

The Progressives Confront Industrial Capitalism



George Bellows, *Cliff Dwellers*, 1913 Bellows was one of many talented artists who migrated from the Midwest to New York early in the century. In this painting, he captures some of the life and excitement in a tenement district on a hot summer night. To Bellows, this was romantic; to the progressive reformers, it was a problem to be solved. How have cities changed in the nearly one hundred years since Bellows painted this scene? (George Bellows, *Cliff Dwellers*, 1913. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Funds)

American Stories

A Professional Woman Joins the Progressive Crusade

Frances Kellor, a young woman who grew up in Ohio and Michigan, received her law degree in 1897 from Cornell University and became one of the small but growing group of professionally trained women in the United States. Deciding that she was more interested in solving the nation's social problems than in practicing law, she moved

to Chicago, studied sociology, and trained herself as a social reformer. Kellor believed passionately that poverty and inequality could be eliminated in America. She also had the progressive faith that if Americans could only hear the truth about the millions of people living in urban slums, they would rise up and make changes. She was one of the experts who provided the evidence to document what was wrong in industrial America.

Like many progressives, Kellor believed that environment was more important than heredity in determining ability, prosperity, and happiness. Better schools and better housing, she thought, would produce better citizens. While a small group of progressives advocated the sterilization of criminals and the mentally defective, Kellor argued that even criminals were victims of their environment. Kellor demonstrated that poor health and deprived childhoods explained the only differences between criminals and college students. If it were impossible to define a criminal type, then it must be possible to reduce crime by improving the environment.

Kellor was an efficient professional. Like the majority of the professional women of her generation, she never married but devoted her life to social research and social reform. She lived for a time at Hull House in Chicago and at the College Settlement in New York, centers not only of social research and reform but also of lively community. For many young people, the settlement, with its sense of commitment and its exciting conversation around the dinner table, provided an alternative to the nuclear family or the single apartment.

While staying at the College Settlement, Kellor researched and wrote a muckraking study of employment agencies, published in 1904 as *Out of Work*. She revealed how employment agencies exploited immigrants, blacks, and other recent arrivals in the city. Kellor's book, like the writing of most progressives, spilled over with moral outrage. But Kellor went beyond moralism to suggest corrective legislation at the state and national levels. She became one of the leaders of the movement to Americanize the immigrants pouring into the country in unprecedented numbers. Between 1899 and 1920, more than 8 million people came to the United States, most from southern and eastern Europe. Many Americans feared that this flood of immigrants threatened the very basis of American democracy. Kellor and her coworkers represented the side of progressivism that sought state and federal laws to protect the new arrivals from exploitation and to establish agencies and facilities to educate and Americanize them. Another group of progressives, often allied with organized labor, tried to pass laws to restrict immigration. Kellor did not entirely escape the ethnocentrism that was a part of her generation's worldview, and like most progressives she tried to teach middle-class values to the new arrivals, but she did believe that all immigrants could be made into useful citizens.

Convinced of the need for a national movement to promote reform legislation, Kellor helped found the National Committee for Immigrants in America, which tried to promote a national policy "to make all these people Americans," and a federal bureau to organize the campaign. Eventually, she helped establish the Division of Immigrant Education within the Department of Labor. But a political movement led by Theodore Roosevelt excited her most. More than almost any other single person, Kellor had been responsible for alerting Roosevelt to the problems the immigrants faced in American cities. When Roosevelt formed the new Progressive party in 1912, she was one of the many social workers and social researchers who joined him. She campaigned for Roosevelt and directed the Progressive Service Organization, intended to educate voters in all areas of social justice and welfare after the election. After Roosevelt's defeat and the collapse of the Progressive party in 1914, Kellor continued to work for Americanization. She spent the rest of her life promoting justice, order, and efficiency as well as trying to find ways of resolving industrial and international disputes.

While no one person can represent all facets of a complex movement, Frances Kellor's life illustrates two important aspects of progressivism, the first nationwide reform movement of the modern era: first, a commitment to promote



Ellis Island Immigrants, 1903

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Conclusion: The Limits of Progressivism

social justice, ensure equal opportunity, and preserve democracy; second, a search for order and efficiency in a world complicated by rapid industrialization, immigration, and spectacular urban growth. Like many progressive leaders, Kellor was a part of a global movement to confront these problems, and she was influenced by writers and reformers in England and Germany as well as those in the United States. Progressivism reached its height in the years between 1900 and 1914. Like most American reform movements, the progressive movement did not plot to overthrow the government; rather, it sought to use the government to promote American ideals and to ensure the survival of the American way of life.

This chapter traces the important aspects of progressivism. It examines the social justice movement, which sought to promote reform among the poor and to improve life for those who had fallen victim to an urban and industrial civilization. It surveys life among workers, a group the reformers sometimes helped but often misunderstood. Then it traces the reform movements in the cities and states, where countless officials and experts tried to reduce chaos and promote order and democracy. Finally, it examines progressivism at the national level during the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, the first thoroughly modern presidents.

THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Historians write of a “progressive movement,” but actually there were a number of movements, some of them contradictory, but all focusing on the problems created by a rapidly expanding urban and industrial world. Some reformers, often from the middle class, sought to humanize the modern city. They hoped to improve housing and schools and to provide a better life for the poor and recent immigrants. Others were concerned with the conditions of work and the rights of labor. Still others pressed for changes in the political system to make it more responsive to the people. Progressivism had roots in the 1890s, when many reformers were shocked by the devastation caused by the depression of 1893, and they read Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* (1879) and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888). They were also influenced by John Ruskin, the strange and eccentric British reformer and art historian, who hated the industrial city. Like the British, they were appalled by a pamphlet titled *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, which revealed the horrors of the slums of East London. They were also influenced by the British and American Social Gospel movement, which sought to build the kingdom of God on earth by eliminating poverty and promoting equality (see Chapter 19).

The Progressive Movement in Global Context

Most progressives saw their movement in a global context with a particular focus on an Atlantic world. Many had studied at European universities. They

attended conferences on urban and industrial problems held at the Paris Exposition of 1900, and they belonged to organizations such as the International Association for Labor Legislation, which tried to promote legislation to aid workers. They read the latest sociological studies from Britain, France, and Germany. Many were introduced to the problems of the modern industrial city by walking through the streets of East London or the slums of Berlin. Others were inspired by visiting Toynbee Hall, the pioneer social settlement in London, and by observing the municipal housing and government-owned street-car lines in Glasgow, Scotland, and Dresden, Germany. John R. Commons, the economist from the University of Wisconsin who trained many progressive experts, kept a chart of labor legislation from around the world on the wall of his seminar room as a constant reminder of the global reform network. At the same time, European reformers visited American cities and took part in American conferences.

The United States lagged behind much of the industrialized world in passing social legislation, perhaps because it lacked the strong labor and socialist movements present in most European countries. Many European countries, along with Australia, New Zealand, and Brazil, passed laws regulating hours and wages and creating pensions for the elderly. Germany enacted sickness, accident, and disability insurance in the 1880s. Great Britain had workers’ compensation by the late 1890s, and old age, sickness, and unemployment insurance by 1911, all paid for with public funds. But American cities, unlike those in Europe, were filled with immigrants from a dozen countries who had cultural adjustments and a language barrier to overcome. The American federal system meant that most reform

John Sloan, *Women Drying Their Hair*, 1912 Sloan (1871–1951) was one of the leading members of the “ash can school,” a group of artists who experimented with new techniques and painted ordinary scenes of urban life, such as that shown here. His paintings offended many because he flouted genteel codes of propriety and decorum, and he showed working-class women in ways that were just as shocking as progressive-era reports on child labor and prostitution. Why was this painting shocking to Americans in 1912? (*John Sloan, Sunday, Women Dry Their Hair, 1912.* © Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. All Rights Reserved.)



battles had to be fought first at the local and state levels before they could reach the national scene. A unique mix of religion, politics, and moral outrage imparted a particular character to the progressive movement in the United States.

The Progressive Worldview

Intellectually, the progressives were influenced by Darwinism. They believed that the world was in flux, and they rebelled against the fixed and the formal in every field. One of the philosophers of the movement, John Dewey, wrote that ideas could become instruments for change. In his philosophy of pragmatism, William James tried to explain all ideas in terms of their consequences. Most progressives were convinced that environment was much more important than heredity in forming character. Thus, if one could build better schools and houses, one could make better people and a more perfect society. Yet even the more advanced reformers thought in racial and ethnic categories. They believed that some groups could be molded and changed more easily than others. Thus, progressivism did not usually mean progress for blacks.

In many ways, progressivism was the first modern reform movement. It sought to bring order and efficiency to a world that had been transformed by rapid growth and new technology. Yet elements of nostalgia infected the movement as reformers tried to preserve

the handicrafts of a preindustrial age and to promote small-town and farm values in the city. The progressive leaders were almost always middle class, and they quite consciously tried to teach their middle-class values to the immigrants and the working class. Often, the progressives seemed more interested in control than in reform; frequently, their efforts to help smacked of paternalism.

