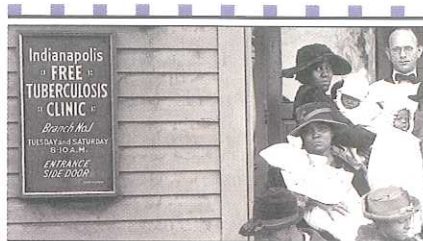


21



THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

1900–1917



WHAT WAS the nature of progressivism?



WHAT ROLE did women play in Progressive Era movements?



HOW DID electoral and municipal reforms improve voting and government during the Progressive Era?

HOW WAS the executive branch strengthened under Roosevelt?

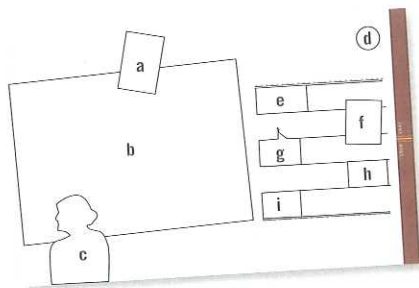


HOW DID Woodrow Wilson bring progressivism to its climax?



IMAGE KEY

for pages 546–547



- a. "The Jungle" by Upton Sinclair cover featuring a factory.
- b. Photo of Women's suffrage parade in D.C., 1913.
- c. Dorothy Newell has Votes for Women written on her back.
- d. Bull Moose party campaign paraphernalia.
- e. Flanner House Baby Clinic, about 1918. The old Flanner house Building on Colton Street was soon abandoned for better quarters.
- f. Illustration "A WOMAN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE".
- g. Detail of photo of Women's suffrage parade in D.C., 1913.
- h. American cartoon showing President Theodore Roosevelt slaying those trusts he considered 'bad' for the public interest while restraining those whose business practices he considered 'good' for the country.
- i. Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924). Oil on canvas.

Five thousand women, marching in the woman suffrage pageant yesterday, practically fought their way foot by foot up Pennsylvania avenue, through a surging mass of humanity that completely defied the Washington police, swamped the marchers, and broke their procession into little companies. The women, trudging stoutly along under great difficulties, were able to complete their march only when troops of cavalry from Fort Myer were rushed into Washington to take charge of Pennsylvania avenue. No inauguration has ever produced such scenes, which in many instances amounted to little less than riots. . . .

The parade in itself, in spite of the delays, was a great success. . . . As a spectacle the pageant was entrancing. Beautiful women, posing in classic robes, passed in a bewildering array, presenting an irresistible appeal to the artistic, and completely captivating the hundred thousand spectators who struggled for a view along the entire route.

Miss Margaret Foley, bearing aloft a large "Votes for Women" flag, and Mrs. G. Farquhar, carrying an American flag, led the procession. . . . After the float reading, "We Demand an Amendment to the United States Constitution Enfranchising the Women of This Country," came a body of ushers clad in light blue capes. . . . Two large floats . . . represented the countries in which women are working for equal rights, followed by a large body of women on foot dressed in street clothes, who bore the banners and pennants of scores of suffrage associations throughout the world. . . . The Homemakers . . . were dressed in long purple robes over their street clothes. Following them came a float, "In Patriotic Service," . . . and Miss Lillian Wald, the walking leader of a large body of women who followed the float, dressed as trained nurses, with gray caps and coats.

Miss Margaret Gage and Maurice Cohen, wearing college gowns with mortar boards, represented "Education," which was followed by nearly 1,000 women of the college section. . . . A group of young girls in blue capes represented the wage-earners, followed by "A Labor Story," which depicted the crowded condition of tenements, with women and children bending over sewing machines, dirty and disheveled, in squalid quarters. . . . [Then followed] the women in the government section, all wearing light blue capes, . . . the business women, dressed in similar manner. . . . the teachers, . . . the social workers, . . . the white and pink costumed delegation of "writers," . . . club women and women clergy.

The greatest ovation was given to "General" Rosalie Jones, who led her little band of hikers from New York over rough roads and through snow and rain to march for the "cause." . . .

But there were hostile elements in the crowd through which the women marched. . . . Passing through two walls of antagonistic humanity, the marchers for the most part kept their temper. They suffered insult and closed their ears to jibes and jeers. Few faltered, although several of the older women were forced to drop out from time to time.

The pageant moved up Pennsylvania avenue with great difficulty and surrounded with some danger: Crowds surged into the streets, completely over-



whelming the police and stopping the pageant's progress. Mounted police charged into the crowds, but failed at times to drive them back, even with the free use of clubs. In more than an hour the pageant had moved only ten blocks.

Miss Inez Milholland, a New York society girl, mounted on her white horse and dressed as a herald, finally rode up beside a mounted policeman, and helped charge the crowd. Miss Milholland gesticulated and shouted at the crowd and rode her horse into it with good effect. . . .

When the surging multitude was driven back in one place it flowed back into the street at another. The pageant slowly moved along, sometimes not more than a dozen feet at a time. . . .

As a result of the unruly spirit of the biggest crowd that ever witnessed a parade on Pennsylvania avenue, or of the inactivity of the police, who seemed powerless to protect the marching suffragists, the Emergency Hospital last night was filled to overflowing. . . . While an automobile and ambulance and horse-drawn vehicle ran back and forth, with all the surgeons in the institution taking turns at riding on it, people who had fainted or been overcome by exhaustion, or crushed and trampled, were brought to the hospital.

Washington Post, March 4, 1913.

INEZ MILHOLLAND'S charge and the jumbled news accounts in the *Washington Post* convey the intensity of the woman suffrage parade on March 3, 1913. The women's difficult journey down Pennsylvania Avenue that day, illustrated critical features of life in the **Progressive Era**.

Important movements challenged traditional relationships and attitudes—here involving women's role in American life—and often met resistance. “Progressives” seeking reforms organized their supporters across lines of class, education, occupation, geography, gender, and, at times, race and ethnicity—as the variety of groups in the suffrage parade demonstrated. Rather than rely on traditional partisan politics, reformers adopted new political techniques, including lobbying and demonstrating, as nonpartisan pressure groups. Reform work begun at the local and state levels—where the suffrage movement had already met some success—inexorably moved to the national level as the federal government expanded its authority and became the focus of political interest. Finally, this suffrage demonstration revealed the diversity of the progressive movement, for the women marched, in part, against Woodrow Wilson, a fellow progressive.

Progressivism had no unifying organization, central leadership, or consensus on objectives. Instead, it represented the coalescing of different and even contradictory movements that sought changes in the nation's social, economic, and political life. But reformers did share certain convictions. They believed that to correct the disorders that industrialization and urbanization had produced required new ideas and methods. They rejected the ideology of individualism in favor of broader concepts of social responsibility, and they sought to achieve social order through organization and efficiency. Finally, most progressives believed that government itself, as the agent of public responsibility, should address social and economic problems.

The interaction among the reformers and the conflict with their opponents made the two decades before World War I a period of ferment and excitement. The progressives' achievements and failures profoundly shaped America.

Progressive Era An era in the United States (roughly between 1900 and 1917) in which important movements challenged traditional relationships and attitudes.



WHAT WAS the nature of progressivism?

THE FERMENT OF REFORM

The diversity of progressivism reflected the diverse impulses of reform. Clergy and professors provided new ideas to guide remedial action. Journalists exposed corporate excesses and government corruption and stirred public demand for reform. Business leaders sought to curtail disorder through efficiency and regulation, while industrial workers struggled to improve the horrible conditions in which they worked and lived. Women organized to protect their families and homes from new threats and even to push beyond such domestic issues. Nearly every movement for change encountered fierce opposition, while also helping America grapple with the problems of industrial society. (See the overview table “Major Progressive Organizations and Groups.”)

THE CONTEXT OF REFORM: INDUSTRIAL AND URBAN TENSIONS

The origins of progressivism lay in the crises of the new urban-industrial order that emerged in the late nineteenth century. The severe depression and consequent mass suffering of the 1890s, the labor violence and industrial armies, the political challenges of Populism and an ineffective government shattered the complacency many middle-class Americans had felt about their nation and made them aware of social and economic inequities that rural and working-class families had long recognized.

By 1900, a returning prosperity had eased the threat of major social violence, but the underlying problems intensified. Big business, which had disrupted traditional economic relationships in the late nineteenth century, suddenly became bigger in a series of mergers between 1897 and 1903. Giant corporations threatened to squeeze opportunities for small firms and workers, dominate markets, and raise social tensions. They also inspired calls for public control.

Most workers still toiled nine to ten hours a day; steelworkers and textile employees usually worked twelve-hour shifts. Wages were minimal; an economist in 1905 calculated that 60 percent of all adult male breadwinners made less than a living wage. Family survival, then, often required women and children to work, often in the lowest paid, most exploited positions. Southern cotton mills employed children as young as 7; coal mines paid 12-year-old slate pickers 39 cents for a ten-hour day. Dangerous work environments and an absence of safety programs threatened not only workers’ health but their lives as well. In 1911 a fire killed 146 workers, most of them young women, trapped inside the factory of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York, because management had locked the exits. The fire chief found “skeletons bending over sewing machines.” The United States had the highest rate of industrial accidents in the world. Half a million workers were injured and thirty thousand killed at work each year. These terrible conditions cried out for reform.

Other Americans saw additional social problems in the continuing flood of immigrants who were transforming America’s cities. From 1900 to 1917, more than 14 million immigrants entered the United States, and most became urban dwellers. By 1910, immigrants and their children comprised more than 70 percent of the population of New York, Chicago, Buffalo, Milwaukee, and other cities. Most of the arrivals were so-called new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, rather than the British, Irish, Germans, and Scandinavians who had arrived earlier. Crowding into urban slums, immigrants overwhelmed municipal sanitation, education, and fire protection services. One Russian described his new life as “all filth and sadness.”



WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- ★ National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

QUICK REVIEW

Triangle Shirtwaist Fire

- ◆ 1911: Fire kills 146 workers.
- ◆ Managers had locked the exits.
- ◆ The United States had the highest rate of industrial accidents in the world.



WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- ★ Lowell National Historic Park, Lowell, Massachusetts
www.nps.gov/lowe/



OVERVIEW

MAJOR PROGRESSIVE ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS

Group	Activity
Social Gospel movement	Urged churches and individuals to apply Christian ethics to social and economic problems
Muckrakers	Exposed business abuses, public corruption, and social evils through investigative journalism
Settlement House movement	Attempted through social work and public advocacy to improve living and working conditions in urban immigrant communities
National Consumers' League (1898)	Monitored businesses to ensure decent working conditions and safe consumer products
Women's Trade Union League (1903)	United workingwomen and their middle-class "allies" to promote unionization and social reform
National Child Labor Committee (1904)	Campaigned against child labor
Country Life movement	Attempted to modernize rural social and economic conditions according to urban-industrial standards
National American Woman Suffrage Association	Led the movement to give women the right to vote
Municipal reformers	Sought to change the activities and structure of urban government to promote efficiency and control
Conservationists	Favored efficient management and regulation of natural resources rather than uncontrolled development or preservation

Ethnic prejudices abounded. Woodrow Wilson, then president of Princeton University, declared in 1902: "The immigrant newcomers of recent years are men of the lowest class from the South of Italy, and men of the meaner sort out of Hungary and Poland, men out of the ranks where there was neither skill nor energy, nor any initiative or quick intelligence." Americans of the Old Stock often considered the predominantly Catholic and Jewish newcomers a threat to social stability and cultural identity and so demanded programs to reform either the urban environment or the immigrants themselves.

CHURCH AND CAMPUS

Many groups, drawing from different traditions and inspirations, responded to such economic and social issues. Reform-minded Protestant ministers created the **Social Gospel movement**, which sought to introduce religious ethics into industrial relations and appealed to churches to meet their social responsibilities. Washington Gladden, a Congregational minister in Columbus, Ohio, was shocked in 1884 by a bloody strike crushed by wealthy members of his own congregation. Gladden began a ministry to working-class neighborhoods that most churches ignored. He endorsed unions and workers' rights and proposed replacing a cruelly competitive wage system with profit sharing.

Social Gospel Movement Movement created by reform-minded Protestant ministers seeking to introduce religious ethics into industrial relations and appealing to churches to meet their social responsibilities.



CHRONOLOGY

<p>1893–1898 Depression grips the nation.</p> <p>1898 South Dakota adopts initiative and referendum. National Consumers' League is organized.</p> <p>1900 Robert La Follette is elected governor of Wisconsin.</p> <p>1901 United States Steel Corporation is formed, the world's largest business at the time. President William McKinley is assassinated; Theodore Roosevelt becomes president. Socialist Party of America is organized. Galveston, Texas, initiates the city commission plan.</p> <p>1902 Antitrust suit is filed against Northern Securities Company. Mississippi enacts the first direct primary law. National Reclamation Act is passed. Roosevelt intervenes in coal strike.</p> <p>1903 Women's Trade Union League is organized.</p> <p>1904 National Child Labor Committee is formed. Roosevelt is elected president.</p> <p>1905 Industrial Workers of the World is organized.</p> <p>1906 Hepburn Act strengthens the Interstate Commerce Commission.</p>	<p>Meat Inspection Act extends government regulation. Pure Food and Drug Act is passed.</p> <p>1908 <i>Muller v. Oregon</i> upholds maximum workday for women. William Howard Taft is elected president.</p> <p>1910 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is organized. Ballinger-Pinchot controversy erupts.</p> <p>1912 Children's Bureau is established. Progressive Party organizes and nominates Roosevelt. Woodrow Wilson is elected president.</p> <p>1913 Sixteenth and Seventeenth Amendments are ratified. Underwood-Simmons Tariff Act establishes an income tax. Federal Reserve Act creates the Federal Reserve System.</p> <p>1914 Federal Trade Commission is established. Harrison Act criminalizes narcotics.</p> <p>1915 National Birth Control League is formed.</p> <p>1916 Keating-Owen Act prohibits child labor.</p> <p>1917 Congress enacts literacy test for immigrants.</p> <p>1920 Nineteenth Amendment is ratified.</p>
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Social Gospeler Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist minister, argued in his book *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907) that Christians should support social reform to alleviate poverty, slums, and labor exploitation. He attacked low wages for transforming workers “into lean, sallow, hopeless, stupid, and vicious young people, simply to enable some group of stockholders to earn 10 percent.”

The Social Gospel movement flowered mainly among certain Protestant denominations, especially Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Methodists. It climaxed in 1908 in the formation of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. The council, representing thirty-three religious groups, adopted a program that endorsed welfare and regulatory legislation to achieve social justice. By linking reform with religion (as “applied Christianity,” in the words of Washington Gladden), the Social Gospel movement gave progressivism a powerful moral drive that affected much of American life.

The Social Gospel movement provided an ethical justification for government intervention to improve the social order. Scholars in the social sciences such as Lester Ward also called for social progress through rational planning and government intervention rather than through unrestrained and unpredictable competition. Economists rejected laissez-faire principles in favor of state action to accomplish social evolution. Industrialization, declared economist Richard T. Ely, “has brought to the front a vast number of social problems whose solution is impossible without the united efforts of church, state, and science.”



MUCKRAKERS

Journalists also spread reform ideas by developing a new form of investigative reporting known as **muckraking**. Samuel S. McClure sent his reporters to uncover political and corporate corruption for *McClure's Magazine*. Sensational exposés sold magazines, and soon *Cosmopolitan*, *Everybody's*, and other journals began publishing investigations of business abuses, dangerous working conditions, and the miseries of slum life.

Muckraking articles aroused indignant public demands for reform. Lincoln Steffens detailed the corrupt links between “respectable” businessmen and crooked urban politicians in a series of articles called “The Shame of the Cities.” Ida Tarbell revealed John D. Rockefeller’s sordid construction of Standard Oil. Muckraking novels also appeared. *The Octopus* (1901) by Frank Norris dramatized the Southern Pacific Railroad’s stranglehold on California’s farmers, and *The Jungle* (1906) by Upton Sinclair exposed nauseating conditions in Chicago’s meatpacking industry.

THE GOSPEL OF EFFICIENCY

Many progressive leaders believed that efficiency and expertise could control or resolve the disorder of industrial society. President Theodore Roosevelt (1901–1909) praised the “gospel of efficiency.” Like many other progressives, he admired corporations’ success in applying management techniques to guide economic growth. Drawing from science and technology as well as from the model of the corporation, many progressives attempted to manage or direct change efficiently. They used scientific methods to collect extensive data and relied on experts for analysis and recommendations. “Scientific management” seemed the key to eliminating waste and inefficiency in government, society, and industry. Rural reformers thought that “scientific agriculture” could bring prosperity to the impoverished Southern countryside; urban reformers believed that improvements in medical science and the professionalization of physicians through uniform licensing standards could eradicate the cities’ wretched public health problems.

Industrialists were drawn to the ideas of Frederick Taylor, a proponent of scientific management. Taylor proposed to increase worker efficiency through imposed work routines, speedups, and mechanization. Workers, Taylor insisted, should “do what they are told promptly and without asking questions. . . . It is absolutely necessary for every man in our organization to become one of a train of gear wheels.” By assigning workers simple and repetitive tasks on machines, Taylorization made their skills expendable and enabled managers to control the production, pace of work, and hiring and firing of personnel. When labor complained, one business leader declared that unions failed “to appreciate the progressivism of the age.”

Sophisticated managers of big business combinations favored government regulations that could bring about safer and more stable conditions in society and the economy. Government regulations, they reasoned, could reassure potential consumers, open markets, mandate working conditions that smaller competitors could not provide, or impose systematic procedures that competitive pressures would otherwise undercut.

LABOR’S DEMAND FOR RIGHTS

Industrial workers with different objectives also hastened the ferment of reform. Workers resisted the new rules of efficiency experts and called for improved wages and working conditions and reduced work hours. They and their middle-class

QUICK REVIEW

Scientific Management

- ◆ Progressive leaders praised the “gospel of efficiency.”
- ◆ Promoted application of scientific management to government, society, and industry.
- ◆ Saw application of scientific method as the key to reform.

Muckraking Journalism exposing economic, social, and political evils, so named by Theodore Roosevelt for its “raking the muck” of American society.



sympathizers sought to achieve some of these goals through state intervention, demanding laws to compensate workers injured on the job, curb child labor, and regulate the employment of women. After the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, for example, urban politicians with working-class constituencies created the New York State Factory Commission and enacted dozens of laws dealing with fire hazards, machine safety, and wages and hours for women.

Workers also organized unions to improve their lot. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) claimed 4 million members by 1920, but it recruited mainly skilled workers, particularly native-born white males. New unions organized the factories and sweatshops where most immigrants and women worked. Despite strong employer resistance, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (1900) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (1914) organized the garment trades, developed programs for social and economic reforms, and led their members—mostly young Jewish and Italian women—in spectacular strikes. The “Uprising of the 20,000,” a 1909 strike in New York City, included months of massive rallies, determined picketing, and police repression. One observer marveled at the women strikers’ “emotional endurance, fearlessness, and entire willingness to face danger and suffering.”

A still more radical union tried to organize miners, lumberjacks, and Mexican and Japanese farm workers in the West, black dockworkers in the South, and immigrant factory hands in New England. Founded in 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), whose members were known as “**Wobblies**,” used sit-down strikes, sit-ins, and mass rallies, tactics adopted by other industrial unions in the 1930s and the civil rights movement in the 1960s. “Respectable people” considered the Wobblies violent revolutionaries, but most of the violence was committed against them.

EXPANDING THE WOMAN’S SPHERE

Women reformers and their organizations played a key role in progressivism. By the early twentieth century, more women than before were working outside the home—in the factories, mills, and sweatshops of the industrial economy and as clerks in stores and offices. In 1910, more than a fourth of all workers were women, increasing numbers of them married. Their importance in the work force and participation in unions and strikes challenged assumptions that woman’s “natural” role was to be a submissive housewife.

Often founded for cultural purposes, women’s clubs soon began adopting programs for social reform and gave their members a route to public influence. In 1914, an officer of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs proudly declared that she could not find a cause for social reform that “has not received a helpful hand from the clubwomen.”

Women also joined or created other organizations that pushed beyond the limits of traditional domesticity. By threatening healthy and happy homes, urban problems required that women become “social housekeepers” in the community. The National Congress of Mothers, organized in 1897, worried about crime and disease and championed kindergartens, foster-home programs, juvenile courts, and compulsory school attendance. Led by the crusading Florence Kelley, the National Consumers’ League tried to protect both women wage earners and middle-class housewives by monitoring stores and factories to ensure decent working conditions and safe products. The Women’s Trade Union League, or WTUL, united working women and their self-styled middle-class “allies” to unionize women workers and eliminate sweatshop conditions. Its greatest success came in the 1909 garment workers’ strike when the allies—dubbed by one worker the “mink brigade”—assisted strikers with relief funds, bail money, food supplies, and public relations campaign.

Wobblies Popular name for the members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).



Although most progressive women stressed women's special duties and responsibilities as social housekeepers, others began to demand women's equal rights. In 1914, for example, critics of New York's policy of dismissing women teachers who married formed a group called the Feminist Alliance and demanded "the removal of all social, political, economic and other discriminations which are based upon sex, and the award of all rights and duties in all fields on the basis of individual capacity alone."

