Introduction

The Continuity of Change? New Perspectives on U.S. Reform Movements[1]

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Abstract

Throughout U.S. history, reform movements have been caught between calls for renewal and the fear of destabilization, between community action and personal interest. Reforms rarely follow a linear path; they may look backward or forward, invoking the promise of a return to a supposedly better past or the creation of an imagined brighter future. Our introductory article calls for more complexity in conceptualizing reform movements by allowing for multiple perspectives and more fluid categories when it comes to determining temporality, scope and reach, as well as structures and agency. By keeping in mind historical and contextual differences, our article brings together the multifaceted contributions to this special issue and positions them within a framework for reform shaped by sociological as well as historical discourse.

Keywords: reform movements; historiography; intersectionality; nineteenth century; twentieth century

Becoming

When Michelle Obama chose the title for her autobiography *Becoming*, she (or her publisher) tapped into a life-writing convention that uses this terminology in the context of teleological development—becoming someone, becoming a personality or a persona. When used in a philosophical sense, the term "becoming" has an ontological meaning. As such it maintains that with regard to actuality and existence, our social and material reality as well as the physical world around us are in constant flux. As the Heraclitan dictum postulates: the only thing that is ever continuous is change (Savitt).[2] It might well be that even if the decision to use *Becoming* as the title for Michelle Obama's autobiography, indeed, came down to marketing considerations, it was neverthe-

1 The authors would like to thank Rebecca Brückmann and the anonymous peer reviewer of *Amerikastudien / American Studies* for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this text.

2 The concept of "becoming" has been taken up by numerous others, including Friedrich Nietzsche and later Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, each adding different aspects or expanding on the basic notion but also referring back to Heraclitus.

less at least indirectly influenced by a distinct U.S. life-writing tradition concerned with constant (self)transformation (Balestrini and Schultermandl; Casper).

Arguably, this practice is part of a larger belief in the possibility and positive effects of reform. Reforms perpetually seek to redefine and renegotiate, for example, concepts such as citizenship, freedom, (social) justice, and equality. Throughout U.S. history, reform movements remained caught between calls for renewal and the fear of their destabilizing effects, between community action and personal interest. Without advocating any kind of ideological exceptionalism, we can identify the confluence and convergence of currents from religious, political, and social thinking that have shaped the concept over the centuries, rendering reform a distinct and more powerful notion than in the Western European context (Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*; Wolgast). Consequently, how reform movements are understood and theorized varies by context, in particular in a transatlantic comparison. Decentralized, single-issue campaigns (though often interrelated, such as women's suffrage and temperance) flourished earlier in the United States than in Europe and at least on the surface were driven less exclusively by class interests (Mayer; Ness).[3] In turn, these historical and contextual differences have shaped scholarly work, i. e., the questions asked and prioritizations made between structural conditions and human agency as well as micro and macro levels, leading to different methodological and theoretical frameworks that will be discussed below.

In colonial Massachusetts, Puritan John Winthrop set out to create "a city upon a hill" and the Constitutional Convention sought "a more perfect union" (Rodgers, *As a City*; Gibson). Transcendentalism, abolitionism, and antitrust activism flourished in the nineteenth century, while the major movements of the twentieth century ranged from women's rights to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Dream," from counterculture utopias to economic plans of varied success (Ness; White). The recent Black Lives Matter protests in the United States and around the world once again remind us to acknowledge and address the systemic injustice based on racism that has deep historical roots (Lebron; Glaude, Jr.). A long tradition of protest and demands for reform rises up behind today's activists—a legacy that endows the movement with an arsenal of references but at the same time exacerbates the frustration at the perceived lack of real change. It may come as no surprise that the intersection of race, racism, and reform(ers) is a major (though not exclusive) thrust in our special issue—undoubtedly, the positionality ("Standort") of scholars, historians in particular, is the present.