The progressives were part of a statistics-minded generation. They conducted surveys, gathered facts, wrote reports, and usually believed that their reports would lead to change. The haunting photographs of young workers taken by Lewis Hine, the stark and beautiful city paintings by John Sloan, and the realist novels of Theodore Dreiser and William Dean Howells reflect the progressives' drive to document and record.

The progressives were optimistic about human nature, and they believed that change was possible. In retrospect, they may seem naive or bigoted, but they wrestled with many social questions, some of them old but fraught with new urgency in an industrialized society. What is the proper relation of government to society? In a world of large corporations, huge cities, and massive transportation systems, how much should the government regulate and control? How much responsibility does society have to care for the poor and needy? The progressives could not agree on the answers, but they struggled with the questions.

RECOVERING THE PAST

Documentary Photographs

Photographs are a revealing way of recovering the past visually. But when looking at a photograph, especially an old one, it is easy to assume that it is an accurate representation of the past. However, much like novelists and historians, photographers have a point of view. They take their pictures for a reason—often to prove a point. As one photographer remarked, “Photographs don’t lie, but liars take photographs.”

To document the need for reform in the cities, progressives collected statistics, made surveys, described settlement house life, and even wrote novels. But they discovered that the photograph was often more effective than words. Jacob Riis, the Danish-born author of *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), a devastating exposure of conditions in New York City tenement house slums, was also a pioneer in urban photography. Others had taken pictures of dank alleys and street urchins before, but Riis was the first to photograph slum conditions with the express purpose of promoting reform. At first he hired photographers, but then he bought a camera and taught himself how to use it. He even tried a new German flash powder to illuminate dark alleys and tenement rooms to record the horror of slum life.

Riis made many of his photographs into lantern slides and used them to illustrate his lectures on the need for housing reform. Although he was a creative and innovative photographer, his pictures were often far from objective. His equipment was awkward, his film slow. He had to set up and prepare carefully before snapping the shutter. His views of tenement ghetto streets and poor children now seem like clichés, but they were designed to make Americans angry and to arouse them to reform.

Another important progressive photographer was Lewis Hine. Although trained as a sociologist, he taught himself photography. Hine used his camera to illustrate his lectures at the Ethical Culture School in New York. In 1908, he was hired as a full-time investigator by the National Child Labor Committee. His haunting photographs of children in factories helped convince many Americans of the need to abolish child labor. Hine’s chil-



Lewis Hine, Carolina Cotton Mill, 1908. (Lewis Hine, Carolina Cotton Mill, 1908. George Eastman House)

dren were appealing human beings. He showed them eating, running, working, and staring wistfully out factory windows. His photographs avoided the pathos that Riis was so fond of recording, but just as surely they documented the need for reform.

Another technique that the reform photographer used was the before-and-after shot. The two photographs shown opposite of a one-room apartment in Philadelphia early in the century illustrate how progressive reformers tried to teach immigrants to imitate middle-class manners. The “before” photograph shows a room cluttered with washtubs, laundry, cooking utensils, clothes, tools, even an old Christmas decoration. In the “after” picture, much of the clutter has been cleaned up. A window has been installed to let in light and fresh air. The wallpaper, presumably a haven



Little Spinner
in Globe Cotton
Mill, 1909—
Lewis Hine
Photo



The reality of one-room tenement apartments (above) contrasted with the tidiness that reformers saw as the ideal (right). (*Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA*)



for hidden bugs and germs, has been torn off. The cooking utensils and laundry have been put away. The woodwork has been stained, and some ceremonial objects have been gathered on a shelf.

What else can you find that has been changed? How well do you think the message of the photographic combinations like this one worked? Would the immigrant family be happy with the new look and condition of their room? Could anyone live in one room and keep it so neat?

REFLECTING ON THE PAST As you look at these, or any photographs, ask yourself: What is the photographer's purpose and point of view? Why was this particular angle chosen for the picture? And why center on these particular people or objects? What does the photographer reveal about his or her purpose? What does the photographer reveal unintentionally? How have fast film and new camera styles changed photography? On what subjects do reform-minded photographers train their cameras today?

The Muckrakers

Writers who exposed corruption and other social evils were labeled “muckrakers” by Theodore Roosevelt. Not all muckrakers were reformers—some wrote just for the money—but reformers learned from their techniques of exposé. In part, the muckrakers were a product of a journalistic revolution in the 1890s. The older magazines often had elite audiences and few illustrations. The new magazines had slick formats, more advertising, and wide sales. Competing for readers, editors eagerly published articles telling the public what was wrong in America.

Lincoln Steffens, a young California journalist, wrote articles exposing the connections between respectable businessmen and corrupt politicians. When published as a book in 1904, *The Shame of the Cities* became a battle cry for people determined to clean up city government. Ida Tarbell, a teacher turned journalist, revealed the ruthlessness of John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company. David Graham Phillips uncovered the alliance of politics and business in *The Treason of the Senate* (1906). Robert Hunter, a young settlement worker, shocked Americans in 1904 with his book *Poverty*. In his compelling novel *The Octopus*, Frank Norris dramatized the railroads’ stranglehold on the farmers, while Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle* (1906) described the horrors of the Chicago meatpacking industry.



Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities* (1904)

Child Labor

Nothing disturbed the social justice progressives more than the sight of children, sometimes as young as 8 or 10, working long hours in dangerous and depressing factories. Young people had worked in factories since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, but that did not make the practice any less repugnant to the reformers. “Children are put into industry very much as we put in raw material,” Jane Addams objected, “and the product we look for is not better men and women, but better manufactured goods.”

The crusade against child labor was a typical social justice reform effort. Its origins lay in the moral indignation of middle-class reformers. But reform went beyond moral outrage as reformers gathered statistics, took photographs documenting the abuse of children, and used their evidence to push for legislation first on the local level, then in the states, and eventually in Washington.



John Spargo, *The Bitter Cry of Children* (1906)

Florence Kelley was one of the most important leaders in the crusade against child



Newsboys Nothing disturbed the reformers more than the sight of little children, sullen and stunted, working long hours in factory, farm, and mine. But of all child laborers perhaps the newsboys caused the most concern. They often had to pick up their papers late at night or very early in the morning. They sometimes were homeless and slept wherever they could find a place. But even more troubling, they associated with unsavory characters and fell prey to bad habits. In this photo Lewis Hine captures three young newsboys in St. Louis in 1910. Why were reformers upset by photos like this? If you had to work, would you prefer the mine or the factory or would you become a newsboy? (Lewis Hine, *Newsies at Skeeter Branch, St. Louis, MO, 11 AM, May 9, 1910*. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Phyllis D. Massar, 1970*. (1970.727.1) All Rights Reserved, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*.)

labor. Kelley had grown up in an upper-class Philadelphia family and graduated from Cornell in 1882—like Addams and Kellor she was a member of the first generation of college women in the United States. When the University of Pennsylvania refused her admission as a graduate student because she was a woman, she went to the University of Zurich in Switzerland. Her European experience was crucial in her development. It transformed her from an upper-class dilettante into a committed reformer. She married a Polish-Russian scholar and became a socialist. The marriage failed, and some years later, Kelley moved to Chicago with her children, became a Hull House resident, and poured her considerable energies into the campaign against child labor. A friend described her as “explosive, hot-tempered, determined . . . a smoking volcano that at any moment would burst into flames.” When she could find no attorney in Chicago to argue child labor cases against some of the prominent corporations, she went to law school, passed the bar exam, and argued the cases herself.

Kelley and the other child labor reformers quickly recognized the need for state laws. Marshaling their evidence about the tragic effects on growing children of working long hours in dark and damp factories, they pressured the Illinois state legislature into passing an anti-child labor law. A few years later,

however, the state supreme court ruled it unconstitutional, convincing reformers that national action was necessary.

Edgar Gardner Murphy, an Alabama clergyman, suggested the formation of the National Child Labor Committee. Like many other Social Gospel ministers, Murphy believed that the church should reform society as well as save souls. He was appalled by the number of young children working in southern textile mills, where they were exposed to great danger and condemned to “compulsory ignorance” (because they dropped out of school).

The National Child Labor Committee, headquartered in New York, drew up a model state child labor law, encouraged state and city campaigns, and coordinated the movement around the country. Although two-thirds of the states passed some form of child labor law between 1905 and 1907, many had loopholes that exempted a large number of children, including newsboys and youngsters who worked in the theater. A national bill was defeated in 1906, but in 1912 the child labor reformers convinced Congress to establish a children’s bureau in the Department of Labor. Despite these efforts, compulsory school attendance laws did more to reduce the number of children who worked than federal and state laws, which proved difficult to pass and even more difficult to enforce. Although American child labor reformers borrowed their tactics and research methods from European reformers, the movement to restrict the labor of children was much more successful in Europe. In most European countries, legislation quickly restricted the hours of all workers including men. This did not happen consistently in the United States until the 1930s.

Like other progressive reform efforts, the battle against child labor was only partly successful. Too many businesses, both small and large, were profiting from employing children at low wages. Too many politicians and judges were reluctant to regulate the work of children or adults because work seemed such an individual and personal matter.



Mother Jones,
“The March of
the Mill
Children”
(1903)

And some parents, who often desperately needed the money their children earned in the factories, opposed the reformers and even broke the law to allow their children to work.

