realized that he was naked, he tried to hide himself even from God. Thus the need to hide was born with the world itself, and has come to be known as dissimulation."

People have a natural disposition to duplicity, Accetto continues, and only those who suffer from emotional conditions, such as excessive exuberance, melancholy, depression and anger, are unable to hide it and cannot profit from it. Quoting the Gospel of Matthew, the author urges his readers to "be astute as snakes and straightforward as doves." While Accetto recognizes that truth is beautiful he believes that its practice was possible only in the utopian Golden Age, which, he adds, was called "golden because it had no need of gold." But, after the expulsion from Eden, "he who does not know how to feign does not know how to live." Not only are dissimulation, duplicity and hypocrisy necessary in the world of fallen mankind, they are also a source of pleasure, "because when you win by ingenuity you feel happier." Thus, if one accepts dissimulation and feels comfortable with it, it will provide wealth, power and peace of mind. Accetto has little doubt that "dissimulation is the remedy that removes all evils."

Thus, when the first American colonists were reviving the Protestant practice of public confession, confident of the opportunities for human regeneration that a virgin continent offered those who wanted to break with the evils of the past, the Europeans were theorizing about how the acceptance of evil made life easier. This is perhaps part of the reason why Americans have always seemed like incorrigible idealists to Europeans, and Europeans as fallen evildoers to Americans.

The American faith in the redemption of mankind is unique among modern societies. It is the trademark of American exceptionalism that characterizes, both in success and in failure, so much of the American experiment. Only history will tell what the final outcome of this work in progress will be. But it certainly goes to America's credit that it wants to ameliorate the less noble features of human nature, even should the task in the end prove impossible.

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What's Right with Kansas

Stephanie Abbajay

America these days is a nation stalked by anxiety. One source of that creeping anxiety is the nagging suspicion that we're off the inked parts of destiny's map, and that, in the blank white spaces into which we have wandered, there is no point trying to seek out historical precedent to guide us forward. There's no point, either, in relying on obsolete ideological templates. We're all pragmatists now, President Obama not least among us. When the President said in his Inaugural Address that "The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works", he sounded the anthem of an era that has moved beyond flinging political labels as epithets. There's a lot to be said for pragmatism, especially if the alternative is some kind of dogmatism. But pragmatism in politics is not the absence of ideology; it's only the absence of self-aware ideology. It's a mistake to ignore precedent, and it's a mistake to dodge the task of discerning what our political principles—in particular, liberalism—actually mean in the current context.

Context really is critical. As most know, liberalism arose some centuries ago, mainly in Britain, as a form of anti-statism. Liberals opposed mercantilism and extortionary taxation, military impressment and property expropriation. Liberalism meant markets freed from government regulation, societies freed from officially mandated inequality. The context back then ensured that to be a liberal also meant, as John Stuart Mill so gracefully expressed it, to support rights for women and minorities, the abolition of slavery, and equal and due process for all. It thus meant the opposite of conservatism, which upheld autocracy and social inequality.

If we fast-forward to the 1960s and a bit beyond, we encounter a context in which American liberalism came to mean in many respects the

opposite of its namesake: expansive government, higher taxes, intrusive state programs of social engineering and greater centralization of political authority. Forty years ago, the anti-statist core of 19th-century liberalism was more convivial to Republicans than to Democrats, even though these Republicans were called conservatives despite the fact that America, founded as a liberal project, has never had a conservatism that favored autocracy and social inequality (aside from the elites of the antebellum, pro-slavery South). And so the recipe: Take two abstract terms, add one ocean and a century-and-a-half, shake well, and the terms come out upside-down.

We all know this, more or less. What we tend to forget, however, is that for the entire sprawling period between the effective end of Reconstruction and the effective beginning of the New Deal, liberalism in context fit neither of these descriptions. At the end of the 19th century, American liberalism was associated with populism, and William Jennings Bryan was its standard-bearer. But liberalism became more closely associated with the progressivism of Theodore Roosevelt , who was determined to shatter the plutocracy that characterized early-20th-century America. Roosevelt intended as a replacement a new order based on the idea that government's job is to *level* the playing field—neither to ignore it nor to seize control of it—and to enforce rules of economic and political engagement that encourage the broadest and fairest amount of democratic participation.

