



Henry George and the Crisis of Inequality: Progress and Poverty in the Gilded Age (Columbia History of Urban Life)

Edward T. O'Donnell

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The remarkable explosion of American industrial output and national wealth at the end of the nineteenth century was matched by a troubling rise in poverty and worker unrest. As politicians and intellectuals fought over who to blame for this crisis, Henry George (1839--1897) published *Progress and Poverty* (1879), a radical critique of laissez-faire capitalism and its threat to the nation's republican traditions. His book, which became a surprise best-seller, offered a popular, provocative solution: a single-tax on land values. George's writings and years of social activism almost won him the mayor's seat in New York City in 1886. Though he lost the election, his ideas proved instrumental to shaping a progressivism that remains essential to tackling inequality today.

Edward T. O'Donnell's exploration of George's life and times merges labor, ethnic, intellectual, and political history to illuminate the early militant labor movement in Gilded Age New York. O'Donnell locates in George's rise to prominence the beginning of a larger effort by American workers to regain control of the workplace and obtain economic security. The Gilded Age was the first but by no means last period in which Americans confronted the mixed outcomes of modern capitalism. George's accessible, forward-thinking ideas on democracy, equality, and freedom have tremendous value to ongoing debates over the future of unions, corporate power, Wall Street recklessness, regulation, and political polarization.

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