The reformers also worried over the young people who got into trouble with the law, often for pranks that in rural areas would have seemed harmless. They feared for young people tried by adult courts and thrown into jail with hardened criminals. Reformers organized juvenile courts, in which judges had the authority to put delinquent youths on probation,

take them from their families and make them wards of the state, or assign them to an institution. A uniquely American invention, the juvenile court often helped prevent young delinquents from adopting a life of crime. Yet the juvenile offender was frequently deprived of all rights of due process, a fact that the Supreme Court finally recognized in 1967, when it ruled that children were entitled to procedural rights when accused of a crime.

Working Women and Woman Suffrage

Closely connected with the anti-child labor movement was the effort to limit the hours of women’s work. The most important court case on women’s work came before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1908. Josephine Goldmark, research director of the National Consumer’s League, an organization dedicated to seeking protective legislation for workers and the safe and sanitary manufacturing of consumer productions, wrote the brief for *Muller v. Oregon*. Goldmark’s brother-in-law, Louis Brandeis, argued the case before the Court. The Court upheld the Oregon law limiting the workday of women in factories and laundries to 10 hours largely because Goldmark’s sociological argument detailed the danger and disease that these women workers faced. Most states fell into line with the Supreme Court decision and passed protective legislation for women, though many companies found ways to circumvent the laws. Even the work permitted by the law seemed too long to some women. “I think ten hours is too much for a woman,” one factory worker stated. “I have four children and have to work hard at home. Make me awful tired. I would like nine hours. I get up at 5:30. When I wash, I have to stay up till one or two o’clock.”

By contending that “women are fundamentally weaker than men in all that makes for endurance: in muscular strength, in nervous energy, in the powers of persistent attention and application,” the reformers won some protection for women workers. But their arguments that women were weaker than men would eventually be used to reinforce gender segregation of the workforce for the next half century.

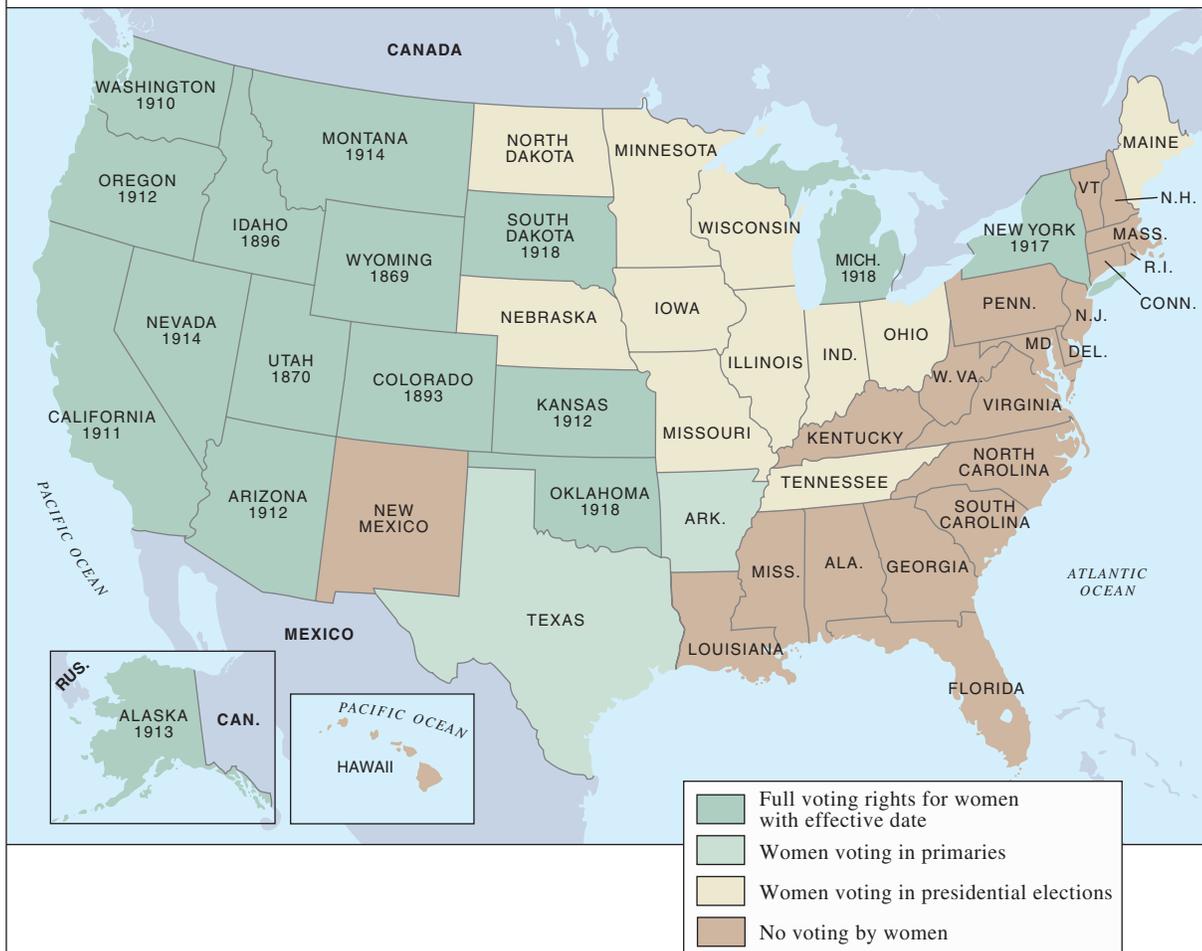
In addition to working for protective legislation for working women, the social justice progressives also campaigned for woman suffrage. The early battles for the right of women to vote were fought at the state level, with the greatest success coming in the West. Wyoming (1869), Utah (1870), Colorado (1893), Idaho (1896), Washington (1910), California (1911), Arizona and Oregon (1912), and Montana and Nevada (1914) gave women



Helen M. Todd,
“Getting Out
the Vote”
(1911)

Woman Suffrage Before the Nineteenth Amendment

Western states led the battle for women’s right to vote, but key victories in New York (1917) and Michigan (1918), and a carefully organized campaign in all parts of the country, finally led to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. It was a triumph of progressive reform.



the right to vote in at least some elections. But this did not mean that the western states were more enlightened on gender issues. In the East and Midwest, both with large immigrant populations, suffrage and prohibition were often tied closely together. Many men believed that women, if given the vote, would support prohibition. The campaign to win the vote for women was a global movement, and the suffrage leaders in the United States were in touch with women in other countries. They often met their foreign counterparts at meetings of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. The United States lagged behind New Zealand, Finland, Norway, and several other countries in granting female suffrage. Women in Great Britain were allowed to vote in 1918, but not until 1938 could they vote on an equal basis with men.



Woman Suffrage Before the Nineteenth Amendment

The political process that eventually led to woman suffrage in the United States was slowed by the difficulty of amending the Constitution and the need to fight the battle one state at a time. But the progressives pressed on. Some suffrage advocates argued that middle-class women would offset the votes of ignorant and corrupt immigrant men, but many progressives supported votes for all women. Jane Addams argued that urban women not only could vote intelligently but also needed the vote to protect, clothe, and feed their families. Women in an urban age, she suggested, needed to be municipal housekeepers. Through suffrage, they would ensure that elected officials provided adequate services—pure water, uncontaminated food, proper sanitation, and police protection. The progressive



Jane Addams, "Ballots Necessary for Women" (1906)

insistence that all women needed the vote helped ensure the victory for woman suffrage that would come after World War I.

Much more controversial than either votes for women or protective legislation was the movement for birth control. Even many advanced progressives could not imagine themselves teaching immigrant women how to prevent conception, especially because the Comstock Law of 1873 made it illegal to promote or even write about contraceptive devices.

Margaret Sanger, a nurse who had watched poor women suffer from too many births and even die from dangerous, illegal abortions, was one of the founders of the modern American birth control movement. Middle-class Americans had limited family size in the nineteenth century through abstinence, withdrawal, and abortion, as well as through the use of primitive birth control devices, but much ignorance and misinformation remained, even among middle-class women. Sanger obtained the latest medical and scientific



Margaret Sanger's Newspaper, 1914

European studies and in 1914 explained in her magazine, *The Woman Rebel*, and in a pamphlet, *Family Limitation*, that women could separate sex from procreation. She was promptly indicted for violation of the postal code and fled to Europe to avoid arrest.

Birth control remained controversial, and in most states illegal, for many years. Yet Sanger helped bring the topic of sexuality and contraception out into the open. When she returned to the United States in 1921, she founded the American Birth Control League, which became the Planned Parenthood Federation in 1942.

Reforming Home and School

The reformers believed that better housing and education could transform the lives of the poor and create a better world. Books such as Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) horrified them. With vivid language and haunting photographs, Riis had documented the misery of New York's slums.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the progressives took a new approach toward housing problems. They combined their vision of what needed to be done to improve society with their practical ability to organize public opinion and get laws passed. They collected statistics, conducted surveys, organized committees, and constructed exhibits to demonstrate the effect of urban overcrowding. Then they worked for the passage of tenement house laws in several cities. These laws set fire codes and regulated the number of windows and bathrooms and the size of apartments, but the laws were

often evaded or modified. In 1910, the progressives organized the National Housing Association, and some of them looked ahead to federal laws and even to government-subsidized housing. American housing reformers were inspired by model working-class dwellings in London, municipal housing in Glasgow, and various experiments in government-constructed housing in France, Belgium, and Germany, but they realized that in the United States, they had to start with regulation at the local level.