TRANSATLANTIC INFLUENCES

A major source of America's progressive impulse lay outside its borders. European nations were grappling with many of the same problems that stemmed from industrialization and urbanization, and they provided guidance and possible solutions. As one American observer said in 1915. What "the men and women who call themselves progressive . . . propose to do is to bring the United States abreast of Germany and other European countries in the matter of remedial legislation." Progressive reformers soon learned that the political, economic, and social structures of America required modifying, adapting, or even abandoning these imported ideas, but their influence was obvious.

International influences were particularly strong in the Social Gospel movement, symbolized by William T. Stead, a British social evangelist, whose idea of a "Civic Church" (a partnership of churches and reformers) captured great attention in the United States.

Muckrakers not only exposed American problems but also looked for foreign solutions. *McClure's* sent Ray Stannard Baker to Europe in 1900 "to see why Germany is making such progress."

Institutional connections also linked progressives with European reformers. By 1912, American consumer activists, trade unionists, factory inspectors, and feminists participated in international conferences on labor legislation, child welfare, social insurance, and housing reform and returned home with new ideas and strategies. State governments organized commissions to analyze European policies and agencies for lessons that might be applicable in the United States.

SOCIALISM

The growing influence of socialist ideas also promoted the spirit of progressivism. Socialists never attracted a large following, even among workers, but their criticism of the industrial economy gained increasing attention in the early twentieth century. American socialists condemned social and economic inequities, criticized limited government, and demanded public ownership of railroads, utilities, and communications. They also campaigned for tax reforms, better housing, factory inspections, and recreational facilities for all. Muckrakers like Lincoln Steffens and Upton Sinclair were committed socialists, as were some Social Gospel ministers and labor leaders, but the most prominent socialist was Eugene Debs. In 1901, Debs helped organize the Socialist Party of America. In the next decade, the party won many local elections, especially in Wisconsin and New York, where it drew support from German and Russian immigrants, and in Oklahoma, among poor tenant farmers. Socialism was also promoted by newspapers and magazines, including the *Appeal to Reason* in Girard, Kansas, which had a circulation of 500,000 by 1906.

WHAT ROLE did

immigrants and women play in Progressive-Era movements?

Striking garment workers and their supporters in the 1909 "Uprising" in New York City. Working women and their allies contributed to the growing pressure for improved working conditions.

Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations.





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Eugene V. Debs, “The Outlook for Socialism in the United States” (1900)

Most progressives considered socialist ideas too drastic. Nevertheless, socialists contributed to the reform ferment, by providing support for reform initiatives and by prompting progressives to push for changes to undercut increasingly attractive radical alternatives.

OPPONENTS OF REFORM

Not all Americans supported progressive reforms, and many people regarded as progressives on some issues opposed change in other areas. Social Gospeler Rauschenbusch, for instance, opposed expanding women’s rights. More typically, opponents of reform held consistently traditional attitudes.

Social Gospelers themselves faced opposition. Particularly strong among evangelical denominations with rural roots, **Protestant fundamentalists** stressed personal salvation rather than social reform. “To attempt reform in the black depths of the great city,” said one, “would be as useless as trying to purify the ocean by pouring into it a few gallons of spring water.” The most famous evangelist was Billy Sunday, who scorned all reforms but prohibition and denounced labor unions, women’s rights, and business regulation as interfering with traditional values. Declaring that the Christian mission was solely to save individual souls, he condemned the Social Gospel as “godless social service nonsense” and attacked its advocates as “infidels and atheists.”

Business interests angered by exposés of corporate abuse and corruption attacked muckrakers. Major corporations like Standard Oil created public relations bureaus to improve their image and to identify business, not its critics, with the public interest. Advertising boycotts discouraged magazines from running critical stories, and credit restrictions forced some muckraking journals to suspend publication. By 1910, the heyday of muckraking was over.

Labor unions likewise encountered resistance. Led by the National Association of Manufacturers, business groups denounced unions as corrupt and radical, hired thugs to disrupt them, organized strikebreaking agencies, and used blacklists to eliminate union activists. The antiunion campaign peaked in Ludlow, Colorado, in 1914. John D. Rockefeller’s Colorado Fuel and Iron Company used the state militia to shoot striking workers and their families. The courts aided employers by issuing injunctions against strikes and prohibited unions from using boycotts, one of their most effective weapons.

Progressives campaigning for government intervention and regulation also met stiff resistance. Many Americans objected to what they considered unwarranted interference in private economic matters. Their political representatives were called the “Old Guard,” implying their opposition to political and economic change. The courts often supported these attitudes. In *Lochner v. New York* (1905), the Supreme Court overturned a maximum-hours law on the grounds that it deprived employers and employees of their “freedom of contract.” Progressives constantly had to struggle with such opponents, and progressive achievements were limited by the persistence and influence of their adversaries.

QUICK REVIEW

Opponents of Reform

- ◆ Protestant fundamentalists.
- ◆ Business interests.
- ◆ Anti-union forces.

Protestant Fundamentalists

Religious conservatives who believe in the literal accuracy and divine inspiration of the Bible.

HOW DID the Progressives reform Society?

REFORMING SOCIETY

With their varied motives and objectives, progressives worked to transform society by improving living conditions, educational opportunities, family life, and social and industrial relations. They sought what they called “social justice,” but their plans for social reform sometimes also smacked of social control—coercive efforts to impose uniform standards on a diverse population.



SETTLEMENT HOUSES AND URBAN REFORM

The spearheads for social reform were settlement houses, community centers in urban immigrant neighborhoods. Reformers created four hundred settlement houses, largely modeled after Hull House in Chicago, founded in 1889 by Jane Addams.

Most settlements were led and staffed primarily by middle-class young women. Settlement work did not immediately violate prescribed gender roles because it initially focused on the “woman’s sphere”: family, education, domestic skills, and cultural “uplift.” Thus settlement workers organized kindergartens and nurseries; taught classes in English, cooking, and personal hygiene; held musical performances and poetry readings; and sponsored recreation.

However, settlement workers soon saw that the root problem for immigrants was widespread poverty that required more than changes in individual behavior. Unlike earlier reformers, they regarded many of the evils of poverty as products of the social environment rather than of moral weakness. Slum dwellers, Addams sadly noted, suffered from “poisonous sewage, contaminated water, infant mortality, adulterated food, smoke-laden air, juvenile crime, and unwholesome crowding.” Thus settlement workers campaigned for stricter building codes to improve slums, better urban sanitation systems to enhance public health, public parks to revive the urban environment, and laws to protect women and children.

Lawrence Veiller played the leading role in the crusade for housing reform. His work at the University Settlement in New York City convinced him that “the improvement of the homes of the people was the starting point for everything.” Veiller relied on settlement workers to help investigate housing conditions, prepare public exhibits depicting rampant disease in congested slums, and agitate for improvements. Based on their findings, Veiller drafted a new housing code limiting the size of tenements and requiring toilet facilities, ventilation, and fire protection. In 1901, the New York Tenement House Law became a model for other cities. To promote uniform building codes throughout the nation, the tireless Veiller founded the National Housing Association in 1910.

PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Settlement workers eventually concluded that only government power could achieve social justice and demanded that state and federal governments protect the weak and disadvantaged. As Veiller insisted, it was “unquestionably the duty of the state” to enforce justice in the face of “greed on the part of those who desire to secure for themselves an undue profit.”

The maiming and killing of children in industrial accidents made it “inevitable,” Addams said, “that efforts to secure a child labor law should be our first venture into the field of state legislation.” The National Child Labor Committee, organized in 1904, led the campaign. Reformers met stiff resistance from manufacturers who used child labor, conservatives who opposed government action as an intrusion into family life, and some poor parents who needed their children’s income. Child labor reformers documented the problem with extensive investigations and also benefited from the public outrage stirred by socialist John Spargo’s muckraking book *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (1906). By 1914, every state but one had a minimum working age law. Effective regulation, however, required national action, for many state laws were weak or poorly enforced. (See American Views, Mother Jones and the Meaning of Child Labor in America.)

Social reformers also lobbied for laws regulating the wages, hours, and working conditions of women and succeeded in having states from New York to Oregon pass maximum-hours legislation. After the Supreme Court upheld such laws in *Muller*



21-6

Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910)

WHERE TO LEARN MORE



Hull House, Chicago, Illinois
www.uic.edu/jaaddams/hull/hull_house.html

WHERE TO LEARN MORE



Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York City, New York
www.tenement.org



OVERVIEW

MAJOR LAWS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS OF THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

Legislation	Effect
New York Tenement House Law (1901)	Established a model housing code for safety and sanitation
Newlands Act (1902)	Provided for federal irrigation projects
Hepburn Act (1906)	Strengthened authority of the Interstate Commerce Commission
Pure Food and Drug Act (1906)	Regulated the production and sale of food and drug products
Meat Inspection Act (1906)	Authorized federal inspection of meat products
Sixteenth Amendment (1913)	Authorized a federal income tax
Seventeenth Amendment (1913)	Mandated the direct popular election of senators
Underwood-Simmons Tariff Act (1913)	Lowered tariff rates and levied the first regular federal income tax
Federal Reserve Act (1913)	Established the Federal Reserve System to supervise banking and provide a national currency
Federal Trade Commission Act (1914)	Established the FTC to oversee business activities
Harrison Act (1914)	Regulated the distribution and use of narcotics
Smith-Lever Act (1914)	Institutionalized the county agent system
Keating-Owen Act (1916)	Indirectly prohibited child labor
Eighteenth Amendment (1919)	Instituted prohibition
Nineteenth Amendment (1920)	Established woman suffrage

v. *Oregon* (1908), thirty-nine states enacted new or stronger laws on women's maximum hours between 1909 and 1917. Fewer states established minimum wages for women.

Protective legislation for women posed a troubling issue for reformers. In California, for example, middle-class clubwomen favored protective legislation on grounds of women's presumed weakness. More radical progressives, as in the socialist-led Women's Trade Union League of Los Angeles, supported legislation to help secure economic independence and equality in the labor market for women, increase the economic strength of the working class, and serve as a precedent for laws improving conditions for all workers.

Progressive Era lawmakers limited protective legislation to measures reflecting the belief that women needed paternalist protection, even by excluding them from certain occupations. Laws establishing a minimum wage for women, moreover, usually set a wage level below what state commissions reported as subsistence rates. Protective legislation thus assured women not economic independence but continued dependence on husbands or fathers.

Social justice reformers forged the beginnings of the welfare state, as many states began in 1910 to provide "mothers' pensions" to indigent widows with dependent children. Twenty-one states, led by Wisconsin in 1911, enacted workers' compensation programs.



