oppose imperialism and diplomacy as a merely commercial venture. He attempted to institute a variety of international arbitration treatise and Wilson gave him a fairly free

hand in other affairs. He supported aid to suffering countries and was one of the only neutral voices in the build-up towards American intervention in the First World War. He was worried that subtle American aid to Britain would draw the United States into the war, and he was right. He was continually troubled by Wilson's eagerness to enter the war and lacked the intelligence (not the courage) to convince Wilson otherwise. He resigned soon after the Germans sank the Lusitania in 1915.

As Bryan age, he decayed rapidly. He was associated with prohibition, anti-evolution forces, real-estate speculation and the Ku Klux Klan. He became something of a laughing stock. He did not fight the presence of the Klan in the Democratic Party, was used as a real-estate advertiser when he moved to Miami to retire, and famously argued against the teaching of evolution in the Scopes Trial.



Chapter 9, Theodore Roosevelt: The Conservative as Progressive

Chapter 9, Theodore Roosevelt: The Conservative as Progressive Summary and Analysis

Hofstadter characterizes American culture in the late nineteenth century as rough, individualistic and obsessed with material gain. The cultural elites had no place to go - they couldn't compete with self-made entrepreneurs and politics was considered a corrupt career path. Theodore Roosevelt entered politics to restore virtue to political office, the martial virtues in particular. Roosevelt was disgusted by commercial spirit and wanted to imbue the United States' people with a 'fighting edge'. However, he hated the mob, along with hating business interests.

Roosevelt had an unusual, unstable and obsessive personality. He was never relaxed, and was always on the move. He was obsessed with hunting, politics, oratory, and war. He wrote copiously. He believed that the Spanish-American War would produce a martial spirit in the country and give it new political virtue. For this reason, he fought in the Spanish-American War and supported it with all of his energy. He reveled in killing the Spanish and the Filipino.

Roosevelt began life as a conservative, which was taught to him by his father. He had no particular interest in trust-busting or big business. He was never particularly sympathetic to labor and while he won their support, he only ever supported mild reforms in their favor. He simply yielded to some of the details of their demands, never embracing their philosophy as LaFollette did. Instead, he always aimed to directing the United States to the 'national good' and to play 'its destined role of mastery' in the world.

Conservative businessmen actually used Roosevelt to prevent more radical progressive policies from being implemented. Hofstadter is unclear as to how Roosevelt ever even acquired a reputation as a trust-buster, as trusts grew more powerful during his presidency than at any time in American history. He was never anti-business, arguing that on his view, "We draw the line against misconduct, not against wealth." Roosevelt conceived of himself as cultured, thoughtful and moral and sought to give the people a stronger moral character. This man was not any kind of revolutionary.

After Taft, his chosen successor, took over, Roosevelt could hardly stand retreating into private life. He continued to associate with Progressives, despite never adopting their political principles. He became involved in a third party during the election of 1912, and ran as the nominee of the Bull Moose Progressive party, which split the Taft vote enough to make Wilson president. He then became a Wilson antagonist, strongly supporting American intervention into World War I. And in Progressive politics, he supported the ascension of Henry Cabot Lodge, a reactionary rather than a Progressive. Roosevelt died near the time of his last political scheme, in tandem with

Lodge, to destroy Wilson's League of Nations, presumably to preserve the possibility of massive war beyond the end of World War I.



Chapter 10, Woodrow Wilson: The Conservative as Liberal

Chapter 10, Woodrow Wilson: The Conservative as Liberal Summary and Analysis

Woodrow Wilson grew up the son of a Presbyterian minister and a Presbyterian minister's daughter. They taught young Woodrow to see political life as the process of bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth. For Wilson, politics became his method of spreading "spiritual enlightenment" and urging the country to public service. As a child and as an adult, Wilson had a strong need for affection and adulation. Politics gave him the affection he never received in private. Wilson was raised in the South and was, deep down, a Southern traditionalist. But he came to admire English intellectual ideas. He looked up to a variety of important British statesmen. In the beginning of his career he "stood far closer to Edmund Burke than to Thomas Jefferson." He hated revolutionary ideas and fought against socialists in his country with great passion. He always supported the ruling class against rebels and preferred that a few men should control the country.