Ironically, many middle-class women reformers who tried to teach working-class families how to live in their tenement flats had never organized their own homes. Often they lived in settlement houses, where they ate in a dining hall and never had to worry about cleaning, cooking, or doing laundry. Some of them, however, began to realize that the domestic tasks expected of women of all classes kept many of them from taking their full place in society. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, author of *Women and Economics* (1898), dismantled the traditional view of "woman's sphere" and sketched an alternative. Suggesting that entrepreneurs ought to build apartment houses designed to allow women to combine motherhood with careers, she advocated shared kitchen facilities and a common dining room, a laundry run by efficient workers, and a roof-garden day nursery with a professional teacher.

Gilman, who criticized private homes as "bloated buildings, filled with a thousand superfluties," was joined by a few radicals in promoting new living arrangements. However, most Americans of all political persuasions continued to view the home as sacred space where the mother ruled supreme and created an atmosphere of domestic tranquility for the husband and children. Many reformers disapproved of the clutter and lack of privacy in immigrant tenements. But often immigrant family ideals and values differed from those of the middle-class reformers.

Next to better housing, the progressives stressed better schools as a way to produce better citizens. Public school systems were often rigid and corrupt. Far from producing citizens who would help transform society, the schools seemed to reinforce the conservative habits that blocked change. A reporter who traveled around the country in 1892 encountered teachers who drilled pupils through repetitious rote learning. A Chicago teacher advised her students, "Don't stop to think; tell me what you know." When asked why the students were not allowed to move their heads, a New York teacher replied, "Why should they look behind when the teacher is in front of them?"



Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "If I Were a Man" (1914)

AMERICAN VOICES

Rosa, An Italian Immigrant Learns English at a Settlement House in Chicago

Most accounts of the settlement movement were written by settlement workers and reformers. This is a rare first person description recalled by an Italian woman who left an abusive husband and moved to Chicago to start a new life.

In the first beginning we always came in the club and made two circles in the room. One circle was for those ladies who could talk English and the other circle was for the ladies who talked German. Mis' Reuter talked German to the German ladies, and Miss Gray talked English to the other ladies. But I guess they both did some preaching. They used to tell us that it's not nice to drink the beer, and we must not let the baby do this, and this. Me, I was the only Italian woman—where were they going to put me? I couldn't talk German, so I went in the English circle. So after we had about an hour, or an hour and a half of preaching, they would pull up the circle and we'd play the games together. All together we played the games—the Norwegian, the German, the English and me. Then we would have some cake and coffee and the goodnight song. . . .

Pretty soon they started the classes to teach us poor people to talk and write in English. The

talk of the people in the settlement house was different entirely than what I used to hear. I used to love those American people, and I was listening and listening how they talked. That's how I learned to talk some good English. Oh, I was glad when I learned enough English to go by the priest in the Irish church and confess myself and make the priest understand what was the sin! But I never learned to do the writing in English. I all the time used to come to that class so tired and so sleepy after scrubbing and washing the whole day—I went to sleep when they started the writing. I couldn't learn it. They had clubs for the children too; my little girls loved to go. And after a few years when they started the kindergarten, my Luie was one of the first children to go in. . . .

- Critics charged that the settlement workers betrayed a paternalism and class bias. Do you see any of that in Rosa's account?
- What was her attitude toward the settlement house and her experiences there?

Progressive education, like many other aspects of progressivism, opposed the rigid and the formal in favor of flexibility and change. John Dewey was the key philosopher of progressive education. In his laboratory school at the University of Chicago, he experimented with new educational methods. He replaced the school desks, which were bolted down and always faced the front, with seats that could be moved into circles and arranged in small groups. The movable seat, in fact, became one of the symbols of the progressive education movement.

Dewey insisted that the schools be child-centered, not subject-oriented. Teachers should teach children rather than teach history or mathematics. He did not mean that history and math should not be taught but that those subjects should be related to the students' experience. Students should learn by doing. They should not just learn about democracy; the school itself should operate like a democracy.

Dewey also maintained that schools should become instruments for social

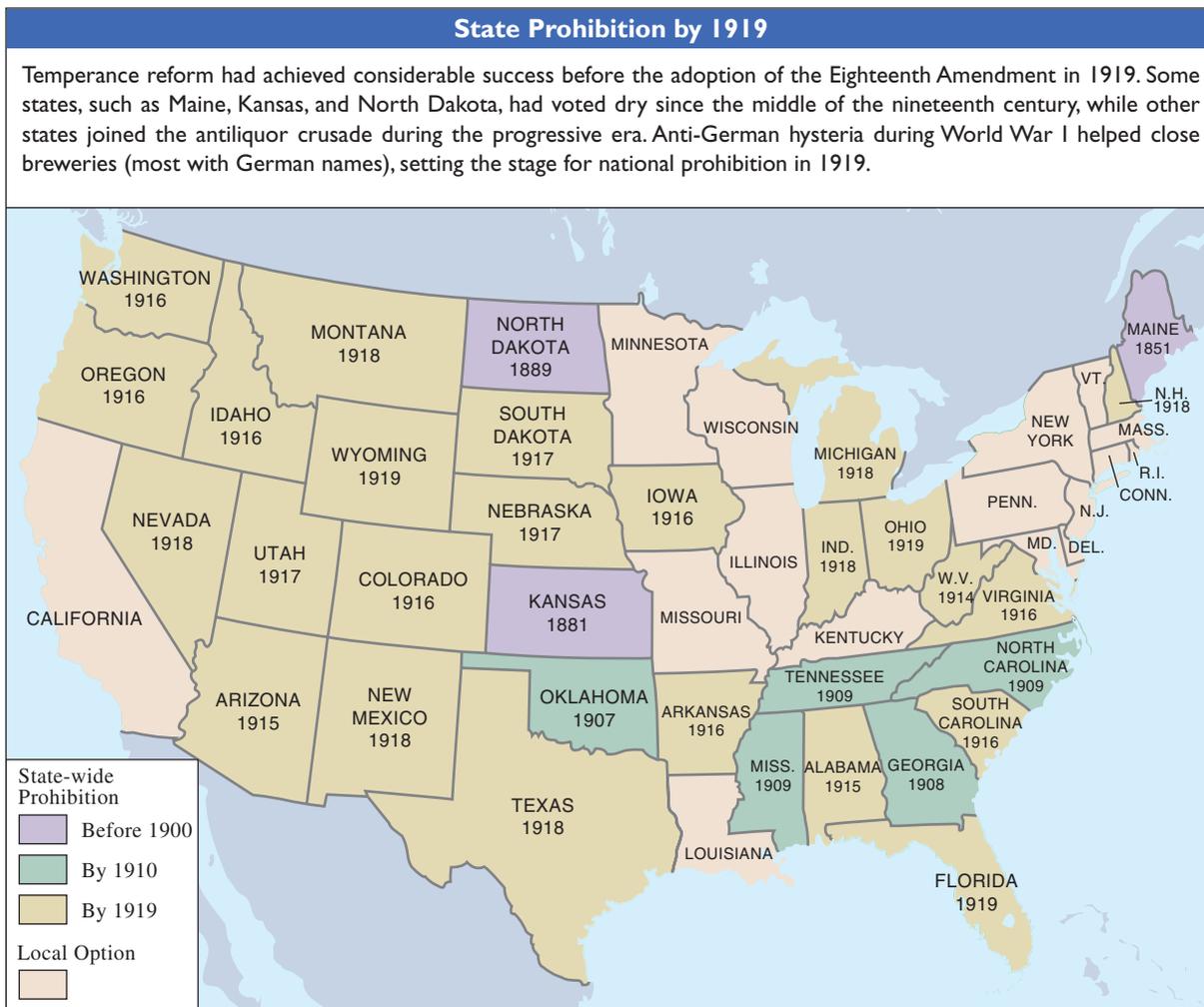
reform. But like most progressives, Dewey was never quite clear whether he wanted schools to help students adjust to the existing society or to turn out graduates who would change the world. Although he wavered on that point, the spirit of progressive education, like the spirit of progressivism in general, was optimistic. Dewey's progressive education, which sought to educate all Americans, stood in sharp contrast to European models, in which educating the intellectual and social elite took precedence over schooling the masses.

Crusades Against Saloons, Theaters, and Prostitution

Progressives often displayed a moral outrage when it came to the behavior of the working class that surprised and confused foreign observers. American attitudes toward prostitution and prohibition especially baffled many Europeans. Most social justice progressives opposed the sale of alcohol. Some came from Protestant homes in which consumption



IMAGE
George Bellows, *The Drunk*, 1923-1924



of liquor was considered a sin, but most advocated prohibition because they saw eliminating the sale of alcohol as part of the process of reforming the city and conserving human resources.