Compared to social insurance programs in Western Europe, however, these were feeble responses to the social consequences of industrialization. Proposals for health insurance and old-age pension programs went nowhere. Business groups and other conservative interests curbed the movement toward state responsibility for social welfare.

RESHAPING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Concerns about child labor overlapped with increasing attention to public schools. In 1900, for example, women's clubs in North Carolina launched a program to improve school buildings, increase teachers' salaries, and broaden the curriculum. Claiming efficiency and expertise, school administrators also pushed for changes, both to upgrade their own profession and to expand their public influence. And some intellectuals predicted that schools themselves could promote social progress and reform. Philosopher John Dewey sketched his plans for such progressive education in *The School and Society* (1899).

Between 1880 and 1920, compulsory school attendance laws, kindergartens, age-graded elementary schools, professional training for teachers, vocational education, parent-teacher associations, and school nurses became standard elements in American education. School reformers believed in both the educational soundness of these measures and their importance for countering slum environments. As Jacob Riis contended, the kindergartner would “rediscover . . . the natural feelings that the tenement had smothered.”

Public education in the South lagged behind the North. After 1900, per capita expenditures for education doubled, school terms were extended, and high schools spread across the region. But the South frittered away its limited resources on a segregated educational system that shortchanged both races. South Carolina spent twelve times as much per white pupil as per black pupil. Booker T. Washington complained in 1906 that the educational reforms meant “almost nothing so far as the Negro schools are concerned.” As a Northern critic observed, “To devise a school system which shall save the whites and not the blacks is a task of such delicacy that a few surviving reactionaries are willing to let both perish together.”

CHALLENGING GENDER RESTRICTIONS

Most progressives held fairly conservative, moralistic views about sexuality and gender roles. Margaret Sanger, however, radically challenged conventional ideas of the social role of women. A public health nurse and an IWW organizer, she soon made the struggle for reproductive rights her personal crusade. Sanger saw in New York's immigrant neighborhoods the plight of poor women worn out from repeated pregnancies or injured or dead from self-induced knitting-needle abortions. Despite federal and state laws against contraceptives, Sanger began promoting birth control as a way to avert such tragedies. In 1914, Sanger published a magazine, *Woman Rebel*, in which she argued that “a woman's body belongs to herself alone. It does not belong to the United States of America or any other government on the face of the earth.” Prohibiting contraceptives meant “enforced motherhood,” Sanger declared. “Women cannot be on an equal footing with men until they have full and complete control over their reproductive function.”

QUICK REVIEW

Public Education

- ◆ Concern about child labor overlapped with attention to public education.
- ◆ Widespread reforms carried out between 1880 and 1920.
- ◆ Public education in the South lagged behind the North.



Women and girls in an Alabama canning factory, 1911. On the right end is Marie Colbeck, 8 years old, who shucked 6 or 7 pots of oysters a day for about 30 or 35 cents at the Alabama Canning Factory. At the left is Johnnie Schraker, 8 years old, who earned 45 cents a day after shucking oysters for 3 years.

Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 102-LH-1986



◆ AMERICAN VIEWS ◆

MOTHER JONES AND THE MEANING OF CHILD LABOR IN AMERICA

Born in Ireland in 1830, the legendary Mother Jones (Mary Harris Jones) became one of America's greatest social activists, protesting social and industrial conditions from the 1870s through the 1920s. Here she recounts an effort to end child labor, one of the most persistent progressive goals. Using the techniques of exposure and publicity characteristic of the period and employing patriotic symbols and references, Jones raised troubling questions about the concepts of social and economic opportunity that many Americans associated with national development and identity.

HOW DID Mother Jones direct public attention to child labor? How did she invoke the treasured American concept of opportunity to gain support for her goal? What did she argue was the relationship between child labor and the privileged status of other Americans? How successful was her crusade against child labor?

In the spring of 1903 I went to Kensington, Pennsylvania, where 75,000 textile workers were on strike. Of this number at least 10,000 were little children.

The workers were striking for more pay and shorter hours. Every day little children came into Union Headquarters, some with their hands off, some with the thumb missing, some with their fingers off at the knuckle. They were stooped little things, round shouldered and skinny. Many of them were not over ten years of age. . . .

We assembled a number of boys and girls one morning in Independence Park and from there we arranged to parade with banners to the court house where we would hold a meeting.

A great crowd gathered in the public square in front of the city hall. I put the little boys with their fingers off and hands crushed and maimed on a platform. I held up their mutilated hands and showed them to the crowd and made the statement that Philadelphia's mansions were built on the broken bones, the quivering hearts, and drooping heads of these children. . . .

I called upon the millionaire manufacturers to cease their moral murders, and I cried to the officials in the open windows opposite, "Some day the workers will take possession of your city hall, and when we do, no child will be sacrificed on the altar of profit."

Sanger's crusade infuriated those who regarded birth control as a threat to the family and morality. Indicted for distributing information about contraception, Sanger fled to Europe. Other women took up the cause, forming the National Birth Control League in 1915 to campaign for the repeal of laws restricting access to contraceptive information and devices.

REFORMING COUNTRY LIFE

Although most progressives focused on the city, others sought to reform rural life. They worked to improve rural health and sanitation, to replace inefficient one-room schools with modern consolidated ones under professional control, and to extend new roads and communication services into the countryside. To further these goals, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Country Life Commission in 1908.

Agricultural scientists, government officials, and many business interests also sought to promote efficient, scientific, and commercial agriculture. A key innovation was the county agent system: the U.S. Department of Agriculture and business groups placed an agent in each county to teach farmers new techniques and



The reporters quoted my statement that Philadelphia mansions were built on the broken bones and quivering hearts of children. The Philadelphia papers and the New York papers got into a squabble with each other over the question. The universities discussed it. Preachers began talking. That was what I wanted. Public attention on the subject of child labor.

The matter quieted down for a while and I concluded the people needed stirring up again. . . . I decided to go with the children to see President Roosevelt to ask him to have Congress pass a law prohibiting the exploitation of childhood. I thought that President Roosevelt might see these mill children and compare them with his own little ones who were spending the summer at the seashore at Oyster Bay. . . .

Everywhere we had meetings, showing up with living children, the horrors of child labor. . . . [In New Jersey] I called on the mayor of Princeton and asked for permission to speak opposite the campus of the University. I said I wanted to speak on higher education. The mayor gave me permission. A great crowd gathered, professors and students and the people; and I told them that the rich robbed these little children of any education of the lowest order that they might send their sons and daughters to places of higher education. . . . And I showed those professors children

in our army who could scarcely read or write because they were working ten hours a day in the silk mills of Pennsylvania. . . .

[In New York] I told an immense crowd of the horrors of child labor in the mills around the anthracite region and . . . I showed them Gussie Rangnew, a little girl from whom all the childhood had gone. Her face was like an old woman's. Gussie packed stockings in a factory, eleven hours a day for a few cents a day. . . . "Fifty years ago there was a cry against slavery and men gave up their lives to stop the selling of black children on the block. Today the white child is sold for two dollars a week to the manufacturers."

. . . We marched down to Oyster Bay but the president refused to see us and he would not answer my letters. But our march had done its work. We had drawn the attention of the nation to the crime of child labor. And while the strike of the textile workers in Kensington was lost and the children driven back to work, not long afterward the Pennsylvania legislature passed a child labor law that sent thousands of children home from the mills, and kept thousands of others from entering the factory until they were fourteen years of age.

Source: The Autobiography of Mother Jones, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Kerr Publishing Company, 1977).

encourage changes in the rural social values that had spawned the Populist radicalism that most progressives decried. The Smith-Lever Act (1914) provided federal subsidies for county agents throughout the country. Its purpose, claimed Woodrow Wilson, was to produce "an efficient and contented population" in rural America.

Few farmers, however, welcomed these efforts. As one Illinois county agent said in 1915, "Farmers, as a whole, resent exceedingly those forces which are at work with missionary intent trying to uplift them." School consolidation meant the loss of community control of education; good roads would raise taxes and chiefly benefit urban business interests. Besides, most farmers believed that their problems stemmed not from rural life but from industrial society.

Even so, government agencies, agricultural colleges, and railroads and banks steadily tied farmers to urban markets. Telephones and rural free delivery of mail lessened countryside isolation but quickened the spread of city values. Improved roads and the coming of the automobile eliminated many rural villages and linked farm families directly with towns and cities. Consolidated schools wiped out the social center of rural neighborhoods and carried children out of their communities, many never to return.



SOCIAL CONTROL AND MORAL CRUSADES

The tendency toward social control evident in the movements to pass protective legislation and transform country life also marked other less attractive progressive efforts. These efforts, moreover, often meshed with the restrictive attitudes that conservative Americans held about race, religion, immigration, and morality. The result was widespread attempts to restrict certain groups and control behavior.

Many Americans wanted to limit immigration for racist reasons. Nativist agitation in California prompted the federal government to restrict Japanese immigration in 1907. Californians, including local progressives, also hoped to curtail the migration of Mexicans. A Stanford University researcher condemned Mexicans as an “undesirable class” compared to “the more progressive races.”

Nationally, public debate focused on restricting the flow of new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Many backed their prejudice with a distorted interpretation of Darwinism, labeling the Slavic and Mediterranean peoples “inferior races.” As early as 1894, nativists had organized the Immigration Restriction League, which favored a literacy test for admission, sure that it would “bear most heavily upon the Italians, Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Greeks, and Asiatics, and very lightly or not at all upon English-speaking immigrants or Germans, Scandinavians, and French.” Congress enacted a literacy law in 1917.

Other nativists demanded the “Americanization” of immigrants already in the country. The Daughters of the American Revolution sought to inculcate loyalty, patriotism, and conservative values. Settlement workers and Social Gospelers also attempted to transfer their own values to the newcomers. The most prominent advocate of Americanization was a stereotypical progressive, Frances Kellor. She studied social work at the University of Chicago, worked in New York settlement houses, wrote a muckraking exposé of employment agencies that exploited women, and became director of the New York Bureau of Immigration. In 1915, she helped organize the National Americanization Committee and increasingly emphasized destroying immigrants’ old-country ties and imposing an American culture.

Closely linked to progressives’ worries about immigrants was their campaign for **prohibition**. Social workers saw liquor as a cause of crime, poverty, and family violence; employers blamed it for causing industrial accidents and inefficiency; Social Gospel ministers condemned the “spirit born of hell” because it impaired moral judgment and behavior. But also important was native-born Americans’ fear of new immigrants. Many immigrants, in fact, viewed liquor and the neighborhood saloon as vital parts of daily life, and so prohibition became a focus of nativist hostilities, cultural conflict, and Americanization pressures.