To understand the logic of reform, the ontological meaning of "becoming" emerges as a key element, for it hinges on the principle that nothing is final and there is always the potential, if not the necessity, for change. Moreover, the idea of reform, in its modern sense, invokes the promise of transformation, amendment, or adjustment, i. e., the pro-

3 For a global perspective, cf. Tyrell; Lake.

jection and creation of a better future rather than, as the pre-modern use indicated, the return to a better past.[4] It is thus clearly linked to a teleological and progressive (though not necessarily Progressive) view of history.[5]

In a similar vein and contrary to what reformers may envision and simple narratives tend to portray, reforms rarely follow a linear, even path. Rather, visions, claims, and demands can spring from a multitude of currents converging but also diverging over time. The use of "movement" as a category for describing and analyzing reform has spread across the disciplines. In particular, sociologists have identified and analyzed certain key conditions deemed opportune for the formation of the structural framework around an idea or reform effort that can be classed as a "movement." These include (1) a following (a number of people with the same or a similar set of aims that are framed accordingly), (2) planning (a certain degree of organization as the basis for mobilization), (3) resources for mobilization (financial, social, intellectual, cultural), and (4) social and political structures that allow for these conditions to exist as a movement over time (Chesters and Welsh; Hellmann).

Historians of reform movements stress the complexity of conceptualizing them in a diachronic but also synchronic perspective. The multilevel and multi-strand network that makes up a movement at any given time needs to be as carefully accounted for as its development over time.[6] For instance, some scholars have begun to use plurals for what used to be analyzed as one movement, such as the struggle for women's rights. We can identify several interrelated yet distinct periods of the women's movement, from activism demanding equal legal rights (suffrage in particular) to addressing cultural inequalities, legal and bodily autonomy, as well as gender norms in society more generally (Tetrault). Popular narratives of the history of feminism have coalesced into a model of waves (first used in 1968 by Martha Weinman Lear)—a metaphor that since then has also been applied to other social movements (Huber).[7]

"Waves" evoke high tides and receding ebbs of reform as well as the continuity of change over time. Aims and methods may differ based on prior progress or in view of sudden obstacles. Yet, this aquatic metaphor is also problematic in at least three ways: first, it conceals the movement's underlying continuities and the periods in between the waves—calls for equal rights never vanished completely. Second, it presents history as a tale of organic progress where even setbacks are part of an overall forward trajectory. And third, it tends, literally, to sweep history into a singular narrative, often along a Western-centric and mostly White version of the past.[8] Thus, understanding reform movements and reformers in historical perspective poses the challenge to conceptualize, discern, and describe them as distinct and at times also interrelated historical phenomena while accounting for their somewhat fuzzy nature and unwieldy complexity. Accordingly, this special issue takes up this discussion by conceptualizing reform for historical analyses and thus by taking part in

4 With regard to "reform," the Reformation can be identified as the caesura for a change in the meaning of the term; thus, we can distinguish a pre-modern from a modern use (Wolgast).

5 The progressive view of history refers to a view of history that sees the course of the world constantly progressing (!) toward ultimate improvement, though it does not necessarily include a uniform idea of what exactly constitutes an improvement. Political Progressivism in the United States, in contrast, is linked to distinct goals broadly associated with the Left.

6 Network analysis struggles with the challenges of multidimensional description, but recent works have developed various approaches in that direction (cf. Fangerau and Halling; Unfried, Mittag, and van der Linden).

7 For a recent analysis of the widespread use of metaphors in knowledge production, cf. Müller and Schmieder.

8 For a thorough critique of the waves model regarding the history of feminism cf. Hewitt. Others have suggested using the metaphor of a river as an alternative model (e. g., Chamberlain).

the process of continuously reforming our understanding as the past is "becoming" history.

Conceptualizing Reform: Temporality, Scope and Reach, Structures and Agency

In order to highlight the multifaceted interrelations of our contributions, we have identified three categories that each relate to the articles of our special issue in different ways and synthesize them into an overall trajectory: (1) temporality, (2) scope and reach, as well as (3) structures and agency.