Roosevelt and the American people had an important ally in that struggle: a Kansas newspaper editor whose name and face were nearly as well known during his adult life as any President's. Once acknowledged as the unofficial spokesman for the then-new middle America, he has been all but forgotten since—alas, just when we middle Americans need him most.

The Liberal Moment

That now-unheralded man is William Allen White, born in 1868 in Emporia, Kansas. As a boy, he had an iconic American upbringing. He ran wild across prairies and swam in crystal clear streams. He saw Indians, buffalo and the Old West as it existed before anyone called it that. But the Kansas of his childhood was an idyll before the great change on the horizon. The new West, with its enormous post-Civil War influx into the Mississippi Valley and of course the railroad, which, along with industrialization, forever changed his self-sufficient little town and the rest of America with it. By 1880 a new era was underway. Gone were the tannery, the tailor, the hat makers and boot makers. Now things came ready made. Machinery began to dominate farms, mortgages and debt were new essentials, credit was easy, and those who owned the railroads, banks and new industries also controlled state and national politics.

White started reporting while in high school. In 1886, at the age of 18, he wrote his first editorial, eulogizing former presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden. In 1888 he became the editor of the *Lawrence Tribune* and decided it was time to choose a party affiliation. His mother was a Republican, his best friend was a Republican, the newspaper's owner was a Republican, and so, as he wrote in his *Autobiography*, he "crossed the Rubicon and became a Republican without deep conviction, purely as a means to an end."

White admits that, at the time, he was clueless about the raging political forces assembling behind his cloistered doors.

> Americans did not understand how their government was turning into a plutocracy. . . . No one but a lot of cranks—ex-Greenbackers, third party Prohibitionists and visionary socialists—complained. They were the ne'er-do-wells, the rag tag, the bobtail anyway. So who listened to them! . . . I was like all the rest of the world—hypnotized by its shimmering surface of false prosperity.

Sound familiar?

Not everyone was clueless. A groundswell of malcontents and reformers got together, and by 1892 the Populists had forged an alliance with the Democrats. White distilled the Populist agenda down to this:

> By their clamor against the trusts, by their demand that the railroads be regulated and that the currency be inflated, that an income tax be established . . . that inheritances be broken up . . . that a score of minor irritations against

> the common man be removed, these reformers were trying to use government as an agency for human welfare. They were trying . . . to establish economic as well as political equality.

White seemed to sympathize with the Populists' motives, though he recoiled at their exuberance, irreverence and political naivety. In 1895 White purchased his hometown paper, the *Emporia Gazette*, for the grand sum of $3,000. By then, he says, the political writing was on the wall and there could be no doubt that "the great public service corporations . . . the railways, the telephones, the banks, the insurance companies and the packing houses [had taken] charge of politics." America had become "a plutocratic republic."

In 1896 the Democrats and Populists nominated William Jennings Bryan to succeed Grover Cleveland. White later wrote glowingly of Bryan in both *Masks in a Pageant* (1928) and in his *Autobiography* (1946):

> Here was a new figure. . . . [A] man large enough to lead a national party had boldly and unashamedly made his cause that of the poor and oppressed. . . . It was the emergence into middle-class respectability of the revolution that had been smoldering for a quarter of a century in American politics.

But at the time, in 1896, White said that you couldn't walk the streets without getting into political arguments. Bryan's nomination electrified and polarized people. One day, the dandy White in a fine linen suit was accosted by a "rag-tag bunch of Populists" who argued with him, made fun of him and poked him with sticks. White stormed back to his office and wrote the piece for which he is probably most famous, "What's the Matter with Kansas?"

The editorial, which White later admitted was an unfair piece of vitriol and scorn, was an overheated, scorching attack on Bryan's liberal, Populist idea that if "you legislate to make the masses prosperous their prosperity will find its way up and through every class and rest upon them." To which White countered:

> That's the stuff! Give the prosperous man the dickens! Legislate the thriftless man into ease. . . [P]ut the lazy, greasy fizzle, who can't pay his debts, on the altar and bow down and worship him. . . . What we need is not the respect of our fellow men, but the chance to get something for nothing.