Americans did drink great quantities of beer, wine, and hard liquor, and the amount they consumed rose rapidly after 1900, peaking between 1911 and 1915. An earlier temperance movement had achieved some success in the 1840s and 1850s, but only three states still had prohibition laws in force. The modern antiliquor movement was spearheaded in the 1880s and 1890s by the Women's Christian Temperance Union and after 1900 by the Anti-Saloon League and a coalition of religious leaders and social reformers. During the progressive era, temperance forces had considerable success in influencing legislation. Seven states passed temperance laws between 1906 and 1912.

The reformers were appalled to see young children going into saloons to bring home a pail of beer for the family and horrified by tales of alcoholic fathers beating wives and children. But most often

progressives focused on the saloon, which they not only viewed as a place for drinking but also linked to drug traffic, prostitution, and political corruption. Although they never quite understood the role that alcohol played in the social life of many ethnic groups, Jane Addams and other settlement workers appreciated the saloon's importance as a neighborhood social center. Addams started a coffeehouse at Hull House in an attempt to lure people away from the saloon. The progressives never found an adequate substitute for the saloon, but they set to work to pass local and state prohibition laws. Joining forces with diverse groups to push for change, they achieved victory when, on December 22, 1917, Congress sent to the states for ratification a constitutional amendment prohibiting the sale, manufacture, and import of intoxicating liquor within the United States. The spirit of sacrifice for the war effort facilitated rapid ratification of the amendment.

In addition to the saloon, progressives saw the urban dance hall and the movie theater as threats to the morals and well-being of young people, especially



The Musketeers of Pig Alley Lillian Gish was one of the stars of the silent film *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912), which was directed by D. W. Griffith three years before he made *Birth of a Nation*. The film shows Gish and other characters trapped in a ghetto but at the same time enjoying the pleasures of the saloons and dance halls—hardly the message that the progressive reformers were trying to get across. Why were movies so exciting to young people in 1912? Do you react in a similar way to movies today? (Photofest)

young women. The motion picture, invented in 1889, developed as an important form of entertainment during the first decade of the twentieth century. At first, the “nickelodeons,” as the early movie theaters were called, appealed mainly to a lower-class and largely ethnic audience. In 1902, New York City had 50 theaters; by 1908, there were more than 400 showing 30-minute dramas and romances.

Not until World War I, when D. W. Griffith produced long feature films, did the movies begin to attract a middle-class audience. The most popular of these early films was Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915), a blatantly racist and distorted epic of black debauchery during Reconstruction. Many early films were imported from France, Italy, and Germany; because they were silent, it was easy to use subtitles in any language. But one did not need to know the language, or even be able to read, to enjoy the action. That was part of the attraction of the early films. Some films stressed slapstick humor or romance and adventure; others bordered on pornography. The reformers objected not only to the plots and content of the films but also to the location of the theaters (near saloons and burlesque houses) and to their dark interiors. But for young immigrant women, who made up the bulk of the audience at most urban movie theaters, the films provided rare exciting moments in their lives. One daughter of strict Italian parents remarked, “The one

place I was allowed to go by myself was the movies. I went to the movies for fun. My parents wouldn’t let me go anywhere else, even when I was twenty-four.”

Saloons, dance halls, and movie theaters all seemed dangerous to progressives interested in improving life in the city, because all appeared to be somehow connected with the worst evil of all, prostitution. Campaigns against prostitution had been waged since the early nineteenth century, but they were nothing compared with the progressives’ crusade to wipe out what they called the “social evil.” All major cities and many smaller ones appointed vice commissions and made elaborate studies of prostitution. The reports, which often ran to several thick volumes, were typical progressive documents, compiled by experts, filled with elaborate statistical studies, and laced with moral outrage.

The progressive crusade against prostitution attracted many kinds of people, for often contradictory reasons. Racists and immigration restrictionists maintained that inferior people—blacks and recent immigrants, especially those from southern and eastern Europe—became prostitutes and pimps. Most progressives, however, stressed environmental causes. They viewed prostitution, along with child labor and poor housing, as evils that education and reform could eliminate.

Progressive reformers also considered economic causes of prostitution. “Is it any wonder,” the Chicago Vice Commission asked, “that a tempted girl who receives only six dollars per week working with her hands sells her body for twenty-five dollars per week when she learns there is a demand for it and men are willing to pay the price?” “Do you suppose I am going back to earn five or six dollars a week in a factory,” one prostitute asked an investigator, “when I can earn that amount any night and often much more?”

Despite all their efforts, the progressives failed to end prostitution and did virtually nothing to address its roots in poverty. They wiped out a few red-light districts, closed a number of brothels, and managed to push a bill through Congress (the Mann Act of 1910) that prohibited the interstate transport of women for immoral purposes. Perhaps more important, they persuaded several states to raise the age of consent for women and in 20 states they made the Wassermann test for syphilis mandatory



Report of the
Vice
Commission,
Louisville,
Kentucky
(1915)

for both men and women before a marriage license could be issued.

THE WORKER IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

Progressive reformers sympathized with industrial workers who struggled to earn a living for themselves and their families. The progressives sought protective legislation (particularly for women and children), unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation. But often they had little understanding of what it was really like to sell one's strength by the hour. For example, they supported labor's right to organize at a time when labor had few friends, yet they often opposed the strike as a weapon against management. And neither organized labor nor the reformers, individually or in shaky partnership, had power over industry. Control was in the hands of the owners and managers, who were determined to strengthen their grip on the workplace as the nature of industrial work was being transformed.

The Changing Nature of Industrial Labor

John Mekras arrived in New York from Greece in 1912 and traveled immediately to Manchester, New Hampshire, where he found a job in the giant Amoskeag textile mill. He did not speak a word of English. "The man who hands out the jobs sent me to the spinning room," he later remembered. "There I don't know anything about the spinning. I'm a farmer . . . I don't know what the boss is talking about." Mekras didn't last long at the mill. He was one of the many industrial workers who had difficulty adjusting to factory work in the early twentieth century.

Many workers—whether from Greece, eastern Europe, rural Vermont, or Michigan—confronted a bewildering world based on order and routine. Unlike farm or craft work, factory life was dominated by the clock, the bell tower, and the boss. The workers continued to resist the mindless routine and relentless pace of factory work, and they subtly sabotaged the employers' efforts to control the workplace. They stayed at home on holidays when they were supposed to work, took unauthorized breaks, and set their own informal productivity schedules. Often they were fired or quit. In the woollen industry, for example, the annual turnover of workers between 1907 and 1910 was more than 100 percent. In New York needleworker shops in 1912 and 1913, the turnover rate was more than 250 percent.



Punching the
Clock



Climbing into the Promised Land Immigrants from eastern and southern Europe came to the United States in great numbers from 1890 to 1914. Many of them were detained at Ellis Island in New York. There usually was a long wait, embarrassing questions to answer, forms to fill out, a complicated bureaucracy to get past. There was also a medical exam to endure. Some immigrants failed the exam and were rejected and sent back to Europe. Still they came with hope and determination. Lewis Hine titled this photo *Climbing into the promised land, Ellis Island, 1908*. Did the United States live up to the hopes of most immigrants? What emotions, thoughts, and concerns can you read on the faces of these immigrants? (Lewis Hine, *Climbing into the Promised Land, Ellis Island, 1908*. © Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, USA, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Rosenblum/Bridgeman Art Library.)

Overall in American industry, one-third of the workers stayed at their jobs less than a year.

The nature of work continued to change in the early twentieth century as industrialists extended late-nineteenth-century efforts to make their factories and their workforces more efficient, productive, and profitable. In some industries, the introduction of new machines revolutionized work and eliminated highly paid, skilled jobs. For example, glassblowing machines (invented about 1900) replaced thousands of glassblowers or reduced them from artisans to workers. Power-driven machines, better-organized operations, and finally the moving assembly line, perfected by Henry Ford, transformed the nature of work and turned many laborers into unskilled tenders of machines.

It was not just machines that changed the nature of industrial work. The principles of scientific



Westinghouse
Air Brake Co.,
Westinghouse
Works

management, which set out new rules for organizing work, were also important. The key figure was Frederick Taylor, the son of a prominent Philadelphia family. After Taylor had a nervous breakdown while at a private school, his physicians prescribed manual labor as a cure, and he went to work as a laborer at the Midvale Steel Company in Philadelphia. Working his way up rapidly while studying engineering at night, he became chief engineer at the factory in the 1880s. Later he used this

experience to develop his four principles of scientific management: centralized planning, systematic analysis of each job, detailed instructions to and close supervision of each worker, and an incentive wage system to encourage laborers to work harder and faster.

Taylor studied all kinds of workers and timed the various components of their jobs with a stopwatch in order to determine the fastest way of performing a task. Many owners enthusiastically adopted Taylor's concepts of scientific management, seeing an opportunity to increase their profits and shift control of the workplace from the skilled workers to the managers. Not surprisingly, many workers resented the emphasis on higher productivity and tighter control. "We don't want to work as fast as we are able to," one machinist remarked. "We want to work as fast as we think it comfortable for us to work."