Wilson went to graduate school at Johns Hopkins to train to be a politician. Despite his teachers, he continued a loyalty to laissez-faire and began life as a young professor, without much access to money. Yet Wilson rose rapidly at Princeton, due to his "gravity ... solidity ... [and] high sentiments." He became president of Princeton and developed the political philosophy that the United States should try to find a middle ground between "plutocracy and the masses." Further, he held that the country must undergo a sort of moral regeneration through its expression in government. However, he first arose to political prominence in the capitalist wing of the Democratic Party. He was an incredibly successful governor and became even more popular. During this time, his political principles became those of a social democrat and moved away from his initial laissez-faire inclinations. This changed his base of voters, and despite this he retained broad political support.

He came to be president in part through coming off as the moderate between Taft on his right and Roosevelt on his left. He told the people that industry must be freed from rule by the strong and that the government could aid in this process of bringing about a "New Freedom." He aimed to promote partnerships between government and corporations, who would govern one another in harmony. This New Freedom supported the middle class - agriculture and labor - to prevent community exploitation, great concentrations of wealth, and generate more competition in business and less corruption of government.

Wilson started his presidency as a non-interventionist and opposed entry into World War I. He felt that the United States could set an example for the world by remaining neutral and peaceful. But as the war continued, he felt that he must support the British



with munitions and supplies. This was in part because the United States was much more economically dependent on the Allies. The recession of 1914 put pressure on Wilson to maintain strong ties with Britain and France. Eventually the German government announced that it would sink supply boats going to the British, yet Wilson still allowed support to continue. He won again in 1916 for keeping the United States out of war but he knew that war was coming. When war came, he fought it eagerly and sought to extend the reach of democratic institutions across Europe. After the war ended, he sought to bring about a new peace through organizing the League of Nations, but the United States people repudiated the treaty and the League of Nations died before it attained any power. The League failed in part because Wilson's arrangements did not account for economic reality. Wilson turned to implement social-democratic programs at home, in part through limiting the accumulation of wealth and encouraging public ownership of utilities. Beyond this, he was hardly progressive. His life ended as a great disappointment, having failed to secure peace through the League of Nations and being replaced by Warren Harding, who was a "model of normal mediocrity," the opposite of Wilson.



Chapter 11, Herbert Hoover and the Crisis of American Individualism

Chapter 11, Herbert Hoover and the Crisis of American Individualism Summary and Analysis

Herbert Hoover rose to prominence in the aftermath of World War I. He was the only person to have his status elevated as a result of the war. He helped to run the American Relief Administration, which was regarded as a success at holding the European economies together after the war. Hoover had great experience in the relevant areas, having undertaken numerous major construction projects between 1899 and 1911. But after World War I, a mere decade later, Hoover's reputation as a great businessman and humanitarian was destroyed.

Indeed Hoover had great business and managerial talents. But Hofstadter argued that he was handicapped by his laissez-faire liberal philosophy, which tied him to a past and seemingly irrelevant age. Hofstadter discusses how he studied engineering and geology at Stanford and quickly won respect. Hoover was also an excellent diplomat, having gained a great deal of diplomatic experience dealing with foreign governments during WWI and before. He strongly urged Wilson to prevent the Treaty of Versailles from being too punitive. He opposed Bolshevik communism and all other forms of socialism. Yet ironically, when he served as Secretary of Commerce under Harding, he was an excellent and efficient bureaucrat. He was relatively liberal in the Harding-Coolidge cabinet and did not involve himself in the scandals of the administration.

Hoover intended his presidency to be a great triumph. But he felt helpless in the face of the Great Depression which he initially did not take seriously. He continued to believe in laissez-faire and defend it. He grew up watching capitalism produce incredible increases in wealth and wages and fought to avoid overturning such a system. He firmly opposed government intervention into business. He believed in equality of opportunity, universal education and community spirit, in contrast to a purer capitalistic vision, but he believed that after one had been given equal opportunity, he should be left to rise or fall on his merits.