Temporality

Any reform operates on three temporal levels, devising present measures and practices with a view to both the past and the future. Each of these levels requires exploration and consequently provides the potential for definition, discourse, and discord. Imaginations of the future are necessarily tied to the point of departure, whether a particular point of reference in the past or the individual positionality in the present. In her contribution to this issue, Nadja Klopprogge analyzes the challenges for Black working-class women through the lens of intersectionality and contrasts the conflicting future visions of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) in the 1930s. Her protagonists were caught up in these rivaling reform agendas. Dustin Breitenwischer highlights how remembering the past of slavery constituted a very powerful step toward reform in the thinking of Frederick Douglass. Rather than focusing on complex concrete visions of the future, the African American abolitionist concentrated on the pragmatic procedural challenges and how measures taken in the present could link the past and the future. Armin Langer's essay sheds light on the complexities of reform efforts within Jewish communities in the United States, all of which aimed for a stronger Jewish identity but arrived at very different conclusions. He thus reminds us that even those who share a common vision of a better future might disagree over the measures to be taken in the present, i. e., the path from the past to the future.

Closely connected to multiple visions of the future and the many-stranded and often also multi-centered constituencies of movements, the question of duration is another important temporal dimension of reform. For example, the struggle for Black freedom and equal rights neither began with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, nor did it end with the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968. Rather, the struggle reaches all the way back to slavery and is still ongoing. Like the practical challenges historians face in defining an "event" (see Sewell), identifying the beginning and the end of any reform movement ultimately

remains elusive. Specific reform efforts are necessarily part of larger currents of social transformations. Even seemingly discernable movements are deeply embedded in longer processes and traditions. When Jacquelyn Dowd Hall called for the study of the "long" Civil Rights Movement in 2005, she underlined the necessity to go beyond the "classical" Martin Luther King, Jr., period. Moreover, in laying out the links to Black labor activism of the 1930s, she highlighted the cross-connections and, consequently, the overlapping chronologies of movements that are all too often artificially separated by and in historical narrative. "Time is an ocean," Jeremy Varon, Michael S. Foley, and John McMillian emphasize in their editorial to the inaugural issue of the journal *The Sixties,* challenging decade-based periodizations and providing us with yet another aquatic metaphor.

This notion of the "long sixties," extending both back and forward, has recently received renewed attention in view of the Black Lives Matter Movement. For instance, Christopher J. Lebron has drawn several "radical lessons" for today's movement, based on the philosophies and thoughts of, for example, Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Anna Julia Cooper, Audre Lorde, and James Baldwin.[9] Thus, when taking a long view and looking beyond the one-dimensional memory of revered national charismatic leaders, we notice that today's protesters stand in a long tradition of thinkers, grassroots organizers, and activists in less hierarchical—and certainly more diverse structures—than the popular emphasis on mostly male leaders suggests. Moreover, examining for example the activism of Ella Baker, who challenged racism and fought for labor rights, especially for Black women, as early as the 1930s, underscores how an intersectional approach reveals depth and perspective within the movement (cf. Buschendorf; Hirschfelder). Still, Steven Lawson has pointed out that the Civil Rights Movement "must be viewed as historically distinct from other aspects of the black freedom struggle that preceded it" (12). This argument ties back to the discussion above regarding the limits of conceptualizing reform movements in "waves." It also raises the question of how succeeding manifestations of that struggle are to be related to the timeframe, as for all the continuities there is also change. One example is the changing role of the Black Churches, which was once a key organizational framework and point of reference for activities as well as the mainstay for the dissemination of information in the Black freedom struggle (Marsh). While religion and spiritualism have by no means lost their relevance, the organizational and communicative functions are now primarily provided through social media (Green; Griswold).