He called the Populists "gibbering idiots" motivated by envy who had not the slightest idea how to create wealth.

The editorial made White a star in the Republican firmament. Thousands of letters poured in, while wire services and newspapers from all over the world reprinted the piece. The Republican Party printed a million copies and used it as a circular. Bryan lost the 1896 election to William McKinley. White, the small-town newspaper publisher who was already a syndicated writer and best-selling author, was now a national figure and a darling of the plutocrats. But no plutocrat himself, White was about to match his own political intuition with a political bearing that fit him.

"What's the Matter with Kansas" (1896)
Masks in a Pageant (1928)
Autobiography (1946)
William Allen White

"Teddy Bit Me"

Two years later, White was in Washington on a book tour and to meet with McKinley when a White House aide told him that a young naval officer wanted to see him—a man named Theodore Roosevelt. The meeting would rock White to his core:

> I had never known such a man as he and shall never again. . . . [H]e poured into my heart such visions, such ideals, such hopes, such a new attitude toward life and patriotism and the meaning of things, as I had never dreamed men had.

Apparently, Teddy had him at hello. "Roosevelt bit me", White later wrote, "and I went mad." The two developed a fast and deep friendship, and White credits Roosevelt for single-handedly transforming his moral and political sentiments into defined political views. Roosevelt

had nothing but "scorn for McKinley and disgust for the plutocracy" that Mark Hanna, the Senator from Ohio and the Karl Rove of his day, was establishing in the land.

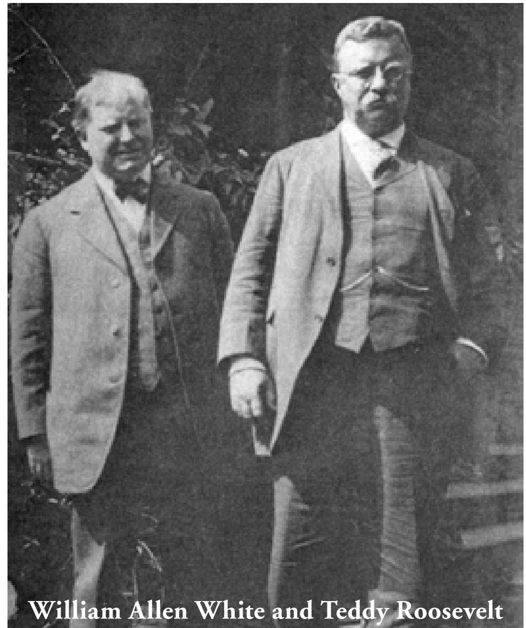
Just as Roosevelt's force and intellect changed White, Roosevelt was about to begin his rendezvous with greatness. Roosevelt soon won the Vice Presidential slot for McKinley's second term, and when McKinley was assassinated in 1901, he became President.

White understood that part of Roosevelt's political genius was that he was conspicuously cautious in his unelected first term, keeping his word to the Republican Party that he would honor McKinley's agenda. Still, bits and pieces of liberalism slipped through: the appointment of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. to the Supreme Court; an antitrust suit against the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern railroads; and greater discretion over political appointments, a dramatic change which allowed him to place higher caliber individuals in mid-level political positions. When Roosevelt was sworn in as President in March 1905 after having won election in his own right, he was no longer McKinley's successor, but

> a militant Liberal, ready to take the Liberal leadership of the world, to join the movement which was interested not in policies looking toward the accumulation of wealth, but rather policies which were looking to government as an agency of human welfare, which should enact laws and form a new tendency in the world—a tendency moving toward the equitable distribution of wealth. This policy regarded prosperity as an incident of life, emphasizing justice in human relations before prosperity.

Roosevelt followed Bryan rather than McKinley, and, as White wrote in the *Masks in a Pageant*, "every Conservative mind was shocked by his pronouncement."