After the Depression, his reputation crashed and burned. He initially thought the Depression was a mere stock market crash. Deflation increased rapidly and he and the Federal Reserve System did nothing. He was then forced into increasingly interventionist policies, which he philosophically opposed. He had no problem with an unequal distribution of wealth, however, and continued to oppose nationalization. After leaving office, he challenged the New Deal and Roosevelt in books and speeches and initially argued against American intervention into World War II, arguing in favor of peace with Hitler and other dictatorships. Yet when war began, he supported it and came to oppose non-interventionism. The United States could not remain at peace because its economic fortunes were tied with Europe's. He strongly opposed

dictatorship, and argued that it resulted from economic planning. Hoover's opposition to the New Deal eventually helped buttress a reaction to it that went into effect after the end of World War II. He was demoralized by the ways in which Roosevelt restricted economic liberty.



Chapter 12, Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Patrician as Opportunist

Chapter 12, Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Patrician as Opportunist Summary and Analysis

Hofstadter sees Franklin Roosevelt as one of the most important personalities in history. He expressed the American "popular temper" perfectly, and arguably completely changed the world. The New Deal, argues Hofstadter, was more of a temperament than a philosophy. It reflected Roosevelt's conviction that he could do no wrong and that even if he did mess up, he would continue to experiment until he succeeded. He was not a man of great learning and did not care much for the vagaries of policy. He was no master planner, but was largely a political opportunist who made the most of what history provided him. He was raised in a rich, upper crust New York City family. He entered law school as most men of elite American classes did at that time. He had a love affair with sailing and became a masterful orator. Roosevelt was Assistant Secretary of the Navy under Wilson. He ran as vice president in 1920, but lost and spent some years a private citizen, during which time he became sick with polio and was paralyzed from the waist down. Hofstadter argues that this limited and restrained his naturally arrogant temperament. Roosevelt absorbed a certain kind of progressive social democratic politics at this time, aiming to have the government cure social ills and worked to secure a host of social reforms, but he was not terribly familiar with economic subjects.

Before Roosevelt's rise to the presidency, United States' political culture had changed. It was no longer a culture of mere individualism, expansion and opportunity. Instead, the American people were looking for a master statesman to lead them out of trouble. Roosevelt arose at the right historical moment. While campaigning against Hoover on the grounds that he spent too much, Roosevelt, upon obtaining office, famously enacted an enormous number of measures aimed at preventing the country's economic collapse. This first New Deal aimed primarily at recovery, however, not at restructuring the economy.

During his dramatic expansion of state control over the economy, Roosevelt found himself stuck between left and right. The Left had become stronger and began to pressure him and conservatives pushed him leftward through their attacks. The upper classes turned on him and he felt rejected by his own class of social elites. He pushed economic policies that would buy him core constituencies and began to build a coalition. He increasingly marginalized Republican opposition. Roosevelt was not a through-and-through man of the left, and he was never a full-throated defender of organized labor. But he sought to co-opt the leftist sentiments embodied by Depression-era socialists like Huey Long. And in his second inaugural, he lauded social democratic policies and having the government help the working classes. In 1938, he also changed economic



policies and began to expand spending and attack monopolies, in contrast to his attempt to concentrate corporate power in through the National Recovery Act. Roosevelt clearly saw big business as a threat to American democracy.

The Second World War brought Roosevelt to international prominence. He had not been known as an isolationist or internationalist before this time and he was one of the first Democrats to repudiate the League of Nations. However, he began to conceive of foreign policy in terms of collective security for non-totalitarian nations. And his determination to aid Britain, like Wilson's, helped to bring the United States into the war. Roosevelt had faith that the United States would win the war, although he died before it ended. It is not clear, however, that he had much faith that institutions like the United Nations could prevent war. He also accumulated some serious diplomatic failures towards the end of his life, such as the ceding of Eastern Europe to the USSR. In comparison to Wilson, Roosevelt was less "serious ... deliberate ... and responsible." But he was a craftier politician and more flexible, and thus won more adulation and garnered greater political success. Further, he died at his peak, whereas Wilson languished on after his greatest failure was cementing in the public mind.