Temporality also features in the classic dichotomy that pits reform against revolution when the gradual nature of change emerges as the defining characteristic distinguishing incremental reform from the often violent suddenness of (total) revolution. It spotlights the inherently conservative meaning of the term "reform" as it developed in the late

9 #BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 by Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza. On how the history of Black thought and activism informs Black Lives Matter, cf. Cullors; Garza; Glaude Jr.

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries following Edmund Burke (Jones). This interpretation has also informed the way historiography has typically identified "radical" and "moderate" variations within one movement. Related to this question is also the discussion of the ideological labels "conservative" and "liberal." These terms evoke different meanings in different contexts in the United States and certainly within a global framework. For instance, although the term "liberal" denotes similar policies on both sides of the Atlantic regarding socio-cultural issues such as anti-racism and LGBTQIA* rights, U.S. economic liberalism would be considered "conservative" in continental Europe. As a result, liberals in the United States, certainly since the so-called New Deal Coalition and the Fifth Party System, are often equated with the political Left advocating for a larger government, while in Europe the liberal political mindset remains associated with limited government, harking back to its nineteenth-century origins.[10]

In historical analysis, neither a pre-categorization nor a strict division along ideological lines seems feasible. At the same time, the conservative-liberal / Left-Right divide in the United States has widened with the advent of the culture wars since the 1970s (Hartman), a time some consider "'the Big Bang' moment of modern American conservatism" (Berger 2; cf. Schulman and Zelizer). Accordingly, by the late 1980s, sociologist Robert Wuthnow argued with respect to the U.S. religious landscape that there was more common ground in cross-denominational "liberal" and "conservative" groupings than within the same denominations.

Each of the essays in this special issue challenges this traditional dichotomy of radical / moderate and conservative / liberal. In the context of Jewish America, Langer re-considers reform initiatives usually associated with orthodox, reform, and assimilated Judaism respectively, concluding that the typical classification only holds up to a point. Klopprogge shows how, in the context of Black womanhood, a traditionalist view of motherhood was reconceptualized to take a radical political stand. Axel Jansen's contribution, in turn, presents an element of Richard Nixon's economic policy that on first sight seems to fit a Progressivist agenda, namely the call for a general basic income. Similarly, Johannes Nagel's military protagonists are representative of a well-established conservative elite, yet their global network put them at odds with their own national traditions and led them to propose reforms that were perceived as radical. Ferdinand Nyberg examines a lesser-known endeavor of Black Power, generally considered part of the more radical struggle for African American rights. Striving for economic sovereignty as a basis for political and social freedom, however, these Black Power activists deliberately worked within the economic framework advocated by the Nixon administration. Arriving at the term "Black Power republicanism," Nyberg presents a third strand of activism that deliberately goes against a liberal-conservative binary and pragmatically toes the line of both. In the same vein, Breitenwischer's contribution speaks to

10 For a general overview on the political foundations and history of liberalism in a transatlantic perspective cf. Manent. Regarding the transatlantic and transnational convergences of the "Left," cf. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*.

the dichotomy on a conceptual level. In his analysis of the reform philosophy of Frederick Douglass, Breitenwischer takes up André Gorz's conception of a "non-reformist reform" (8) and speaks of "a quasi-revolutionary" path to reform.

Scope and Reach

There is also a Marxist echo in contrasting revolution and reform. Only a sweeping movement that fundamentally reshapes society seems to be deserving of the term "revolution," while reforms are thought of as limited, localized, specific, and, according to Marx and Engels, generally intended by the ruling classes to improve their own situation and/or to stave off revolution.[11] The historiographical debate over the radicalism of the U.S. founding is a case in point here (Morgan). At the same time, U.S.-American independence also raises another issue, for it shows that what starts as a reform may develop into a revolution. This observation suggests that rather than binary opposites, the two modes of change—revolution and reform—seem to be positioned on a common graduated scale. Nevertheless, the oft-evoked explicit distinction points to another pair of parameters in conceptualizing reform: *scope and reach*.

