

7 Core Principles for a Progressive Post COVID-19 World



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7 Core Progressive Principles

A Uniting Crisis

Our society is so accustomed to conflict and arm wrestling over power or perceived advantage we can lose sight of what fundamentally matters. In the face of a new major threat brought to us in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic this has been no different. We have found ourselves arguing over how to organize logistics, treatments, and response timelines. We have even publicly debated the worth of the lives of our neighbors.



New life always begins with water. Most ideas are recycled just like all water.

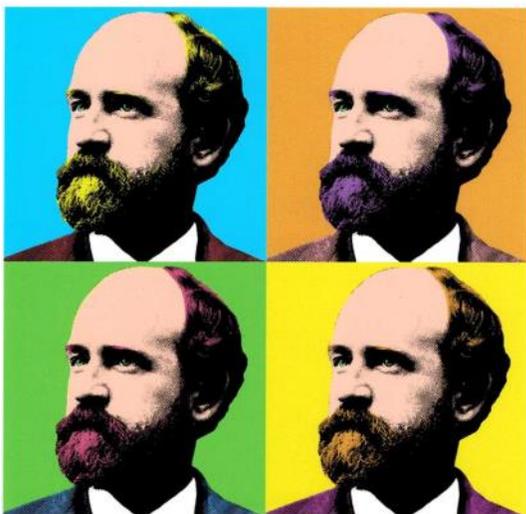
Whether conservative (keeping to tradition) or liberal (open to new ways) the pandemic challenges all comers. One can see the fear in each citizen alike, young and old, strong or weak, right or left. The virus knows no boundaries and cares naught for any divisions.

On top of this public health disaster we have seen an Economic disaster of unparalleled scope and depth take hold. With industries broadly forced to a halt and moderate worker support provided to over 20 million unemployed we may be entering a staggering and lengthy downturn.

A Way Forward from the Past

This leads us to consider a few key principles which have helped drive the United States to success in the past and continue to do so today. The selection here all come from Henry George (1839-1897) who was one of the most widely read Political Economists of the 19th century and continued to have significant influence into the 20th century and even today.

These principles were defined in detail in George's master work "**Progress and Poverty**" published in 1879 and can be agreed to by many and furthered strengthened to improve the climb out of our current economic condition and improve our post crisis societal challenges.



A portrait of Henry George

The Principles

1. **Support of Women's Suffrage:** *"If we must have two houses of Congress, then by all means let us fill one with women and the other with men."* Here, Henry George was writing 140 years ago cleverly demonstrating the advocacy of a form of equal rights which is something our society still pursues and which will be required if we hope to fully rebuild the economy fairly for all after the crisis.
2. **Secret Ballots:** As amazing as it may sound, there was a time when voting did not necessarily mean voting secretly. Henry George was a pioneering advocate for Secret Ballots in the United States believing that this provided an honest accounting for the election process. Again we not only owe a debt to him for his work on this, however, the parallel in our world today is the continuing fight of providing voting rights to all and to have every vote fairly counted in our democracy to be able to rebuild after this crisis. Lastly, George

fought against undue financial influence money in elections foreshadowing the movements of today.

3. **Opposition to Protectionism:** In this case George aligned himself to the traditional free marketer or what we might call conservative economist and industrialist views of today or at least leading up to just a few years ago. The US thrived in an environment of unilateral and globalist open markets which promoted free trade and did not give monopolists a hiding place for decades. Also, since the cost of tariffs are borne by consumers such approaches are inherently regressive and anti-worker and middleclass by keeping prices artificially high. As we come into the future state economy the damaging tariff regime which has been put in place of late and the destructive unilateralism needs to be reversed to allow business to thrive and support job creation.

4. **Protection of Natural Monopolies:** A fundamental belief in George's outlook

related to how common elements were to be a benefit to society and not usurped by private means without due charges. Thus, public utilities would be provided at marginal cost or even free rates and underwritten by what is known as a land value tax (see below). An excellent example of this from our current environment is Internet access. Why is it that during the pandemic lockdown nearly half of school children went home and could not attend online classes as they had no computers or network access? For wealthy children this was not a restriction. In the future society we want to build should not every child in NYC and in the hills of Kentucky have access to the same world class lecture?

5. **Intellectual Property Rights:** In an unusual twist George also took the position that creative work fell into the common pool and should not be restricted. Thus, patents should not be profited upon in the way that they are currently. Since the US is built on an innovation engine this is a somewhat radical

concept. However, when considered in the light of the pandemic perhaps this is highly enlightened thinking. Here we are in a situation where all of our lives depend on the discovery and deployment of medicines and vaccines. Do we want those solutions to be trapped inside the hands of one technical provider? Perhaps in certain cases for the good of society we want those solutions to be shared immediately at zero cost. Naturally, there should be some means of compensating for the R&D investment and reasonable revenue from sales but not from undue profiteering. Did George also hit on something useful here for our future?

6. **Citizen's Dividend:** George was a proponent of the establishment of a pension and disability system for Americans. This was also proposed by Thomas Paine. Recently this has come back into vogue and is now called the Universal Basic Income. Many people immediately launch into

various critiques of this approach but there are sound benefits to be derived from this method. In our current economic distress, the UBI or Citizen's Dividend, actually becomes an extremely necessary and attractive tool in stabilizing the country. In fact, Congress is considering exactly such an approach right now. The only difficulty is that their



funding mechanism would be to generate more deficit spending. For Henry George there was a much better financial solution to this problem which we come to now.

7. **Single Tax – Georgism:** Saving the best for last in many ways we look at the Land Value Tax (LVT) or the Single Tax solution. The concept is that land (and common natural property such as radio bandwidth) is in fact

commonly held by all and used only by some at any given time. For those people they pay for the right (a tax). They may maintain this right for an exceptionally long time. Eliminating all other forms of taxes and only instituting an LVT allows municipalities and governments to meet their current and future budget requirements with moderate tax ratios. In the case of NYC, a 5.98% LVT can yield the full \$90B annual city revenue needs for 2019. A 15% tax rate for the US would cover its \$3.4T revenue needs for 2019. With only manageable increased rates for example UBI could be supported. Furthermore, this approach improves productive land utilization and reduces real estate speculation which causes economic boom and bust cycles. These methods have been used in certain jurisdictions in the US and overseas most notably in Singapore.

Discussion

Considering the massive scale of the economic damage already witnessed

in the first part of 2020 as well as the emotional strain inflicted on average people going through the stress of the pandemic, potentially suffering human loss and illness, possibly out of work, and unsure of the future, it is reassuring to hear a voice from our American past who has seen some of the same problems before and who actually took the time to construct a road map for us to follow on how to move forward together.

Amazingly, many of the 7 principles are actually already core parts of our society and the fabric of our democracy and economy due to the fact that George fought so diligently for each one of them and they resonated at the time with people of many stripes within the country. Many are even generally accepted today on both the left and the right. Perhaps we can look at these concepts afresh and consider whether we still believe in voting rights, free trade, helping people in times of need, and trying something new (like LVT) even if it is coming to us from the same year that the light bulb was invented. Maybe some things just take time for the light to circle around.

**Progressive means
Progress and America
needs Progress to
Recover**



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