Samuel Gompers, head of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), however, was quick to recognize that Taylorism would reduce workers to "mere machines." Under Gompers, the AFL prospered during the progressive era. Between 1897 and 1904, union membership grew from 447,000 to more than 2 million, with three out of every four union members claimed by the AFL. By 1914, the AFL alone had more than 2 million members. Gompers's "pure and simple unionism" was most successful among coal miners, railroad workers, and the building trades. As we saw in Chapter 18, Gompers ignored the growing army of unskilled and immigrant workers and concentrated on raising the wages and improving the working conditions of the skilled artisans who were members of unions affiliated with the AFL.

For a time, Gompers's strategy seemed to work. Several industries negotiated with the AFL as a way of avoiding disruptive strikes. But cooperation was short-lived. Labor unions were defeated in a number of disastrous strikes, and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) launched an aggressive

counterattack. NAM and other employer associations provided strikebreakers, used industrial spies, and blacklisted union members to prevent them from obtaining other jobs.

Early in the century, courts at all levels sided overwhelmingly with employers. They often declared strikes illegal and were quick to issue restraining orders, making it impossible for workers to interfere with the operation of a business. The Supreme Court came down squarely on management's side, ruling in the Danbury Hatters case (*Loewe v. Lawler*, 1908) that the boycott of an industry by a labor union violated the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. The boycott had been a valuable tool for striking workers, enabling them to picket and pressure companies doing business with their employers during a strike.

Although many social justice progressives sympathized with the working class, they spent more time promoting protective legislation than strengthening organized labor. Often cast in the role of mediators during industrial disputes, they found it difficult to comprehend what life was really like for people who had to work six days a week.

Working women and their problems aroused more sympathy among progressive reformers than the plight of working men. The number of women working outside the home increased steadily during the progressive era, from more than 5 million in 1900 to nearly 8.5 million in 1920. But few belonged to unions.

Many upper-class women reformers tried to help working women in a variety of ways. The settlement houses organized day-care centers, clubs, and classes, and many reformers tried to pass protective legislation. Tension and misunderstanding often cropped up between the reformers and the working women, but one organization in which there was genuine cooperation was the Women's Trade Union League. Founded in 1903, the league was organized by Mary Kenney and William English Walling, a socialist and reformer, but it also drew local leaders from the working class, such as Rose Schneiderman, a Jewish immigrant cap maker, and Leonora O'Reilly, a collar maker. The league established branches in most large eastern and midwestern cities and served for more than a decade as an important force in helping organize women into unions. The league forced the AFL to pay more attention to women, helped out in time of strikes, and publicized the plight of working women.

Garment Workers and the Triangle Fire

Thousands of young women, most of them Jewish and Italian, were employed in the garment industry



Frederick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911)



Samuel Gompers, *The American Labor Movement* (1914)

AMERICAN VOICES

Pauline Newman, Conditions in a Garment Factory

Many children of immigrants went to work in factories to help support their families. Most accounts of child labor were constructed by investigators and reformers. This is a rare personal experience recalled many years later by a woman who became a labor leader.

A cousin of mine worked for the Triangle Shirtwaist Company and she got me on there in October of 1901. It was probably the largest shirtwaist factory in the city of New York then. They had more than two hundred operators, cutters, examiners, finishers. Altogether more than four hundred people on two floors. The fire took place on one floor, the floor where we worked. You've probably heard about that. But that was years later. . . .

What I had to do was not really very difficult. It was just monotonous. When the shirtwaists were finished at the machine there were some threads that were left, and all the youngsters—we had a corner on the floor that resembled a kindergarten—we were given little scissors to cut the threads off. It wasn't heavy work, but it was monotonous, because you did the same thing from seven-thirty in the morning till nine at night.

Well, of course, there were [child labor] laws on the books, but no one bothered to enforce them. The employers were always tipped off if there was going to be an inspection. "Quick," they'd say, "into the boxes!" And we children would climb into the big boxes the finished shirts were stored in. Then some shirts were piled on top of us, and when the inspector came—no children. The factory always got an okay from the inspector, and I suppose someone at City Hall got a little something, too.

The employers didn't recognize anyone working for them as a human being. You were not allowed to sing. Operators would have liked to have sung, because they, too, had the same thing to do and weren't allowed to sing. We weren't allowed to talk to each other. Oh, no, they would sneak up behind if you were found talking to your next colleague. You were admonished: "If you keep on you'll be fired." If you went to the toilet and you were there longer than the floor lady thought you should be, you would be laid off for half a day and sent home. And, of course, that meant no pay. You were not allowed to have your lunch on the fire escape in the summertime. The door was locked to keep us in. That's why so many people were trapped when the fire broke out.

My pay was \$1.50 a week no matter how many hours I worked. My sisters made \$6.00 a week; and the cutters, they were skilled workers, they might get as much as \$12.00. The employers had a sign in the elevator that said: "If you don't come in on Sunday, don't come in on Monday." You were expected to work every day if they need you and the pay was the same whether you worked extra or not. You had to be there at seven-thirty, so you got up at five-thirty, took the horse car, then the electric trolley to Greene Street, to be there on time. . . .

- What was the most difficult thing about working in the factory?
- How did the owners evade the child labor laws and other laws?

in New York City. Most were between ages 16 and 25; some lived with their families, and others lived alone or with a roommate. They worked a 56-hour, six-day week and made about \$6 a week for their efforts. New York was the center of the garment industry, with more than 600 shirtwaist (blouse) and dress factories employing more than 30,000 workers.

Like other industries, garment manufacturing had changed in the first decade of the twentieth century. Once conducted in thousands of dark and

dingy tenement rooms, now operations were centralized in large loft buildings in lower Manhattan. These buildings were an improvement over the tenements, but many were overcrowded, and they had few fire escapes or safety features. The owners applied scientific management techniques to heighten productivity and thereby increase their profits. But conditions for the workers were miserable. Most of the women had to rent their sewing machines and pay for the electricity they used. They were penalized for making



Triangle Fire Victims The Triangle fire shocked the nation, and dramatic photographs, such as this candid shot showing bodies and bystanders waiting for more young women to jump, helped stimulate the investigation that followed. What event in your lifetime was as shocking as this photo? (*Brown Brothers*)

mistakes or talking too loudly. They were usually supervised by a male contractor who badgered and sometimes even sexually harassed them.

In 1909, some of the women went out on strike to protest the working conditions. The International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Women's Trade Union League supported them. But strikers were beaten and sometimes arrested by unsympathetic policemen and by strikebreakers on the picket lines. At a mass meeting held at Cooper Union in New York on November 22, 1909, Clara Lemlich, a young shirtwaist worker who had been injured on the picket line and was angered by the long speeches and lack of action, rose and in an emotional speech in Yiddish demanded a general strike. The entire audience pledged its agreement. The next day, all over the city, the shirtwaist workers went out on strike.

"The uprising of the twenty thousand," as the strike was called, startled the nation. One young worker wrote in her diary, "It is a good thing, that strike is. It makes you feel like a grown-up person." The Jews learned a little Italian and the Italians a little Yiddish so that they could communicate. Many social reformers, ministers, priests, and rabbis urged the strikers on. Mary Dreier, an upper-class reformer and president of the New York branch of the Women's Trade Union League, was arrested for marching with the strikers. A young state legislator, Fiorello La Guardia, later to become a congressman and mayor of New York, was one of the many public officials to aid the strikers.

The shirtwaist workers won, recognition for their union and some improvements in the factories, but

their victory was limited. The young women went back to work amid still oppressive and unsafe conditions. On Saturday, March 25, 1911, a fire broke out on the eighth floor of the 10-story loft building housing the Triangle Shirtwaist Company near Washington Square in New York. There had been several small fires in the factory in previous weeks, so no one thought much about another one. But this fire was different. Within minutes, the top three floors of the factory were ablaze. The owners had locked most of the exit doors. The elevators broke down. There were no fire escapes. Forty-six women jumped to their deaths, some of them in groups of three and four holding hands. More than 100 died in the flames.

Shocked by the Triangle fire, the state legislature appointed a commission to investigate working conditions in the state. One investigator for the commission was a young social worker named Frances Perkins, who in the 1930s would become secretary of labor. She led the politicians through the dark lofts, filthy tenements, and unsafe factories around the state to show them the conditions under which young women worked. The result was state legislation limiting the work of women to 54 hours a week, prohibiting labor by children under age 14, and improving safety regulations in factories. One supporter of the bills in Albany was a young state senator named Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The investigative commission was a favorite progressive tactic. When there was a problem, reformers often got a city council, a state legislature, or the federal government to appoint a commission. If

they could not find a government body to give them a mandate, they conducted their own studies. They brought in experts, compiled statistics, and published reports.

The federal Industrial Relations Commission, created in 1912 to study the causes of industrial unrest and violence, conducted one of the most important investigations, a study of the labor-management conflict at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Industry near Ludlow, Colorado. In the fall of 1913, miners at the company, which was largely owned by the Rockefeller family, went on strike demanding an eight-hour workday, better safety precautions, and the removal of armed guards. Colorado Fuel and Iron was a paternalistic empire in which workers lived in company towns, were paid in company scrip, and were forced to shop at the company store. When the company refused to negotiate with the striking workers, the strike turned violent. In the spring of 1914, strikebreakers and national guardsmen armed with machine guns fired on the workers, killing 11 children and 2 women in an incident that became known as the Ludlow Massacre.