Some movements at first sight appear selective, focusing on a single issue, such as the Pure Foods Movement at the end of the nineteenth century that sought consumer protection through a regulation of food and medicine (Goodwin). Others were more encompassing, tackling a number of these areas. The more radical currents of the Labor Movement, for example, the Industrial Workers of the World, certainly were aiming for revolution rather than reform (Dubofsky and McCartin). Throughout U.S. history, reform efforts took aim at "social ills" (e.g., poverty), political structures (e.g., taxes), belief systems (moral and/or religious), body regimes (e.g., health), institutions (e.g., the military), or even entire nations and/or supra-national organizations.

In recent decades, particularly in the realm of administration, "reform" has become an almost casual term that applies to any and all fields, from higher education and party financing to the diplomatic corps and the judiciary. While some of the suggested amendments in these areas are quite far-reaching and fundamental, their frame of reference in administration implies a limited and controllable agenda, echoing a fear of the destabilizing effect of "too much too quickly." Yet, administrative reform can be bound up with radical and sweeping social change, shown by the passionate recent debates regarding healthcare or voting districts, both thoroughly bureaucratic matters on the surface.

Arguably, the intriguing link between administrative reform and social revolution in the United States is a legacy of what Richard Hofstadter has termed the "Age of Reform" that encompassed the triad of Gilded Age populism, Progressivist reform zeal, and New Deal government activism.[12] The firm belief in social engineering throughout the

11 For a more discerning analysis of Marx's and Engels's view allowing for its evolution over time, cf. Hollander.

12 Others have also argued for the Gilded Age to be described as a reform era, pointing however to different phenomena such as the rise of the women's and the temperance movement (White; see also the special issue of *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* discussing the question of a second Gilded Age, edited by Wortel-London and Cothran).

twentieth century further strengthened this mindset. What becomes clear here, though, is that the scope and reach of a particular reform or even a reform movement cannot easily be pinpointed or delineated. Nagel's analysis of the reform efforts within the U.S. military demonstrates this notion. The discourse on reforming what appears to be a limited arena such as the military needs to be seen as affected by and itself affecting larger, global changes.

Moreover, military reform was prompted by rapid technological development, a phenomenon that everyday language also likes to describe using the terminology of revolution (rather than reform). However, the discourse on the social impact of technological "revolutions" often in turn spurs new reform efforts. Arguably, the environmental movement grew and unfolded alongside the gradual (post)industrial development. Such phenomena highlight the interpretation of reform as adjusting, or "keeping up," as a society with change. Jansen's essay sheds further light on this interpretation of reform. He shows how the idea of a basic income gained momentum tied to debates over the impact of new technology such as automation on the labor market.

Structures and Agency

An interdisciplinary debate, if strongly influenced by sociology, in social movement studies has unfolded since the 1960s. According to different local, regional, or national contexts, different strands have developed on both sides of the Atlantic that have only slowly begun to converge in the twenty-first century. While in the United States Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) remains the dominant research paradigm focusing on how movements emerge and mobilize, the European school of thought on New Social Movements (NMS) emphasizes structures and why movements occur (cf. Chesters and Welsh; Hellmann).[13] From a structural perspective, spotlighting the similarities and differences in strategies of mobilization and organization reminds us of the necessity to conceptualize reform movements as part of a dynamic historical moment, within the social conditions and the discursive framework of the time. Further, it helps us to understand the more permanent strands: the logic of social cooperation and conflict as well as the challenges of projecting perspective and communicating change. At the same time, while it may seem intuitive to analyze reform movements through the prism of parameters focused on structural and supra-personal perspectives, the contributions to this special issue also show the benefit of taking the actors and their agency seriously. Hence, a third pair of parameters introduced here is *structure and agency*.