Protestant fundamentalists also stoutly supported prohibition, working through the Anti-Saloon League, founded in 1893. Their nativism and antiurban bias surfaced in demands for prohibition to prevent the nation’s cities from lapsing into “raging mania, disorder, and anarchy.” With most urban Catholics and Jews opposing prohibition, the Anti-Saloon League justified imposing its reform on city populations against their will: “Our nation can only be saved by turning the pure stream of country sentiment . . . to flush out the cesspools of cities and so save civilization from pollution.”

With these motivations, prohibitionists campaigned against the manufacture and sale of alcohol. Eventually, the Eighteenth Amendment made prohibition the law of the land by 1920.

Less controversial was the drive to control narcotics, then readily available, and prostitution. Fears that drug addiction was spreading, particularly among black people and immigrants, led Congress in 1914 to pass the Harrison Act, which

QUICK REVIEW

Opposition to Immigration

- ◆ Nativists in California wanted to restrict the entry of Japanese and Mexicans.
- ◆ The national debate focused on immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.
- ◆ Some nativists demanded the “Americanization” of immigrants.

Prohibition A ban on the production, sale, and consumption of liquor, achieved temporarily through state laws and the Eighteenth Amendment.



prohibited the distribution and use of narcotics except for medical purposes. The progressive attack on prostitution, which was seen as symptomatic of the exploitation and disorder that affected industrial cities, resulted in state and city attacks on “red light” districts and in the federal Mann Act of 1910, which banned the interstate transport of women “for immoral purposes.”

California provided other examples of progressives’ interest in social control and moral reform. The state assembly, prohibited gambling, cardplaying, and prizefighting, and Los Angeles banned premarital sex and introduced artistic censorship.



FOR WHITE PEOPLE ONLY?

Racism permeated the Progressive Era. In the South, progressivism was built on black disfranchisement and segregation. Like most white Southerners, progressives believed that racial control was necessary for social order. Governors Hoke Smith of Georgia and James Vardaman, “the White Chief,” of Mississippi supported progressive reforms, but they also viciously attacked black rights. Their racist demagoguery incited antiblack violence throughout the South. Antiblack race riots, like the riot produced in Atlanta by Smith’s election in 1906, and lynching—defended on the floor of the U.S. Senate by a Southern progressive—were part of the system of racial control that made the era a terrible time for African Americans.

Even in the North, where relatively few black people lived, race relations deteriorated. A reporter in Pennsylvania found “this disposition to discriminate against Negroes has greatly increased within the past decade.” Antiblack race riots exploded in New York in 1900 and in Springfield, Illinois—Lincoln’s hometown—in 1908.

But African Americans also pursued progressive reforms. Even in the South, some black activists struggled to improve conditions. In Atlanta, for example, black women created progressive organizations and established settlement houses, kindergartens, and day-care centers. The women of the Neighborhood Union, organized in 1908, even challenged the discriminatory policies of Atlanta’s board of education, demanding equal facilities and appropriations for the city’s black schools. They had only limited success, but their efforts demonstrated a persisting commitment to reforming society.

In the North, African Americans more openly criticized discrimination. Ida Wells-Barnett, the crusading journalist who had fled the South for Chicago, became nationally prominent for her militant protests. She fought fiercely against racial injustices, especially school segregation, agitated for woman suffrage, and organized kindergartens and settlement houses for Chicago’s black migrants.

Still more important was W.E.B. Du Bois, who campaigned tirelessly against all forms of racial discrimination. In 1905, Du Bois and other black activists met in Niagara Falls, Canada, to make plans to promote political and economic equality. In 1910, this **Niagara Movement** joined with a small group of white reformers, including Jane Addams, to organize the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The NAACP sought to overthrow segregation

The Flanner House, a black settlement house in Indianapolis, provided the black community with many essential services, including health care. In addition to this baby clinic, pictured in 1918, it established a tuberculosis clinic at a time when the city’s public hospitals refused to treat black citizens afflicted with the disease.

Indians Historical Society.

Niagara Movement African-American group organized in 1905 to promote racial integration, civil and political rights, and equal access to economic opportunity.



HOW DID electoral and municipal reforms improve voting and government during the Progressive Era?

and establish equal justice and educational opportunities. As its director of publicity and research, Du Bois launched the influential magazine *The Crisis* to shape public opinion. “Agitate,” he counseled, “protest, reveal the truth, and refuse to be silenced.” By 1918, the NAACP had 44,000 members in 165 branches.

REFORMING POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Progressives of all kinds clamored for the reform of politics and government, but their political activism was motivated by different concerns, and they sometimes pursued competing objectives. Many wanted to change procedures and institutions to promote greater democracy and responsibility. Others hoped to improve the efficiency of government, to eliminate corruption, or to increase their own influence. All justified their objectives as necessary to adapt the political system to the nation’s new needs.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE

The woman suffrage movement had begun in the mid-nineteenth century, but suffragists had been frustrated by the prevailing belief that women’s “proper sphere” was the home and the family. Woman suffrage, particularly when championed as a step toward women’s equality, seemed to challenge the natural order of society, and it generated much opposition among traditionalist-minded men and women.

In the early twentieth century, under a new generation of leaders like Carrie Chapman Catt, suffragists adopted activist tactics, including parades, mass meetings, and “suffrage tours” by automobile. They also organized by political districts and attracted workingwomen and labor unions. By 1917, the National American Woman Suffrage Association had over 2 million members.

But some suffrage leaders shifted arguments to gain more support. Rather than insisting on the “justice” of woman suffrage or emphasizing equal rights, they spoke of the special moral and maternal instincts women could bring to politics if allowed to vote. The suffrage movement now appeared less a radical, disruptive force than a vehicle for extending traditional female benevolence and service to society. The new image of the movement increased public support by appealing to conventional views of women. Noted one Nebraska undergraduate, women students no longer feared “antagonizing the men or losing invitations to parties by being suffragists.”

Gradually, the suffrage movement began to prevail. In 1910, Washington became the first state to approve woman suffrage since the mid-1890s, followed by California in 1911 and Arizona, Kansas, and Oregon in 1912. Suffragists also mounted national action, such as the dramatic inaugural parade in March 1913 described at the beginning of this chapter. By 1919, thirty-nine states had established full or partial woman suffrage, and Congress finally approved an amendment. Ratified by the states in 1920, the **Nineteenth Amendment** marked a critical advance in political democracy.

QUICK REVIEW

Votes for Women

- ◆ Woman suffrage movement began in the mid-nineteenth century.
- ◆ Early twentieth-century leaders adopted activist tactics.
- ◆ Nineteenth Amendment ratified in 1920.

Nineteenth Amendment

Constitutional revision that in 1920 established women citizens’ right to vote.

Australian ballot Secret voting and the use of official ballots rather than party tickets.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Other electoral reforms changed the election process and the meaning of political participation. The so-called **Australian ballot** adopted by most states during the 1890s provided for secret voting and replaced the individual party tickets with an official ballot listing all candidates and distributed by public officials. The Australian ballot led to quiet, orderly elections. One Cincinnati editor, who recalled



the “howling mobs” and chaos at the polls in previous elections, declared: “The political bummer and thug has been relegated to the background . . . while good citizenship . . . has come to the front.”

Public regulation of other parts of the electoral process previously controlled by parties soon followed. Beginning with Mississippi in 1902, nearly every state provided for direct primaries to remove nominations from the boss-ridden caucus and convention system. Many states also reformed campaign practices.

The decreasing ability of parties to mobilize voters was reflected in a steady decline in voter participation, from 79 percent in 1896 to 49 percent in 1920. As parties contracted, the influence of nonpartisan organizations and pressure groups grew, promoting narrower objectives. Thus the National Association of Manufacturers (1895) and the United States Chamber of Commerce (1912) lobbied for business interests; the National Farmers Union (1902), for commercial agriculture; the American Federation of Teachers (1916), for professional educators. The organized lobbying of special-interest groups would give them greater influence over government in the future and contribute to the declining popular belief in the value of voting or participation in politics.

Disfranchisement more obviously undermined American democracy. In the South, Democrats—progressive and conservative alike—eliminated not only black voters but also many poor white voters from the electorate through poll taxes, literacy tests, and other restrictions. Republicans in the North adopted educational or literacy tests in ten states, enacted strict registration laws, and gradually abolished the right of aliens to vote. These restrictions reflected both the progressives’ anti-immigrant prejudices and their obsessions with social control and with purifying politics and “improving” the electorate. Such electoral reforms reduced the political power of ethnic and working-class Americans, often stripping them of their political rights and means of influence.

MUNICIPAL REFORM

Muckrakers had exposed crooked alliances between city bosses and business leaders that resulted in wasteful or inadequate municipal services. In some cities, urban reformers attempted to break these alliances and improve conditions for those suffering most from municipal misrule. For example, in Toledo, Ohio, Samuel “Golden Rule” Jones won enough working-class votes to be elected mayor four times despite the hostility of both major parties. Serving from 1897 to 1904, Jones opened public playgrounds and kindergartens, established the eight-hour day for city workers, and improved public services. Influenced by the Social Gospel, he also provided free lodging for the homeless and gave his own salary to the poor. Other reforming mayors also fought municipal corruption, limited the political influence of corporations, and championed public ownership of utilities.

More elitist progressives attempted to change the structure of urban government. Middle-class reformers worked to replace ward elections with citywide elections which required greater resources and therefore helped swell middle-class influence at the expense of working-class wards. So did nonpartisan elections, which reformers introduced to weaken party loyalties.

Urban reformers developed two other structural innovations: the city commission and the city manager. Both attempted to institutionalize efficient, businesslike government staffed by professional administrators. By 1920, hundreds of cities had adopted one of the new plans.

Business groups often promoted these reforms. In Des Moines, for example, the president of the Commercial Club declared that “the professional politician must be ousted and in his place capable businessmen chosen to conduct the

QUICK REVIEW

Municipal Reform

- ◆ Urban reformers sought to break alliances between city bosses and business leaders.
- ◆ Urban reformers developed the concept of the city commission and the city manager.
- ◆ Business groups often promoted these reforms.



21-12

Herbert Croly, *Progressive Democracy* (1914)

Initiative Procedure by which citizens can introduce a subject for legislation, usually through a petition signed by a specific number of voters.

Referendum Submission of a law, proposed or already in effect, to a direct popular vote for approval or rejection.

Seventeenth Amendment

Constitutional change that in 1913 established the direct popular election of U.S. senators.

Recall The process of removing an official from office by popular vote, usually after using petitions to call for such a vote.

affairs of the city.” Again, then, reform in municipal government often shifted political power from ethnic and working-class voters, represented however imperfectly by partisan elections, to smaller groups with greater resources.