The Industrial Relations Commission called John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to testify and implied that he was personally guilty of the murders. The commission decided in its report that violent class conflict could be avoided only by limiting the use of armed guards and detectives, by restricting monopoly, by protecting the right of the workers to organize, and, most dramatically, by redistributing wealth through taxation. The commission's report, not surprisingly, fell on deaf ears. Most progressives, like most Americans, denied the commission's conclusion that class conflict was inevitable.

Radical Labor

Not everyone accepted the progressives' faith in investigations and protective labor legislation. Nor did everyone approve of Samuel Gompers's conservative tactics or his emphasis on getting higher wages for skilled workers. A group of about 200 radicals met in Chicago in 1905 to form a new union as an alternative to the AFL. They called it the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and talked of one big union.

Like the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, the IWW would welcome all workers: the unskilled and even the unemployed, women, African Americans, Asians, and all other ethnic groups.

Daniel De Leon of the Socialist Labor Party attended the organizational meeting, and so did Eugene Debs. Debs, who had been converted to socialism

after the Pullman strike of 1894, had already emerged by 1905 as one of the outstanding radical leaders in the country. Also attending was Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, who dressed like a society matron but attacked labor leaders "who sit on velvet chairs in conferences with labor's oppressors." "Mother" Jones had been a dressmaker, a Populist, and a member of the Knights of Labor. During the 1890s, she had marched with miners' wives on the picket line in western Pennsylvania.

Presiding at the Chicago meeting was "Big Bill" Haywood, the president of the Western Federation of Miners. He had been a cowboy, a miner, and a prospector. Somewhere along the way, he had lost an eye and mangled a hand, but he had a booming



An IWW Performance The way art and politics sometimes combined in the progressive era is illustrated by this poster for a performance by a group of political radicals at Madison Square Garden in New York. They re-enacted the IWW-supported silk workers' strike, which was then going on in Paterson, New Jersey. Many of the actual strikers took part in the performance. But the play lost money, and the strike ultimately failed. Still, this impressively designed program cover recalls a time when radical artists and labor leaders sought to transform the world. Why do many Americans even today have a romantic view of the IWW? (*The Tamiment Institute Library, New York University*)



Logo for Industrial Workers of the World

voice and a passionate commitment to the workers. Denouncing Gompers and the AFL, he talked of class conflict. “The purpose of the IWW,” he proclaimed, “is to bring the workers of this country into the possession of the full value of the product of their toil.”

Haywood dominated the movement, which played an important role in organizing the militant strike of textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912 and the following year in Paterson, New Jersey, and Akron, Ohio. The IWW had its greatest success organizing itinerant lumbermen and migratory workers in the Northwest. But in other places, especially in times of high unemployment, the Wobblies (as they were called) helped unskilled workers vent their anger against their employers.

Yet the IWW remained a small organization, troubled by internal squabbles and disagreements. Most American workers did not feel, as European workers did, that they were involved in a perpetual class struggle with their capitalist employers, but that did not mean that they were docile and passive. Many American workers struggled with their managers over control of the workplace, and workers occasionally went on strike for better wages and working conditions. Immigrants often did not join in these actions. Some immigrant workers, intent on earning enough money to go back home, had no time to join the conflict. Most of those who stayed in the United States held fast to the dream of a better job or moving up into the middle class. They avoided organized labor militancy. They knew that even if they failed, their sons and daughters would profit from the American way. The AFL, not the IWW, became the dominant American labor movement. But for a few, the IWW represented a dream of what might have been. For others, its presence, though small and largely ineffective, meant that perhaps someday a European-style labor movement might develop in America.

REFORM IN THE CITIES AND STATES

The reform movements of the progressive era usually started at the local level, then moved to the state, and finally to the nation's capital. Progressivism in the cities and states had roots in the depression and discontent of the 1890s. The reform banners called for more democracy, more power for the people, and legislation regulating railroads and other businesses. Yet often the professional and business classes were the movement's leaders. They intended to bring

order out of chaos and to modernize the city and the state during a time of rapid growth.

Municipal Reformers

American cities grew rapidly in the last part of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century. New York, which had a population of 1.2 million in 1880, grew to 3.4 million by 1900 and 5.6 million in 1920. Chicago expanded even more dramatically, from 500,000 in 1880 to 1.7 million in 1900 and 2.7 million in 1920. Los Angeles was a town of 11,000 in 1880 but multiplied 10 times by 1900, and then increased another 5 times, to more than a half million, by 1920.

The spectacular and continuing growth of the cities caused problems and created a need for housing, transportation, and municipal services. But it was the kind of people who were moving into the cities that worried many observers. Americans from small towns and farms continued to throng to the urban centers, as they had throughout the nineteenth century, but immigration produced the greatest surge in population. Fully 40 percent of New York's population and 36 percent of Chicago's was foreign born in 1910; if one included the children of the immigrants, the percentage approached 80 percent in some cities. To many Protestant Americans, the new immigrants seemed to threaten the American way of life and the very tenets of democracy.

The presence of large immigrant populations was the most important difference between American and European cities, and it made attempts to reform the city different in the United States. Twentieth-century reformers, mostly middle-class citizens like those in the nineteenth century, wanted to regulate and control the sprawling metropolis, restore democracy, reduce corruption, and limit the power of the political bosses and their immigrant allies. When these reformers talked of restoring power to the people, they usually meant ensuring control for people like themselves. The chief aim of municipal reform was to make the city more organized and efficient for the business and professional classes who were to control its workings.

Municipal reform movements varied from city to city, but everywhere the reformers tried to limit the power of the city bosses, whom they saw as corrupt and antidemocratic. In Boston, the reformers tried to strengthen the power of the mayor, break the hold of the city council, and eliminate council corruption. They succeeded in removing all party designations from city election ballots, and they extended the term of the mayor from two to four years. But to their chagrin, in the election of 1910,

A Traffic Jam in Chicago in 1909

Cities grew so rapidly that they often ceased to work. This 1909 photograph shows Dearborn Street looking south from Randolph Street in Chicago. Horse-drawn vehicles, streetcars, pedestrians, and even a few early autos clogged the intersection and created the urban inefficiency that angered municipal reformers. How have urban centers changed today? Have we solved the problem of urban transportation and crowding? (*Chicago Historical Society, [IChi-04151]*)



John Fitzgerald, grandfather of John F. Kennedy and foe of reform, defeated their candidate.

The most dramatic innovation in municipal reform was the replacement of both mayor and council with a nonpartisan commission of administrators. This scheme began quite accidentally when a hurricane devastated Galveston, Texas, in September 1900. More than 6,000 people died in the worst natural disaster in the nation's history. The existing government was helpless to deal with the crisis, so the state legislature appointed five commissioners to run the city during the emergency.



Walker Percy,
"Birmingham
Under the
Commission
Plan" (1911)

The idea spread to Houston, Dallas, and Austin and to cities in other states. It proved most popular in small to medium-sized cities in the Midwest and the Pacific Northwest. By World War I, more than 400 cities had adopted the commission form. Dayton, Ohio, went one step further: after a disastrous flood in 1913, the city hired a manager to run the city and to report to the elected council. Appointed, not elected, the city manager was more a businessman or technician than a politician. Government by experts was the perfect symbol of what most municipal reformers had in mind.

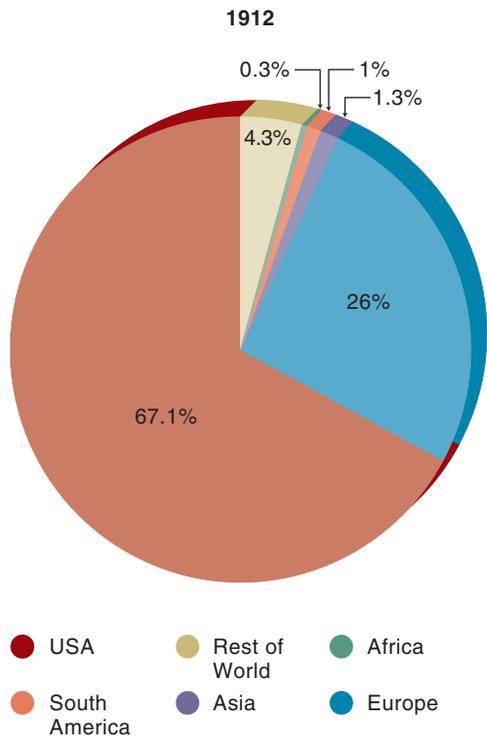
The commission and the expert manager did not replace the mayor in most large cities. One of the

most flamboyant and successful of the progressive mayors was Tom Johnson of Cleveland. Johnson had made a fortune by investing in utility and railroad franchises before he was 40. But Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* so influenced him that he began a second career as a reformer. Elected mayor of Cleveland in 1901, he reduced transit fares and built parks and municipal bathhouses throughout the city. Johnson also broke the connection between the police and prostitution in the city by promising the madams and the brothel owners that he would not bother them if they would be orderly and not steal from their customers or pay off the police.