In particular, intersectionality—understood as both a frame of analysis as well as a theoretical and methodological paradigm—allows us to analyze reform movements from both an agency-centered and structuralist perspective.[14] On the one hand, as intersectionality "capture[s] and

13 The division in "old" (nineteenth century) and "new" (since the latter part of the twentieth century) social movements can be problematic depending on the perspective and the country analyzed. For instance, while activists of the 1960s social movements might be regarded as "new" when analyzing a certain European country (i. e., not the proletariat), in the United States, most had earlier counterparts (e. g., feminism, discussed above). Similarly, global mobility and reach has been a feature of both, "old" and "new" (Chesters and Welsh 1, 12-13).

14 This argument is further elaborated in the 2013 special issue of Signs on "Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory," guest-edited by Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. The issue looks back at the concept's history since its introduction in the 1980s and sketches out (new) fields of intersectional studies (theoretical and applied).

engage[s] in contextual dynamics of power" (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 788), it allows us to zoom in on structures of power, exclusion, and inequalities. Arguably, as Jennifer J. Chun, George Lipsitz, and Young Shin have pointed out in their study of intersectionality as a social movement strategy, intersectionality "primarily concerns the way things work rather than who people are" (923; cf. MacKinnon). To understand how agency features within an intersectional framework, however, the motivations and deliberations of historical actors are equally relevant to the way movements unfold. Since "individual lives and narratives always bring the social context to light" (Spiekermann 43), each of the articles in this volume re-introduces a biographical perspective to complement the structural analysis, which ties their research back to identity construction, including gendered, religious, nationalist, racial, ethnic, and class distinctions. The study of intersections and/or conflicts of various identities is central to understanding reform movements (Castells).

Historiographically, "agency" can prove a challenging concept to grapple with. Once shunned for its implication that men (in both senses of the word) somehow "made" history, this approach has experienced a revival since the late 1970s and early 1980s from the opposite side of a palpably politicized spectrum based on its potential for indicating empowerment of subaltern contributors in the historical process (Pomper; Zelnik). In the context of reform movements, the ambivalent nature of agency as a heuristic approach emerges clearly. Not only does it underline the fundamental question of whether it is even feasible to think of reforms as being actively "made," it also probes the logic of social and/or organizational hierarchies as they seem to present themselves on the surface.

Moreover, by looking at agency, an insider-outsider dynamic comes into view, even if a clear binary may remain difficult. Are reforms imposed from the outside or pursued from within? Such reflections also lead back to social, intellectual, and economic hierarchies as well as notions of elitism, community action, and collectivism. These power dynamics could be caused, for example, by economic as well as educational inequalities, and quite often by the combination of both. Klopprogge lays out the obstacles that "semi-literate" African American mothers faced in their political activism, including the way they had to navigate between empowerment and being co-opted or appropriated. The dominant role of education and intellectual resources can be seen clearly in the case of Frederick Douglass, whose journey from activist to intellectual is the subject of Breitenwischer's essay. Additionally, elites of different kinds are the key reforming actors in Langer's (Jewish theologians), Jansen's (economic theorists), Nyberg's (lawyer turned entrepreneur), and Nagel's (military experts) contributions. Overall, the papers in this special issue show that it is paramount to analyze how these elites constructed the social or racial "other" they had in mind when devising their reforms in order to understand their motivations.

The so-called "paradox of progressivism" (Lake) is another case in point for inherent hierarchies and contradictions within reform movements. Inspired by democratic (even egalitarian) idealism, the Progressivist Movement was very much a project of a predominantly White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant elite. While many of the reforms were accompanied by a rhetoric of self-improvement and emancipation, the measures taken were often extremely coercive and infringed on personal liberties (Chambers). Following this, another underlying tension in the Progressivist Movement that harked back to nineteenth-century idealism and continued into the New Deal becomes manifest, namely the constant (re)negotiation of the "individual" vis-à-vis the state.