Characters

The American Founders

While the only American founding father that is the subject of an entire chapter is Thomas Jefferson, Hofstadter analyzes the other founders as a whole, based not on their differences but on the common political philosophy they shared and how it shaped American history. The Founders were extremely 'realistic' in their view of human nature. They believed that humans were imminently corruptible and that government should be structured so as to prevent abuses of power. They self-consciously aimed to create a government that would protect the individual liberties of the people against any threat. They sought to produce a system of checks and balances that would pit the natural interests of differing groups against one another and prevent any one group from gaining too much power. They believed strongly in the rights of private property and believed that all those with political power should be property owners, including voters. They were also quite hostile to fully democratic institutions which they thought would lead to instability and decay into either tyranny or chaos. However, they also strongly opposed monarchy and believed in representative government. As a result, they created a 'republican' government that would combine elements of both in order to produce a system of government that suffered from the vices of neither. But they disagreed about whether to have a system of government more insulated from the popular will or from central control. From the perspective of current American life, they were strongly elitist, yet for their own time, they were viewed as radicals by the Europeans. Hofstadter argues that, in fact, they were political moderates.

Abraham Lincoln

Hofstadter's chapter on Abraham Lincoln begins with an attack on American historians' elevation of Lincoln to sainthood. Lincoln was in fact a natural politician, giving stump speeches from an early age. His natural charisma and calculating political maneuvering led to an extremely quick rise to power, becoming speaker of the House of Representatives in Illinois at twenty-eight.

Lincoln originally seemed indifferent to the question of whether slavery should be abolished. He was not a defender of slavery, but emphasized over and over again that he did not seek to end the institution. He was a moderate Whig, interested in Henry Clary's "American System", where government provided special privileges to corporations to make internal improvements, protected Northern manufacturing interests with protective tariffs and produced a national bank that would generate currency stability. Lincoln only dealt with slavery when it became political expedient to do so. Southerners were attempting to push new states to becoming slave states, and many Northerners feared competition from slave labor. Lincoln wanted to prevent this in order to win over his constituents, and fought to preserve freedom in the new states, although in many of them, freed blacks were barred entry (incidentally, Lincoln's home



state of Illinois was one of these states). Lincoln wanted to avoid the Civil War, but fought it because he believed that the Union must be maintained at all costs. Southern secession would weaken the country to foreign invasion and prevent the North from being effectively competitive with British and other European exports. This is not to suggest that Lincoln was indifferent to slavery, but on Hofstadter's view, Lincoln's moral struggle with slavery was secondary to his concern with practical expediency.

Thomas Jefferson

Third president of the United States, this American founder wrote the Declaration of Independence, supported an extension of the democratic franchise and lacked a systematic political philosophy.

Andrew Jackson

Seventh president of the United States, Andrew Jackson rose from Kentucky aristocracy, won the Battle of New Orleans, massacred Native Americans, abolished the Central Bank of the United States, and nearly conquered South Carolina.

John C. Calhoun

South Carolina Senator and Vice-President, Calhoun had a philosophical mind that he used to defend both federalism and slavery.

Wendell Phillips

An important Northern abolitionist who gave abolitionism a good public face.

William Jennings Bryan

The late nineteenth century revivalist who ran for president on numerous occasions. He articulated populist sentiment in his support for the free silver movement, opposition to foreign wars, and defense of the banning the teaching of evolution in the classroom.

Theodore Roosevelt

Twenty-sixth president of the United States, Roosevelt was a wild and energetic president who never met a war he didn't like. He acquired a reputation for trust-busting and progressive politics, without having any real interest in either.



Woodrow Wilson

Twenty-eighth president of the United States, Wilson was originally a moderate Southern conservative, who through his time as Princeton President and governor of New Jersey, came to a social democratic ethos that he spread across the world.

Herbert Hoover

Thirty-first president of the United States, Hoover was originally a world-renowned businessman, philanthropist and diplomat, who after being secretary of commerce under Harding and Coolidge, rose to the presidency himself. He had a great reputation that was smashed by his haphazard and limp-wristed response to the Great Depression.