PROGRESSIVE STATE GOVERNMENT

Progressives also reshaped state government. Some tried to democratize the legislative process, regarding the legislature—the most important branch of state government in the nineteenth century—as ineffective and even corrupt, dominated by party bosses and corporate influences. The Missouri legislature reportedly “enacted such laws as the corporations paid for, and such others as were necessary to fool the people.” Populists had first raised such charges in the 1890s and proposed novel solutions adopted by many states in the early twentieth century. The **initiative** enabled reformers themselves to propose legislation directly to the electorate, bypassing an unresponsive legislature; the **referendum** permitted voters to approve or reject legislative measures.

Other reforms also expanded the popular role in state government. The **Seventeenth Amendment**, ratified in 1913, provided for the election of U.S. senators directly by popular vote instead of by state legislatures. Beginning with Oregon in 1908, ten states adopted the **recall**, enabling voters to remove unsatisfactory public officials from office.

As state legislatures and party machines were curbed, dynamic governors like Robert La Follette pushed progressive programs into law. Elected in 1900, “Fighting Bob” La Follette turned Wisconsin into “the laboratory of democracy.” “His words bite like coals of fire,” wrote one observer. “He never wearies and he will not allow his audience to weary.” Overcoming fierce opposition from “stalwart” Republicans, La Follette established direct primaries, railroad regulation, the first state income tax, workers’ compensation, and other important measures before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 1906.

La Follette also stressed efficiency and expertise. The Legislative Reference Bureau that he created was staffed by university professors to advise on public policy. He used regulatory commissions to oversee railroads, banks, and other interests. Most states followed suit, and expert commissions became an important feature of state government, gradually gaining authority at the expense of local officials.

“Experts” were presumed to be disinterested and therefore committed to the general welfare. In practice, however, regulators were subject to pressures from competing interest groups, and some commissions became captives of the very industries they were supposed to control. This irony was matched by the contradiction between the expansion of democracy through the initiative and referendum and the increasing reliance on nonelected professional experts to set and implement public policy.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND THE PROGRESSIVE PRESIDENCY

HOW WAS the executive branch strengthened under Roosevelt?

When a crazed anarchist assassinated William McKinley in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt entered the White House, and the progressive movement gained its most prominent leader. The son of a wealthy New York family, Roosevelt had been a New York legislator, U.S. civil service commissioner, and assistant secretary of the navy. After his exploits in the Spanish-American War, he was elected governor of New York in 1898 and vice president in 1900. His public life was matched by an active private life in which he both



wrote works of history and obsessively pursued what he called the “strenuous life”: boxing, wrestling, hunting, rowing, even ranching and chasing rustlers in Dakota Territory. His own son observed that Roosevelt “always wanted to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral.”

Mark Twain fretted that “Mr. Roosevelt is the Tom Sawyer of the political world of the twentieth century; always showing off; always hunting for a chance to show off; in his frenzied imagination the Great Republic is a vast Barnum circus with him for a clown and the whole world for audience.” But Roosevelt’s flamboyance and ambitions made him the most popular politician of the time and enabled him to dramatize the issues of progressivism and to become the first modern president.

TR AND THE MODERN PRESIDENCY

Roosevelt believed that the president could do anything to meet national needs that the Constitution did not specifically prohibit. “Under this interpretation of executive power,” he later recalled, “I did and caused to be done many things not previously done. . . . I did not usurp power, but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power.” Indeed, the expansion of government power and its consolidation in the executive branch were among his most significant accomplishments.

Roosevelt spelled out his policy goals in more than four hundred messages to Congress, sent drafts of bills to Capitol Hill, and intervened to win passage of “his” measures. Some members of Congress resented such “executive arrogance” and “dictatorship.” Roosevelt generally avoided direct challenges to the conservative Old Guard Republicans who controlled Congress, but his activities helped shift the balance of power within the national government.

Roosevelt also reorganized the executive branch. He believed in efficiency and expertise. To promote rational policymaking and public management, he staffed the expanding federal bureaucracy with able professionals. The president, complained one Republican, was “trying to concentrate all power in Washington . . . and to govern the people by commissions and bureaus.”

Finally, Roosevelt exploited and skillfully handled the mass media, which made him a celebrity, “TR” or “Teddy.” The publicity kept TR in the spotlight and enabled him to mold public opinion.

ROOSEVELT AND LABOR

One sign of TR’s vigorous new approach to the presidency was his handling of a coal strike in 1902. Members of the United Mine Workers Union walked off their jobs, demanding higher wages, an eight-hour day, and recognition of their union. The mine owners closed the mines and waited for the union to collapse. But led by John Mitchell, the strikers held their ranks. Management’s stubborn arrogance contrasted with the workers’ orderly conduct and willingness to negotiate and hardened public opinion against the owners. TR’s legal advisers told him that the government had no constitutional authority to intervene.

As public pressure mounted, however, Roosevelt decided to act. He invited both the owners and the union leaders to a White House conference and declared that the national interest made government action necessary. Mitchell agreed to negotiate. The owners, however, refused even to speak to the miners and demanded that Roosevelt use the army to break the union, as Cleveland had done in the Pullman strike in 1894.

Roosevelt was not a champion of labor. But furious with the owners’ “arrogant stupidity” and “insulting” attitude toward the presidency, he announced that

WHERE TO LEARN MORE



Sagamore Hill,
Oyster Bay, New York
www.nps.gov/sahi/



he would use the army to seize and operate the mines, not to crush the union. Questioned about the constitutionality of such an action, Roosevelt bellowed: “To hell with the Constitution when the people want coal.” Reluctantly, the owners accepted the arbitration commission they had previously rejected. The commission gave the miners a 10 percent wage increase and a nine-hour day, but not union recognition, and permitted the owners to raise coal prices by 10 percent. Roosevelt described his intervention as simply giving both labor and management a “square deal.” It also set important precedents for an active government role in labor disputes and a strong president acting as a steward of the public.

MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES

Federal land policy had helped create farms and develop transportation, but it had also ceded to speculators and business interests much of the nation’s forests, mineral deposits, waterpower sites, and grazing lands. A new generation believed in the **conservation** of natural resources through efficient and scientific management. Conservationists achieved early victories in the Forest Reserve Act (1891) and the Forest Management Act (1897), which authorized the federal government to withdraw timberlands from development and to regulate grazing, lumbering, and hydroelectric sites in the forests (see Map 21–1).

Roosevelt and his friend Gifford Pinchot made conservation a major focus of his presidency. Appointed in 1898 to head the new Division of Forestry (renamed the Forest Service in 1905), Pinchot brought rational management and regulation to resource development. With his advice, TR used presidential authority to triple the size of the forest reserves to 150 million acres, set aside another 80 million acres valuable for minerals and petroleum, and establish dozens of wildlife refuges. In 1908, Roosevelt held a White House conference of state and federal officials that led to the creation of the National Conservation Commission, forty-one state conservation commissions, and widespread public support for the conservation movement.

Some interests opposed conservation. Many Westerners resented having Easterners make key decisions about Western growth and saw conservation as a perpetuation of this colonial subservience. Many ranchers refused to pay federal grazing fees. Colorado arsonists set forest fires to protest the creation of forest reserves.

But Westerners were happy to take federal money for expensive irrigation projects that private capital would not undertake. They favored the 1902 National Reclamation Act, which established the **Bureau of Reclamation**. Its engineers were to construct dams, reservoirs, and irrigation canals, and the government was to sell the irrigated lands in tracts no larger than 160 acres. With massive dams and networks of irrigation canals, it reclaimed fertile valleys from the desert. Unfortunately, the bureau did not enforce the 160-acre limitation and thus helped create powerful corporate farms in the West.

CORPORATE REGULATION

Nothing symbolized Roosevelt’s active presidency better than his popular reputation as a “trust buster.” TR regarded the formation of large business combinations favorably, but he knew he could not ignore the public anxiety about corporate power. Business leaders and Old Guard conservatives opposed any government intervention in the large trusts, but Roosevelt knew better. “You have no conception of the revolt that would be caused if I did nothing,” he said privately. TR proposed to “develop an orderly system, and such a system can only come through the gradually exercised right of efficient government control.” Rather than invoking “the foolish antitrust law,” he favored government regulation to prevent corporate abuses and defend the public interest. But he did sue some “bad trusts.”



WHERE TO LEARN MORE

★ John Muir National Historic Site,
Martinez, California
www.nps.gov/jomu/

Conservation The efficient management and use of natural resources, such as forests, grasslands, and rivers, as opposed to preservation or controlled exploitation.

Bureau of Reclamation Federal agency established in 1902 providing public funds for irrigation projects in arid regions.



MAP EXPLORATION

To explore an interactive version of this map, go to <http://www.prenhall.com/goldfield2/map21.1>



MAP 21-1

The Growth of National Forests and National Parks Rapid exploitation of the West prompted demands to preserve its spectacular scenery and protect its remaining forests. In 1872 Yellowstone became the first National Park, and the National Forest system began in the 1890s. Conservation became increasingly important during the Progressive Era but often provoked Western hostility.

WHICH STATES have the most national forests and national parks?

In 1902, the Roosevelt administration filed its most famous antitrust suit, against the Northern Securities Company, a holding company organized by J.P. Morgan to control the railroad network of the Northwest. For TR, this suit was an assertion of government power that reassured a worried public and made corporate responsibility more likely. In 1904, the Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of the Northern Securities Company.

Elected president in his own right in 1904 over the colorless and conservative Democratic candidate Judge Alton B. Parker, Roosevelt responded to the growing popular demand for reform by pushing further toward a regulatory government.



FROM THEN TO NOW

The Environmental Movement

Many of the issues that concern environmentalists today were first raised by the conservationists and preservationists of the Progressive Era. Conservationists favored the planned and regulated management of America's natural resources for the public benefit. Led by Theodore Roosevelt, they dominated the new agencies like the Forest Service that were responsible for federal lands. In contrast, preservationists—like John Muir, who founded the Sierra Club in 1892—sought to protect wilderness from any development whatsoever. Opposing both were those who championed the uncontrolled development of public lands.

Preservationists' reasons for protecting wilderness were primarily aesthetic—to preserve natural splendors intact for future generations. By the second half of the twentieth century, however, the disturbing consequences of technological change, rapid economic development, and spiraling population growth began to raise the stakes. Air pollution from smoke-stack industries and automobile exhaust damaged natural vegetation and caused respiratory diseases; water pollution from sewage and chemical waste spread disease; and oil spills fouled beaches and devastated marine habitats.

Public concern over these problems gave birth to the environmental movement, which drew on the legacy of both the conservation and preservation movements but had wider interests and broader support than either. Responding to the environmental movement's quickly growing strength, Congress in the 1970s passed laws to protect endangered species, reduce pollution, limit the use of pesticides, and control hazardous waste. The Environmental Protection Agency, created in 1970, subsequently became the largest federal regulatory agency.