In U.S.-American thought, the role of the individual has been particularly powerful, both morally and conceptually (Paul; Daniels). In the context of agency and reform, this comes into play in at least three ways. Firstly, ascribing formative significance to the actions of certain individuals personalizes an abstract process of change and offers the historian a linchpin as a point of entry to build an argument. At the same time, this approach holds dangerous pitfalls in its tendency to choose and (re)construct certain (i. e., mostly White and/or male) leadership and to artificially fix hierarchies that were often fluid or unclear to contemporaries, as the case laid out above concerning the question of Civil Rights leadership beyond King illustrates. Secondly, one of the core questions of the theory of individualism, namely the relation and role of the individual in and for society, is pertinent to conceptualizing the workings of reform. Following Emersonian individualism, for example, would suggest that everyone is their own reformer. This way of thinking flows from both religious and secular traditions, ranging from Puritan self-reform to the ideology of self-reliance. It suggests that the most promising path to a better society is reforming oneself. The (auto-)biographical tradition referred to at the beginning of this introduction can clearly be placed within this line of thinking.[15] However, as much as this appears to run counter to the idea of organizing for the purpose of reform, numerous examples in U.S. history illustrate individualist reform zeal and cooperative action running parallel or even feeding into each other. For instance, the Second Great Awakening, with its focus on individual salvation helped spur many of the nineteenth-century social reform movements (Butler). Situated within a pluralistic U.S. religious landscape, several denominations used reforms to redirect their policies and to revitalize and evoke renewed commitment from their members. Thirdly, individual agency seems to sit uneasily with the intersectionality approach that positions historical actors within dominant power structures, as already mentioned above. While striving for change and developing visions of the future, actors within reform movements actively critique these formative structures and, by extension, consciously engage with their own biography, positionality, and that which they potentially perceive as the "other." Thus, the intersectionality lens, as

15 The tradition can also be linked to notions of self-fashioning and character-building (cf. Salazar), while economically it panders to the libertarian view of an over-individualist market and egoist consumption.

opposed to a more general look at social structures, provides a more sophisticated understanding of the way power structures and individual agency correlate in the historical dynamics shaping reform efforts.

In this special issue, Klopprogge analyzes how gendered and economic dimensions of motherhood for African American women affected their identity construction as well as their actions. Attempting to claim their position within the intersecting structures of race, class, and gender, however, could both empower and curtail political self-actualization. In turn, the construction of the very stereotypes Klopprogge's protagonists struggled against is laid open in Jansen's article. Through the prism of tax reform, he analyzes how the Nixon administration deliberately portrayed poverty as gendered and racialized. Set within the same historical moment (the Nixon presidency), Nyberg's contribution raises the question if by planning Soul City, different structural elements could be played up against each other and if, in this case, economic success could override racial discrimination. Arguably, though, in the 1970s, this was an option almost exclusively open to men.

In addition, both Langer and Nagel deal with protagonists whose decidedly masculinist and elitist identities are underscored by equally gendered professional contexts and social standing (rabbis and military experts, respectively). Langer sets out the fault lines within the American Jewish community that were not only gendered, but also ran along racial, class, and regional identities. American Jewry constitutes a religion and an ethnicity, balancing "the sincere desires for both full Americanism and group survival" (Levenson 350).[16] Reconstructionist Judaism was a second-generation immigration phenomenon, formulated in the 1920s by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, one of the protagonists Langer studies. Nagel interrogates the inner workings of the Eurocentric worldview his U.S. protagonists held, which is often taken as a structural given informed by colonialism and racism. By looking at the United States before its full emergence as a military power on the world stage, he traces a process of identity construction that looked to Europe as an organizational model but also as an ideological "other." Moreover, by differentiating between stadialist and essentialist strands of "othering" in the U.S. experts' views of Asia, Nagel highlights the difference of the agency / structure dichotomy.