Franklin Roosevelt

Thirty-third president of the United States, Roosevelt was a young patrician with little interest in political principles. Instead he was a political opportunist who rose to power during a time when Americans wanted a great leader and expanded government control over the economy in order to stop the Depression.



Objects/Places

The United States

The country of origin for all of the book's major characters

The Constitutional Convention

Largely where the story begins and where the Constitution was created. The document embodied the political philosophy popular in the late eighteenth century but was altered over time to reflect changes in public opinion.

Virginia

Perhaps the center of political life for many of the early characters in the book. Many American Founders were raised there and rose to political power there as well, particularly Thomas Jefferson

Monticello

Jefferson's famed plantation.

The South

The Southern states in the Union, which included Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia and came to include Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma and Florida. Calhoun was the senator from South Carolina and Jackson came from Kentucky. Woodrow Wilson was also a Southerner originally. Many of the Southern states seceded in the mid nineteenth century, which precipitated the Civil War

The North

The original states of the Union, which at the time of the Civil War included Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, California, Nevada and Oregon. The Union of these states won the Civil War. Many of our important characters originated in these states. Lincoln came from Illinois, Phillips from Massachusetts.



The Emancipation Proclamation

The famed document that freed the slaves, which Lincoln issued in 1862. Importantly, Hofstadter points out that it only freed the slaves in the Southern States

The Second Bank of the United States

The United States national bank that was chartered in 1816. Andrew Jackson attacked the bank as allowing the money supply to be controlled by a business elite and strangled farmers with debts from land speculation. He allowed the charter of the bank to expire during his presidency.

The Cross of Gold

A famous bit of symbolism from one of William Jennings Bryan's most famous speeches. It represented the popular sentiment that the deflation that resulted from the gold standard was 'crucifying' farmers by trapping them in increasing levels of debt.

The Philippines

A former Spanish protectorate that the United States conquered in 1898. Theodore Roosevelt became a well-known military officer during this time and reveled in the spirit of the war.

The New Freedom

A policy of Woodrow Wilson's that aimed to produce middle class prosperity by promoting partnerships between government and corporations, preventing community exploitation by business, reducing great concentrations of wealth, generating more competition between business by breaking up trusts and reducing corruption in government.

The League of Nations

After World War I, Wilson proposed that an international body be formed to preserve world peace. While many nations became members, the United States rejected the treaty, humiliating Wilson.

The New Deal

The vast expansion of government power over the economy implemented by Franklin Roosevelt in an attempt to save the United States from the Great Depression. It

included a smorgasboard of policies, many of which were changed over time and ruled unconstitutional. Others continue to the present day.



Themes

The Rise and Fall of Capitalism

One of the major themes of *The American Political Tradition* is the role that private property rights and capitalism play in American history. The book begins with a discussion of why the Founders preferred private property rights. They believed strongly in natural rights, the doctrine that strong property rights are part of transcendent moral reality, rather than human convention. However, they also defended property rights in a largely pre-industrial economy. Property was central for citizens to have a stake in maintaining their government and would lead to general prosperity. However, the Founders did not foresee that the growth of industry would generate some - in Hofstadter's mind - nasty consequences. Eventually, a tension developed in American political thought between those who thought that government should help the elite business classes and those who thought the government shouldn't be associated with the economy save enforcing property rights. The latter position was the position of the Democrats, the 'party of the people'. Laissez-Faire was seen as a populist position. However, as the United States industrialized, the putative faults of capitalism manifested themselves in the form of vast inequalities of wealth and political power, excruciating and unsafe labor conditions and so on. A new populist movement arose to oppose the gold standard and advocate central banking - an interference with the market economy - in order to save the people from abuses by business. Further, the rise of social democratic ideas led to various regulations on the economy, breaking up of major business trusts and so on. Finally the Great Depression put an end to laissez-faire with the New Deal.