Again, however, as during the Progressive Era, efforts to protect the environment encountered opposition from proponents of unrestricted development, especially in the West.

In the Sagebrush Rebellion in the late 1970s and 1980s, some Westerners condemned “outside” federal regulation and tried to seize control of public lands for private exploitation. One oil company dismissed catastrophic oil spills as merely “Mother Earth letting some oil come out.”

Three Republican presidents from the West—Californians Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan and Texan George H. W. Bush, all closely tied to oil and real estate interests—sought in varying degrees to curtail environmental policies, agencies, and budgets and to promote development. This repudiation of Theodore Roosevelt's conservationism reflected the shift of the party's base to the sunbelt. As one Nixon adviser said, when a pipeline across the Alaskan wilderness was approved, “Conservation is not in the Republican ethic.”

Ronald Reagan in particular was convinced that environmental protection fundamentally conflicted with economic growth. The business executives and corporate lawyers he appointed to key federal positions rescinded or weakened environmental regulations.

Congress, the courts, and the public, however, resisted efforts to weaken environmental policy. “Green” groups proliferated, demanding greater attention to environmental issues; some, like Greenpeace, undertook direct action to protect the environment, and even Western communities organized to oppose strip-mining, nuclear power plants, and toxic waste dumping.

Despite fluctuations, public opinion and mainstream politics now appear to favor greater environmental protection. Debate is sure to continue over the cost and effectiveness of specific policies. But as ever more challenging ecological problems arise—like ozone depletion and global warming—Americans are increasingly inclined to stand with Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir in looking to the federal government for effective action to meet them.

He proposed legislation “to work out methods of controlling the big corporations without paralyzing the energies of the business community.”

The Hepburn Act, passed in 1906, authorized the Interstate Commerce Commission to set maximum railroad rates and extended its jurisdiction. It was a weaker law than many progressives had wanted, but it marked the first time the federal government gained the power to set rules in a private enterprise.

In the same year, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act. In part, this legislation reflected public demand, but many business



leaders also supported government regulation of food and drugs, convinced that it would expand their markets by certifying the quality of their products and drive their smaller competitors out of business. The meat and food and drug acts did thus extend government regulation over business to protect the public health and safety, but they also served some corporate purposes.

Despite the compromises and weaknesses in the three laws, TR contended that they marked “a noteworthy advance in the policy of securing federal supervision and control over corporations.” In 1907 and 1908, he pushed for an eight-hour workday, stock market regulation, and inheritance and income taxes. Republican conservatives in Congress blocked such reforms. Old Guard Republicans thought Roosevelt had extended government powers dangerously, but in fact his accomplishments had been relatively modest. As La Follette noted, Roosevelt’s “cannonading filled the air with noise and smoke, which confused and obscured the line of action, but, when the battle cloud drifted by and the quiet was restored, it was always a matter of surprise that so little had really been accomplished.”

TAFT AND THE INSURGENTS

TR handpicked his successor as president: a loyal lieutenant, William Howard Taft. Member of a prominent Ohio political family, Taft had been a federal judge, governor-general of the Philippines, and TR’s secretary of war. Later he would serve as chief justice of the United States. But Taft’s election as president in 1908, over Democrat William Jennings Bryan in his third presidential campaign, led to a Republican political disaster.

Taft did preside over a more active and successful antitrust program than Roosevelt’s. He supported the Mann-Elkins Act (1910), which extended the ICC’s jurisdiction to telephone and telegraph companies. Taft set aside more public forest lands and oil reserves than Roosevelt had. He also supported a constitutional amendment authorizing an income tax, which went into effect in 1913 under the **Sixteenth Amendment**. One of the most important accomplishments of the Progressive Era, the income tax would provide the means for the government to expand its activities and responsibilities.

Nevertheless, Taft soon alienated progressives and floundered into a political morass. His problems were twofold. First, Midwestern reform Republicans, led by La Follette, clashed with more conservative Republicans led by Senator Nelson Aldrich of Rhode Island. Second, Taft was politically inept. He was unable to mediate between these two groups, and the party split apart.

Reformers wanted to restrict the power of the speaker of the House, “Uncle Joe” Cannon, a reactionary who blocked reform. After seeming to promise support,



Roosevelt enjoyed this cartoon illustrating his distinction between good trusts, retrained by government regulations for public welfare, and bad trusts. On those he put his foot down.

The Granger Collection, New York

WHERE TO LEARN MORE



William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Cincinnati, Ohio

Sixteenth Amendment

Constitutional revision that in 1913 authorized a federal income tax.



Taft backed down when conservatives threatened to defeat important legislation. The insurgents in Congress never forgave what they saw as Taft's betrayal. The tariff also alienated progressives from Taft. He had campaigned in 1908 for a lower tariff to curb inflation, and Midwestern Republicans favored tariff reduction to trim the power of big business. But when they introduced tariff reform legislation, the president failed to support them. Aldrich's Senate committee added 847 amendments, many of which raised tariff rates. Taft justified his inaction as avoiding presidential interference with congressional business, but progressives concluded that Taft had sided with the Old Guard.

That perception solidified when Taft stumbled into a controversy over conservation. When Pinchot challenged secretary of the interior Richard Ballinger's role in a questionable sale of public coal lands in Alaska to a J. P. Morgan syndicate, Taft upheld Ballinger and fired Pinchot. Progressives concluded that Taft had repudiated Roosevelt's conservation policies.

In 1911, reformers formed the National Progressive League to champion La Follette for the Republican nomination in 1912. They appealed to TR for support, but Roosevelt's own position was closer to Taft's than to what he called "the La Follette type of fool radicalism." But condemning Taft as "disloyal to our past friendship . . . [and] to every canon of ordinary decency," TR began to campaign for the Republican nomination himself. In thirteen state primaries, TR won 278 delegates to only 46 for Taft. But most states did not then have primaries; that allowed Taft to dominate the Republican convention and win renomination. Roosevelt's forces formed a third party—the Progressive party—and nominated the former president. The Republican split almost guaranteed victory for the Democratic nominee, Woodrow Wilson.

WOODROW WILSON AND PROGRESSIVE REFORM

HOW DID Woodrow Wilson
bring progressivism to its climax?

Elected president in 1912 and 1916, Woodrow Wilson mediated among differing progressive views to achieve a strong reform program, enlarge the power of the executive branch, and make the White House the center of national politics.

THE ELECTION OF 1912

In Congress, Southern Democrats more consistently supported reform measures than Republicans did, and Democratic leader William Jennings Bryan surpassed Roosevelt as a persistent advocate of significant political and economic reform. As the Democrats pushed progressive remedies and the Republicans quarreled during Taft's administration, Democrats achieved major victories in the state and congressional elections of 1910. To improve the party's chances in 1912, Bryan announced he would step aside. The Democratic spotlight shifted to the governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson.

Born in Virginia as the son and grandson of Presbyterian ministers, Wilson combined public eloquence with a cold personality; he balanced a self-righteousness that led to stubborn inflexibility with an intense ambition that permitted the most expedient compromises. Wilson first entered public life as a conservative. In 1910, while he was president of Princeton University, New Jersey's Democratic bosses selected him for governor to head off the progressives. But once in office, Wilson championed popular reforms and immediately began to campaign as a progressive for the party's 1912 presidential nomination.



Wilson's progressivism differed from that of Roosevelt. TR emphasized a strong government that would promote economic and social order. He defended big business as inevitable and healthy provided that government control ensured that it would benefit the entire nation. Roosevelt called this program the **New Nationalism**, reflecting his belief in a powerful state and a national interest. He also supported demands for social welfare, including workers' compensation and the abolition of child labor.

Wilson was horrified by Roosevelt's vision. His **New Freedom** program rejected what he called TR's "regulated monopoly." Wilson wanted "regulated competition," with the government's role limited to breaking up monopolies through antitrust action and preventing artificial barriers like tariffs from blocking free enterprise. Wilson opposed social welfare legislation as "paternalistic."

Unable to add progressive Democrats to the Republicans who followed him into the Progressive party, TR could not win despite his personal popularity. Other reform voters embraced the Socialist candidate, Eugene V. Debs, who captured 900,000 votes—6 percent of the total. Taft played little role in the campaign. "I might as well give up as far as being a candidate," he lamented. "There are so many people in the country who don't like me."

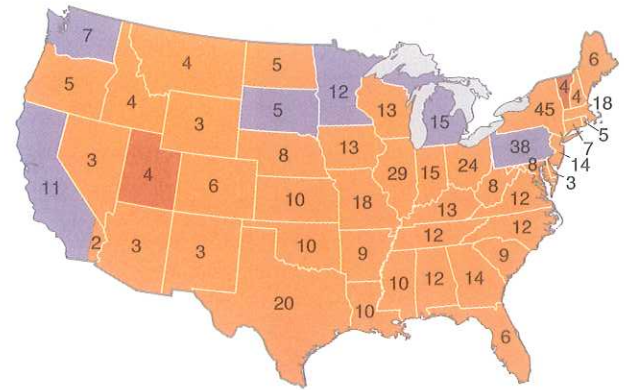
Wilson won an easy electoral college victory, though he received only 42 percent of the popular vote. Roosevelt came in second, Taft third. The Democrats also gained control of Congress, giving Wilson the opportunity to enact his New Freedom program.

IMPLEMENTING THE NEW FREEDOM

Wilson built on Roosevelt's precedent to strengthen executive authority. He summoned Congress into special session in 1913 and delivered his message in person, the first president to do so since John Adams. Wilson proposed a full legislative program and worked forcefully to secure its approval. He held regular conferences with Democratic leaders and had a private telephone line installed between the Capitol and the White House to keep tabs on congressional actions. When necessary, he appealed to the public for support or doled out patronage and compromised with conservatives.

Wilson turned first to the traditional Democratic goal of reducing the high protective tariff. "The object of the tariff duties," Wilson announced, "must be effective competition." He forced through the **Underwood-Simmons Tariff Act** of 1913, the first substantial reduction in duties since before the Civil War. The act also levied the first income tax under the recently ratified Sixteenth Amendment.