This Special Issue: New Perspectives on Radicalism, Conservatism, and Intersectionality

Pursuing new perspectives on this "continuity of change," this special issue conceptualizes reform and reform movements beyond established dichotomies of progressive vs. reactionary, liberal vs. conservative, and radical vs. moderate, while extending the established periodization. It consciously engages with the challenges of analyzing social realities at the crosshair of a structural versus an agent-centered approach. The

16 On the topicality of debates on antisemitism and its connection to racism and gender, see the roundtable discussion in the 2020 issue of *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (Koffman et al.).

latter in particular brings into focus the importance of intersectionality in order to account for the complexity of reform movements in history.

Collectively, the contributors assembled here argue for a broader understanding of the concept of reform. Instead of a morality-centered approach operating from hindsight, they aim to highlight historical arguments, structural constitutions, and social contexts, as well as individual agency. Some of the essays are based on selected papers presented at the annual conference of the Historians of the German Association of American Studies on "Reform Movements in U.S. History" (February 2020); they are complemented by contributions solicited through an open call for papers. Hereby it was possible to bring together a variety of topics, approaches, and disciplines (historians, Americanists, sociologists) and to offer the opportunity to compare, juxtapose, and correlate reform movements. As discussed above, they all echo in the present; most notably in the United States in the anti-racist efforts and the negotiations over the (re-)distribution of wealth. At the same time, we are reminded of how transnational structures of diaspora (in this case, the Jewish) and geopolitical dynamics of anti-alien (here, specifically Anti-Asian) sentiment also shape domestic reform discourses.

Readers are invited to read this special issue not only as a collection of individual essays on a plethora of reform efforts from different time periods, but also to discover the way "reformers," "reform," and "reform movements" have created traditions of their own and shaped U.S. politics and culture. In both academic and popular history, certain decades are known for being particularly focused on change and improvement. Yet, while these were remarkable developments accelerated by industrialization, demographic change, economic upheaval, and geopolitical strategies, reform movements can be identified throughout the United States' past. This entails going beyond "classical" reform periods such as the Progressive Era between the 1870s and World War II, i. e., Hofstadter's "Age of Reform," or the 1960s, which, from his privileged position, Hofstadter rather dismissively called an "Age of Rubbish" when, in a 1970 *Newsweek* interview, he maintained that little actual change had been accomplished. Yet, the decade certainly can be described as a turning point. Moreover, beyond the resurgent conservatism, Simon Hall has convincingly argued that the 1960s ignited a "host of social movements that came to prominence after Nixon's election" (4). For instance, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign and the Welfare Rights Movements have informed debates on income and have furnished reference points for subsequent reform movements. Conceptualizing this period as a "long reform era" and a "hidden history"[17] of radicalism ties back to the discussion of the "waves" metaphor above. This special issue thus adds nuance to the rise-and-fall logic.

Additionally, the issue ties together rather established fields in the study of progressive reform movements (like social and racial justice) with strands and areas that so far have received less attention and that

17 See the title of the anthology by Berger. On continuities, see also Carroll; Tuck.

are usually considered "conservative" or even "anti-progressive" (like the Nixon administration, the military, or religious elites). Each of the contributions discusses reforms that operated within a framework of ideals grounded within U.S. history and culture. All of the historical actors studied here employed a rhetoric that cast reform as improvement driven by both societal and individual needs. Changes could be proposed by the government (as Jansen's paper explores for the Nixon White House), by government-related institutions (like the military in Nagel's article), by (political) organizations and lobby groups (as Klopprogge shows for the NAACP and the CPUSA and Nyberg analyzes with regard to Black Power), as well as by individuals, through working within respective social and organizational frameworks (as Breitenwischer examines for Frederick Douglass, and Langer shows for the two American rabbis, Mordecai Kaplan and Bernard Revel).

At the same time, the different contributions to the volume are interconnected through key themes and converging conceptual approaches as outlined above. The authors assembled here addressed two questions in particular: (1) How have reformers "imagined" or "constructed" the social and/or racial "other" and how did that impact their particular reform efforts? (2) How does intersectionality feature in reform (movements)? These questions are inextricably linked and the different articles in the special issue speak to this conviction.

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