Contrasting Myth and Reality

Hofstadter sees himself as a debunker of long-held myths about the great men of American political history. History has often seen Andrew Jackson as a pure populist in his origins, that he came from nothing and was not an aristocrat. This was not entirely true, however. His personality and work led him to become Kentucky aristocracy before his rise to national politics. There was a kind of class hierarchy in Kentucky, and he was at the top of it, although most of these aristocrats were self-made. Jackson, while he could not spell and dressed like a frontiersman, had an aristocratic way about him.

Hofstadter argues that historians should drop the myth of Lincoln as a saintly man. While he did have some moral concerns about slavery, he began life as a natural born politician and continued as one throughout most of his life. He grew up giving stump speeches and worked to vault himself to power, becoming speaker of the Illinois house at twenty-eight. Hofstadter argues that Lincoln initially wasn't much concerned about slavery, preferring to focus on the domestic agenda of the Whigs and next Republicans, which was more focused on tariffs, government-financed internal improvements and a national bank. He only became interested in slavery when the extension of slavery into



new states threatened white laborers with competition from slave labor. Woodrow Wilson was seen as the paradigm of a social democratic internationalist, but in fact he began life as a moderate sort of Southern traditionalist who grew into social democratic positions as time progressed. And finally, FDR had no real political principles, according to Hofstadter, but was largely an opportunist and pragmatist.

Changes in Ideology

Hofstadter is interested in tracking changes in ideology throughout American history. This includes not only changes in American attitudes towards government intervention in the economy, but to the structure of political institutions. The American Founders believed in restricting the role of democratic institutions to a republican level. They believed that men were wicked and should not have power over one another, so they restricted voting rights to those who owned property so that only those with a stake in the state of the country would be able to influence politics. But over time the franchise of voting was extended, first to men who did not own land, then to African-American men, and finally to women. At each stage, some worried that allowing a certain class of people to vote would be a disaster, and over time they were proven to have had a lack of faith in democracy. Further, Hofstadter tracks the development and decay of American individualism. Throughout the nineteenth century, American individualism was strong, but varied amongst individualist elitism and an individualist populism. The first sought to give privilege to the 'better' part of society and the latter sought to prevent these privileges from being handed out in the first place. However, as industrial capitalism became more powerful, many began to see individualism as destructive to the common good and advocated forms of collectivist government policies to improve the lot of the working poor. The Great Depression furthered this attitude, in some ways undermining American individualism altogether.



Style

Perspective

The perspective of the book is that of the narrator, American historian Richard Hofstadter. Richard Hofstadter is one of the most important historians of the twentieth century, and was known as the "historian of the post-war liberal consensus". Specifically, he endorsed the values of the post-war social democratic order. He defended an extensive welfare state, heavily criticized conservative moral attitudes as psychologically dysfunctional and articulated the historical perspective of what was then a consensus liberal position until the rise of the conservative movement in the late twentieth century. He has been criticized for writing with broad strokes, rarely reading manuscripts, and preferring to speak in general terms. Further, his well-known *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*, which ridiculed and psychoanalyzed American conservatives, earned him great ridicule on the right and exposed his bias against the major ideological strands of thought he opposed.

The purpose of this discussion is to illustrate Hofstadter's biases. Rather than be specific about the historical details of American political history, he prefers to describe history generally, so the reader may not receive an accurate picture of history. Further, because he had a clear ideological bias, it is important to be aware of where his lack of impartiality may color his historical scholarship. It is particularly important to be aware of his preference for the growth of state power throughout American history, his hostility to both laissez-faire and radical socialism, and his ridicule of the ethos of the small town and preference for great social experiments.

Tone

The tone of the book reflects its perspective. Hofstadter was widely known as a post-war liberal historian, with all the biases to boot. He is a critic of laissez-faire capitalism, though not a socialist. He understands the progress of American history as one towards greater equality and care for the oppressed, and the extension of democratic institutions, with only brief interruptions. However, he does not glorify the figures who agreed with him ideologically. He argues that Lincoln helped to create the myth of his own greatness, and he argues that Franklin Roosevelt was a political opportunist with few political principles. However, his tone is harshly critical of two different groups - defenders of laissez-faire and decentralized power. He seems to understand the arguments the American founders made on behalf of restricting the power of the state. His tone indicates that he believes that the harms of capitalism came as it developed throughout the nineteenth century. Further, he harshly ridicules John C. Calhoun's defense of decentralism as a mere rationale for slavery. His tone is not impartial; he is interested in giving a critique not only of the ideas of his characters but of their personalities. He argues that John C. Calhoun had a lack of moral judgment, despite

having a brilliant mind. Again, he argued that Franklin Roosevelt and Lincoln were political opportunists.