When Roosevelt met opposition from Congressmen—and he did so at every turn—he took the fight directly to their home districts, right to the people, who invariably supported him. He was gunning for the popular heart, and his aim was true. Roosevelt "took away the magic of the cult of high priests, and turned America's heart from a solemn plutocracy to


William Allen White and Teddy Roosevelt

a rather noisy and aspiring democracy." Party lines broke down and a spirit of bipartisanship arose between Liberal Republicans, Populists and Democrats to enact major political and economic reforms.

> People were questioning the way every rich man got his money. . . . Some way into the hearts of the dominant middle class of this country had come a sense that their civilization needed recasting, that their government had fallen into the hands of the self-seekers.

Anybody hear an echo?

White wrote that TR's "list of accomplishments was not imposing, but viewed as a crusade for justice, it was revolutionary." He meant political reforms like the establishment of the direct primary, initiative and referendum in the states; conservation of public lands; "intelligent" control of the railroads; a shorter work day; strong antitrust laws accompanied by trust-busting, restoring competition in industry; the establishment of the Federal Trade Commission, the Food and Drug Administration and the Departments of Commerce and Labor; rural free delivery of mail; the Income Tax Amendment; Women's Suffrage; the Federal Reserve Act; and a sensible foreign policy ("Speak softly and carry a big stick").

But after the Taft Administration, the failure of the Bull Moose insurgency that White played

a major role in, and the election of Woodrow Wilson, White concluded that the jig was up. "The oppressed were not at that moment heavily oppressed", White writes, and Roosevelt turned down the 1916 presidential nomination from his own Bull Moose Party. Roosevelt would not run against Charles Evans Hughes, a good man who he believed would defeat Wilson if TR did not split the Republican vote, as had happened in 1912. Hughes narrowly lost.

After Roosevelt declined the nomination at the convention, White called his wife and "spent nine dollars and eighty-five cents bawling like a calf into the receiver. . . . It was the end of … the greatest adventure of my life." In White's view, the great and noble epoch of liberalism, begun in 1901, ended in 1917.

Yet despite war and political setbacks, liberalism had nevertheless taken hold, and White took heart. He supported Woodrow Wilson's progressive agenda, but not his racism. Indeed, White became a vocal critic of the Ku Klux Klan, whose popularity rose sharply in the 1920s not just in the Old South but in the Midwest as well. Withal, reforms had forced industry to change. Better working conditions, the eight-hour work day and other measures had been codified, and industry began to realize that if workers could not afford the goods they produced, there was little point in producing them. White described how business became satisfied with higher wages and lower prices as increased volume turned profits. Mass production distributed the products of industry, White wrote, "with much show of fairness."

Though a Republican, White disparaged the Republican Administrations from Harding to Coolidge to Hoover. He opposed them for their foreign policy of isolationism and their passivity in the face of corporate abuses, which he loathed. White then became a grudging admirer of FDR. In 1941 he wrote, "He has started us down so many roads that had long been blocked by an arrogant plutocracy that I cannot ask perfection and I am glad he came." Still, White, ever a party man, never brought himself to back FDR for President. His attitude is summed up well by a remark that greeted FDR's return from the February 1943 Casablanca Summit: "We who hate your gaudy guts salute you."

White's problem with FDR was not his heroism or internationalism, to be sure, but his role in distorting the liberalism White admired into a form of big government boosterism. Where Teddy established policies and procedures (and agencies and departments) for a level playing field, Franklin backed an agenda that was the governmental equivalent of, and goad to, the gigantism in American culture he despised. The breaking point for White between the liberalisms of the two Roosevelts was not whether the government *should* help, but *how* it should help:

> Where the Republican plan differs from the Democratic practice is in our promise that this Federal aid shall be administered by states, counties and cities . . . following local knowledge and wisdom. [Otherwise you] build up a great political machine centered in Washington and pay for it with waste and extravagance.