Wilson next reformed the nation's banking and currency system, which was inadequate for a modernizing economy. He skillfully maneuvered a compromise measure through Congress, balancing the demands of agrarian progressives for government control with the bankers' desires for private control. The **Federal Reserve Act** of 1913 created twelve regional Federal Reserve banks that, although privately controlled, were to be supervised by the Federal Reserve Board, appointed by the president. The law also provided for a flexible national currency and improved access to credit. Serious problems remained, but the new system



	Electoral Vote (%)	Popular Vote (%)
WOODROW WILSON (Democrat)	435 (82)	6,296,547 (42)
Theodore Roosevelt (Progressive)	88 (17)	4,118,571 (27)
William Taft (Republican)	8 (1)	3,486,720 (23)
Eugene Debs (Socialist)	—	900,672 (6)

MAP 21-2

The split within the Republican party enabled Woodrow Wilson to carry most states and become president even though he won only a minority of the popular vote

HOW IS it possible that Woodrow Wilson received 82 percent of the electoral vote but only 42 percent of the popular vote?

New Nationalism Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 program calling for a strong national government to foster, regulate, and protect business, industry, workers, and consumers.

New Freedom Woodrow Wilson's 1912 program for limited government intervention in the economy to restore competition by curtailing the restrictive influences of trusts and protective tariffs, thereby providing opportunities for individual achievement.

Underwood-Simmons Tariff Act The 1913 reform law that lowered tariff rates and levied the first regular federal income tax.

Federal Reserve Act The 1913 law that revised banking and currency by extending limited government regulation through the creation of the Federal Reserve System.



U.S. President Woodrow Wilson sits at his desk in an oil painting on canvas by Edmund Charles Tarbell.

The Granger Collection, New York

promoted the progressive goals of order and efficiency and fulfilled Wilson's New Freedom principle of introducing limited government regulation while preserving private business control.

Wilson's third objective was new legislation to break up monopolies. To this end, he initially supported the Clayton antitrust bill, which prohibited unfair trade practices and restricted holding companies. But when business leaders and other progressives strenuously objected, Wilson reversed himself. Opting for continuous federal regulation rather than for the dissolution of trusts, Wilson endorsed the creation of the **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)** to oversee business activity and prevent illegal restrictions on competition.

The Federal Trade Commission Act of 1914 embraced the New Nationalism's emphasis on positive regulation. Wilson now accepted what he had earlier denounced as a partnership between trusts and the government that the trusts would dominate. Indeed, Wilson's conservative appointments to the FTC ensured that the agency would not seriously interfere with business.

Wilson now announced that no further reforms were necessary. He refused to support woman suffrage and helped kill legislation abolishing child labor and expanding credits to farmers. Race relations provided a flagrant instance of Wilson's indifference to social justice issues. Raised in the South, he believed in segregation and backed the Southern Democrats in his cabinet when they introduced formal segregation within the government itself. Government offices, shops, restrooms, and restaurants were all segregated; employees who complained were fired.

THE EXPANSION OF REFORM

Wilson had won in 1912 only because the Republicans had split. By 1916, Roosevelt had returned to the GOP, and Wilson realized that he had to attract some of TR's former followers. Wilson therefore promoted measures he had previously condemned as paternalistic. He now also recognized that some problems could be resolved only by positive federal action. "Old political formulas," he said, "do not fit the present."

In 1916, Wilson convinced Congress to pass the Federal Farm Loan Act, which provided farmers with federally financed, long-term agricultural credits. The Warehouse Act of 1916 improved short-term agricultural credit. The Highway Act of 1916 provided funds to construct and improve rural roads.

Wilson and the Democratic Congress also reached out to labor. Wilson signed the Keating-Owen Act prohibiting the interstate shipment of products made by child labor. In 1902, Wilson had denounced Roosevelt's intervention in the coal strike, but in 1916, he broke a labor-management impasse and averted a railroad strike by helping pass the Adamson Act establishing an eight-hour day for railway workers. Wilson pushed the Kern-McGillicuddy Act, which achieved the progressive goal of a workers' compensation system for federal employees.

Wilson also promoted activist government when he nominated Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court. Known as the "people's lawyer," Brandeis had successfully defended protective labor legislation before the conservative judiciary. Brandeis was the first Jew nominated to the court, and anti-Semitism motivated some of his opponents. Wilson overcame a vicious campaign against Brandeis and secured his confirmation.

By these actions, Wilson brought progressivism to a culmination of sorts and consolidated reformers behind him for a second term. Less than a decade earlier, Wilson the private citizen had assailed government regulation and social legislation; by 1916, he had guided an unprecedented expansion of federal power.

Federal Trade Commission
Government agency established in 1914 to provide regulatory oversight of business activity.



CONCLUSION

Progressive reformers responded to the tensions of industrial and urban development by moving to change society and government. Programs and laws to protect women, children, and injured workers testified to their compassion; the creation of new agencies and political techniques indicated their interest in order and efficiency; campaigns to end corruption, whether perceived in urban political machines, corporate influence, drunkenness, or “inferior” immigrants, illustrated their self-assured vision of the public good.

Americans had come to accept that government action could resolve social and economic problems, and the role and power of government expanded accordingly. The emergence of an activist presidency, capable of developing programs, mobilizing public opinion, directing Congress, and taking forceful action, epitomized this key development.

Progressivism had its ironies and paradoxes. It called for democratic reforms—and did achieve woman suffrage, direct legislation, and popular election of senators—but helped disfranchise black Southerners and Northern immigrants. It advocated social justice but often enforced social control. It demanded responsive government but helped create bureaucracies largely removed from popular control. It endorsed the regulation of business in the public interest but forged regulatory laws and commissions that tended to aid business. Some of these seeming contradictions reflected the persistence of traditional attitudes and the necessity to accommodate conservative opponents; others revealed the progressives’ own limitations in vision, concern, or nerve.

SUMMARY

The Ferment of Reform Progressivism was a diverse movement; reformers responded to the tensions of industrialization and urbanization by developing programs to give women the right to vote, expose business abuses, end child labor, make government more efficient, manage natural resources and bring about social reform. The Social Gospel movement sought to introduce religious ethics into industrial relations; as businesses adopted Taylorization to improve workplace efficiency, workers resisted these new rules of efficiency. Opponents of reform held to traditional values and religious fundamentalism; businesses, angered by muckraking, used public relations as well as less desirable tactics to counter their critics.

Reforming Society Progressives worked to transform society by improving living conditions, educational opportunities, family life, and social and industrial relations. Settlement houses were the spearheads of social reform in urban immigrant neighborhoods; however, many reformers concluded it would take government intervention to end some of the abuses. Today’s modern public school system emerged, and reformer Margaret Sanger crusaded for birth control. Nativists sought to limit immigration; the prohibition of alcohol was linked to social controls; the Eighteenth Amendment made prohibition the law of the land. The Niagara Movement sought to extend equal justice to African Americans; most Progressive reforms had not extended to them.

Reforming Politics and Government Progressives clamored for the reform of politics and the government; many wanted to change procedures and institutions to promote greater democracy; others hoped to improve the efforts of





government and eliminate corruption. One of the most important achievements was woman suffrage; the Nineteenth Amendment gave women across America the right to vote. The secret ballot, initiative, referendum, recall, and direct election of senators were all introduced into the American political landscape during this period.

Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Presidency Progressive proponent Theodore Roosevelt entered the White House upon the assassination of President McKinley in 1901. He rejected the limited role of the Gilded Age presidents and believed it was the role of the president to meet any national needs not prohibited by the Constitution. Called the first “modern president,” Roosevelt’s flamboyance and ambitions made him the most popular president of the time and enabled him to take aggressive approaches toward a coal strike, conservation, “busting” trusts, and regulating business abuses. His administration marks the first time that the federal government gained the power to set rules in private enterprise.

Woodrow Wilson and Progressive Reform Progressivism was not limited to the Republican party; following Taft’s administration Democrats pushed progressive remedies. President Woodrow Wilson, elected in 1912, introduced the New Freedom program; though he believed government’s role should be more limited, he took steps to reduce the high protective tariff, create the Federal Reserve, break up monopolistic practices through the Federal Trade Commission, assist farmers, help workers and build highways. Wilson’s “limited” view of Progressivism resulted in an unprecedented expansion of federal power.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How and why did the presidency change during the Progressive Era?
 2. How did the progressive concern for efficiency affect social reform efforts, public education, government, and rural life?
 3. What factors, old and new, stimulated the reform movements of progressivism?
 4. How did the changing role of women affect progressivism?
 5. Why did the demand for woman suffrage provoke such determined support and such bitter opposition?
-

KEY TERMS

Australian ballot (p. 564)
Bureau of Reclamation (p. 568)
Conservation (p. 568)
Federal Reserve Act (p. 573)
Federal Trade Commission (p. 574)
Fundamentalists (p. 556)
Initiative (p. 566)
Muckraking (p. 553)

New Freedom (p. 573)
New Nationalism (p. 573)
Niagara Movement (p. 563)
Nineteenth Amendment (p. 564)
Progressive Era (p. 549)
Prohibition (p. 562)
Recall (p. 566)
Referendum (p. 566)

Seventeenth Amendment
 (p. 566)
Sixteenth Amendment (p. 571)
Social Gospel Movement (p. 551)
Underwood-Simmons Tariff Act
 (p. 573)
Wobblies (p. 554)



WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- 🏛️ **John Muir National Historic Site, Martinez, California.** The architecture and furnishings of this seventeen-room house reflect the interests of John Muir, the writer and naturalist who founded the Sierra Club and led the preservationists in the Progressive Era. www.nps.gov/jomu/
- 🏛️ **National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.** A permanent exhibition, “Parlor to Politics: Women and Reform, 1890–1925,” uses design, artifacts, and recent scholarship to vividly illustrate the changing role of women in the Progressive Era. It effectively emphasizes their work in settlement houses and their growing politicization and demonstrates the importance of the work of black women’s organizations.
- 🏛️ **Hull House, Chicago, Illinois.** This pioneering settlement house is now a museum on the campus of the University of Illinois, Chicago. www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/hull_house.html
- 🏛️ **Lowell National Historic Park, Lowell, Massachusetts.** “The Working People,” a permanent exhibition, uses artifacts and photographs to chart the activities of immigrant workers at different times in the past, particularly during the Progressive Era. www.nps.gov/lowe/
- 🏛️ **Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York City, New York.** A six-story tenement building containing twenty-two apartments, this museum vividly illustrates the congested and unhealthy living conditions of urban immigrants from the 1870s to the early twentieth century. See www.tenement.org/ for a virtual tour.
- 🏛️ **Sagamore Hill, Oyster Bay, New York.** Theodore Roosevelt’s home is now a National Historic Site and open to the public. www.nps.gov/sahi/
- 🏛️ **William Howard Taft National Historic Site, Cincinnati, Ohio.** Taft was born in this house, the only national Taft memorial. An informative tour focuses on Taft’s public and private life.
- 🏛️ **Staunton, Virginia.** The birthplace and childhood home of Woodrow Wilson, restored with period furnishings, reveals many of the influences that shaped Wilson’s career.



For additional study resources for this chapter, go to:
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