Structure

The American Political tradition contains twelve chapters that span the range of American history, from the American founding to the end of the Second World War. The first chapter covers the Founding Fathers, and the second focuses specifically on Thomas Jefferson. Chapter three follows up with an analysis of Andrew Jackson, and the four on the South Carolina Senator, Vice-President and philosopher of Southern decentralism, John C. Calhoun. Chapter five discusses Abraham Lincoln and chapter six a prominent abolitionist named Wendell Phillips. Chapter seven focuses on the political figures during the so-called Gilded Age. The next chapter focuses on the iconoclastic orator and presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. The final four chapters discuss Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt respectively. Each of these chapters covers different aspects of their central characters. Chapters usually begin with a story that characterizes the personality the reader will encounter. It next transitions into a brief biography and the origins of their political ideas. Hofstadter also makes a concerted effort to describe aspects of his characters' lives that are not well-known. Finally, he transitions into those periods of his characters' life that were of great historical significance. The book has a largely narrative structure. It tells general life stories and does not often stop to analyze details. In many ways, the book can be understood as a compilation of short stories, with an introduction, plot, climax and denouement.



Quotes

"The sheep are happier of themselves, than under the care of the wolves." p. 18

"Nothing then is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man." p. 43

"Could it really be urged that the framers of the constitution intended that our Government should become a government of brokers? If so, then the profits of this national brokers' shop must inure to the benefit of the whole and not to a few privileged monied capitalists to the utter rejection of the many." p. 44

"This is a country of self-made men, than which there can be no better in any state of society." p. 66

"Let those who are interested remember that labor is the only source of wealth ..." p. 67

"We must remember, it is the most difficult process in the world to make two people of one." p. 69

"'Slavery,' he said, was 'the best guarantee to equality among the whites.'" p. 78

"His ambition was a little engine that knew no rest." p. 92

"He had had his ambitious and fulfilled them, and met heartache in his triumph." p. 134

"College bred men should be agitators to tear a question open and riddle it with light and to educate the moral sense of the masses." p. 135

"I believe in moral suasion. The age of bullets is over." p. 148

"He [Grover Cleveland] was the flower of American political culture in the Gilded Age." p. 182

"A man can be born again; the springs of life can be cleansed instantly. ... If this is true of one, it can be true of another. Thus, a nation can be born in a day if the ideals of the people can be changed." p. 183

"How I wish I wasn't a reformer, oh, Senator! But I suppose I must live up to my part, like the Negro minstrel who blacked himself all over!" p. 203

"The truth is, we are all caught in a great economic system which is heartless." p. 234

"The test of the rightfulness of our decisions must be whether we have sustained and advanced ... prosperity." p. 279



Topics for Discussion

To what extent were the American Founders genuinely realistic? What was unrealistic about their political views? What was realistic?

What are Jefferson's greatest accomplishments as president? His failures?

Was Andrew Jackson right to let the national bank expire?

Was John C. Calhoun's philosophy of decentralism a mere rationale for slavery? Or does it have any independent validity? If so, state why, and if not, why not.

Hofstadter claims that Abraham Lincoln helped to create the legends that surround him. How in Hofstadter's opinion did he do this?

To what extent was the 'Age of Cynicism' truly cynical? What was it cynical about? What was hopeful about it?

Was Theodore Roosevelt a good president or a bad president? State why or why not in detail.

Please describe Woodrow Wilson's ideological evolution in detail.

To what extent should Franklin Roosevelt's accomplishments be praised if he acted out of political opportunism, as Hofstadter argues he did?