It's perhaps a kind of mercy that White passed away in January 1944, before he beheld his own prediction coming true. White was a small-town man who saluted small-town virtue and small-town common sense, and that was why middle America loved him the same way it loved Will Rogers. Not surprisingly, the two men knew and respected one another. Rogers had White in mind when he said, "Kansas has more real newspapermen than all the rest of the states combined." And White supported Rogers's 1928 tongue-in-cheek run for the White House on the Bunk Party ticket.

William Allen White lived through the most turbulent period of economic and political change in American history (at least until now). America was moving from an agrarian economy to an industrialized one. Political power and government shifted first toward and then away from plutocracy, as political and economic liberalism helped a new, empowered middle class emerge. White was present at the creation of modern 20th-century liberalism. Indeed, he had a ringside seat and threw some punches, too, in the great fight against the entrenched plutocracy and "to make government an agency of human welfare"—a phrase he repeated again and again in his writing. It was a movement whose subsequent failure, he wrote

during the New Deal, lay in trying to make government the *only* agency of human welfare.

There are two reasons why Americans would profit from reading White today. First, his is the incredibly entertaining story of a life well lived through decades of daunting change. He was a keen observer of his times and introduced his readers to the great people of the day—Theodore Roosevelt, William Jennings Bryan, Mark Hanna, General Douglas MacArthur, H.G. Wells, J.M. Barrie, Rudyard Kipling, Henry James, Mark Twain, Woodrow Wilson and Willa Cather among them. Thomas Hardy, too, of whom White wrote, "He had gorgeous blue eyes which opened sometimes like the lifting of a curfew." Certainly he was a prolific scribe, publishing thousands of editorials, essays and articles as well as 28 books, including his captivating Pulitzer Prize–winning *Autobiography of William Allen White* (published posthumously in 1946) and *Masks in a Pageant* (1928), his brilliant study of the political power players of his day.

That would be enough if it weren't for the fact that White offers an exhilarating study of the rise, and if not the fall then certainly marginalization, of what he called the Liberal movement. White thought of that movement as a way for America to live up to Jefferson's admonition, "Equal rights for all, special privileges for none." And right now, for a country that is struggling to find the right balance between safeguarding citizens' interests and ensuring economic prosperity, reading White works wonderfully as a primer on the parameters of a successful liberal agenda. If nothing else, it's a bracing reminder of what liberalism sought before it became a dirty word.

In White's view (and in practice), two things threaten liberalism, properly understood: corporate special interests and too much government. Put another way, liberalism is threatened both by too much Republican market fundamentalism and by too much Democratic meliorism. Excesses of the former give rise to excesses of the latter, if one is not careful. Since we were not, in fact, careful, one suspects that White would not have felt comfortable in either of the two major postwar Parties.

Would he feel any more comfortable today? Well, that depends. He probably would take a Republican view of the recently passed stimulus package, which, we have to remember, was a creature of congressional Democrats far more than it was one of the new Democratic President. White hated deficit spending and saw it as an evil with tentacles too numerous to count. But chances are good that he would take a benign view of a President who evidently understands the need for a delicate balance between managing the public interest and allowing capitalism to flourish. There is no blue sky between White and Obama in their determination that we must guard against letting corporate interests rule, lest government become an agency of the "the priests of prosperity" rather than an agency of the people.

I suspect that White would also agree with Robert Reich, who has written in *Supercapitalism* (2007) that government has ceded too much of its role to regulate the public interest, allowing instead the interests of wealth to rule with tax cuts, subsidies, deregulation, little or no oversight, and other economic incentives for business. White would no doubt conclude not that there wasn't enough liberalism, but rather that it's been of the wrong sort. Yes, we have a very big government, but fat lot of good it's done to protect us, at least economically. White would look around today and see a disturbing irony: a new kind of plutocracy and a bloated, ineffective government at the same time—the worst of both worlds.

Our current situation arguably presents us with an opportunity to restore the balance in America: between the Federal government and the states; between enough intervention to level the field but not so much as to swamp it; between individual freedom and social responsibility. William Allen White cannot give us a blueprint for how to do this, and we can't easily follow him back to the small-town virtues of Emporia, Kansas. But he can give us the faith to believe that, yes, it can be done.

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