His most controversial move, however, was advocating city ownership of the street railroads and utilities. Like many American urban reformers, Johnson had always admired the municipally owned transportation systems in European cities. "Only through municipal ownership," he argued, "can the gulf which divides the community into a small dominant class on one side and the unorganized people on the other be bridged." Johnson was defeated in 1909 in part because he alienated many powerful business interests, but one of his lieutenants, Newton D. Baker, was elected mayor in 1911 and carried on many of his programs. Cleveland was one of many cities that began to regulate municipal utilities or take them over from the private owners.

The Global Adoption of the Telephone

The United States and Europe led the way in adopting the telephone during the progressive era. But the small towns and the farms lagged behind the cities everywhere in the world. **Reflecting on the Past** How did the telephone change business and personal habits for those who could afford the new device?



Telephones per 100 Inhabitants

	1895	Rank	1911	Rank
Stockholm	4.1	1	19.9	2
Christiania (Oslo)	3	2	6.9	8
Los Angeles	2	3	24	1
Berlin	1.6	4	5.3	9
Hamburg	1.5	5	4.7	10
Copenhagen	1.2	6	7	7
Boston	1	7	9.2	4
Chicago	0.8	8	11	3
Paris	0.7	9	2.7	12
New York	0.6	10	8.3	6
Vienna	0.5	11	2.3	13
Philadelphia	0.3	12	8.6	5
London	0.2	13	2.8	11
St. Petersburg	0.2	14	2.2	14

Data Source: *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, 1/2 (1913), 143.

In Cleveland, both Tom Johnson and Newton Baker promoted the arts, music, and adult education. They also supervised the construction of a civic center, a library, and a museum. Most other American cities during the progressive era set out to bring culture and beauty to their centers. They were influenced at least in part by the great, classical White City constructed for the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, but even more by the grand European boulevards, especially the Champs-Élysées in Paris.

The architects of the “city beautiful” movement, strongly influenced by European city planners, preferred the impressive and ceremonial architecture of Rome or the Renaissance for libraries, museums, railroad stations, and other public buildings. The huge Pennsylvania Station in New York (now replaced by Madison Square Garden) was modeled after the imperial Roman baths of Caracalla, and the Free Library in Philadelphia was an almost exact copy of a building in Paris. The city beautiful leaders tried to make the city more attractive and meaningful for the middle and upper classes. The museums

and the libraries were closed on Sundays, the only day the working class could possibly visit them.

The social justice progressives, especially those connected with the social settlements, were more concerned with neighborhood parks and playgrounds than with the ceremonial boulevards and grand buildings. Hull House established the first public playground in Chicago. Jacob Riis, the housing reformer, and Lillian Wald of the Henry Street Settlement campaigned in New York for small parks and for the opening of schoolyards on weekends. Some progressives looked back nostalgically to their rural childhoods and desperately tried to get urban children out of the city in the summertime to attend rural camps. But they also tried to make the city more livable as well as more beautiful.

Most progressives had an ambivalent attitude toward the city. They feared it, and they loved it. Some saw the great urban areas filled with immigrants as a threat to American democracy, but one of Tom Johnson’s young assistants, Frederic C. Howe, who had traveled and studied in Europe, wrote a book titled

The City: The Hope of Democracy (1905). Hope or threat, the progressives realized that the United States had become an urban nation and that the problems of the city had to be faced.

Reform in the States

The progressive movements in the states had many roots and took many forms, but because of the American federal system, the states took on an importance that confused observers from other parts of the world. In some states, especially in the West, progressive attempts to regulate railroads and utilities were simply an extension of Populism. In other states, the reform drive emerged from municipal reform efforts. Most states passed laws during the progressive era designed to extend democracy and give more authority to the people. Initiative and referendum laws allowed citizens to originate legislation and to overturn laws passed by the legislature, and recall laws gave the people a way to remove elected officials. Oregon was one of the leaders in this kind of legislation and, as in other western states, the progressives in Oregon tried to limit the power of the public utilities and the railroads. A notable success for progressive reform was the ratification in 1913 of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, which provided for the direct election of U.S. senators rather than their appointment by the legislatures.

Much progressive state legislation promoted order and efficiency, but many states passed social justice measures as well. Maryland enacted the first workers' compensation law in 1902, paying employees for days missed because of job-related injuries. By 1917, 37 states (almost all outside the South) had passed workers' compensation laws and 28 states had set maximum hours for women working in industry. Illinois approved a law aiding mothers with dependent children. Several states passed anti-child labor bills, and Oregon's 10-hour law restricting women's labor became a model for other states.

The states with the most successful reform movements elected strong and aggressive governors: Charles Evans Hughes in New York, Hoke Smith in Georgia, Hiram Johnson in California, Woodrow Wilson in New Jersey, and Robert La Follette in Wisconsin. After Wilson, La Follette was the most famous and in many ways the model progressive governor. Born in a small town in Wisconsin, he graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1879 and was admitted to the bar. Practicing law during the 1890s in Madison, the state capital, he received a large retainer from the Milwaukee Railroad and defended

Landmark Social Legislation in the States

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1902 | Maryland passed the first state worker's compensation law. |
| 1903 | Oregon adopted a law limiting women's work to ten hours a day in factories (upheld by the United States Supreme Court in <i>Muller v. Oregon</i> , 1908). |
| 1911 | Illinois enacted the first state law providing public assistance to mothers with dependent children. |
| 1912 | Massachusetts passed the first minimum-wage law. A commission fixed wage rates for women and children. This and other similar state laws were overturned by the United States Supreme Court in <i>Atkins v. Children's Hospital</i> , 1923. |

the railroad against both riders and laborers who sued the company.

The depression of 1893 hit Wisconsin hard. More than one-third of the state's citizens were out of work, farmers lost their farms, and many small businesses went bankrupt. At the same time, the rich seemed to be getting richer. As grassroots discontent spread, a group of Milwaukee reformers attacked the giant corporations and the street railways. Several newspapers joined the battle and denounced special privilege and corruption. Everyone could agree on the need for tax reform, railroad regulation, and more participation of the people in government.

La Follette, who had had little interest in reform, took advantage of the general mood of discontent to win the governorship in 1901. It seemed ironic that La Follette, who had once taken a retainer from a railroad, owed his victory to his attack on the railroads. But La Follette was a shrewd politician. He used professors from the University of Wisconsin (in the capital) to prepare reports and do statistical studies. Then he worked with the legislature to pass a state primary law and an act regulating the railroads. "Go back to the first principles of democracy; go back to the people" was his battle cry. The "Wisconsin idea" attracted the attention of journalists such as Lincoln Steffens and Ray Stannard Baker, and they helped popularize the "laboratory of democracy" around the country. La Follette won national recognition and was elected to the Senate in 1906.

The progressive movement did improve government and made it more responsible to the people in Wisconsin and other states. For example, the railroads were brought under the control of a railroad commission. But by 1910, the railroads no longer complained about the new taxes and restrictions. They had discovered that it was to their advantage to make their operations more efficient, and often they were able to convince the commission that

they should raise rates or abandon the operation of unprofitable lines.

Progressivism in the states, like progressivism everywhere, had mixed results. But the spirit of reform that swept the country was real, and progressive movements on the local level did eventually have an impact on Washington, especially during the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND THE SQUARE DEAL

President William McKinley was shot in Buffalo, New York, on September 6, 1901, by Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist. McKinley died eight days later, making Theodore Roosevelt, at age 42, the youngest man ever to become president.

No one knew what to expect from Roosevelt. Some politicians thought he was too radical; a few social justice progressives remembered his suggestion that the soldiers should fire on the strikers during the 1894 Pullman strike. Nonetheless, under his leadership, progressivism reshaped the national political agenda. Although early progressive reformers had attacked problems that they saw in their own communities, they gradually understood that some problems could not be solved at the state or local level. The emergence of a national industrial economy had spawned conditions that demanded national solutions. Roosevelt began the process that would continue, sometimes with setbacks, throughout the twentieth century—a process that would regulate business, move beyond the states, and promote reform.

Progressives at the national level turned their attention to the workings of the economic system. They scrutinized the operation and organization of the railroads and other large corporations. They examined the threats to the natural environment. They reviewed the quality of the products of American industry. As they fashioned legislation to remedy the flaws in the economic

system, they vastly expanded the power of the national government.

A Strong and Controversial President

Roosevelt came to the presidency with considerable experience. He had run unsuccessfully for mayor of New York, served a term in the New York state assembly, spent four years as a U.S. civil service commissioner, and served two years as the police commissioner of New York City. His exploits in the Spanish-American War brought him to the public's attention, but he had also been an effective assistant secretary of the navy and a reform governor of New York. While police commissioner and governor, he had been influenced by a number of progressives. He had supported conservation, an eight-hour workday, and other progressive measures in New York. But no one was sure how he would act as president. He came from an upper-class family, had traveled widely in Europe, and had associated with the important and the powerful all over the world. He had written a number of books and was one of the most intellectual and cosmopolitan presidents since Thomas Jefferson. But there was no guarantee that he would be a progressive in office.

Roosevelt loved being president. He called the office a “bully pulpit,” and he enjoyed talking to the



TR's Bully Pulpit Theodore Roosevelt was a dynamic public speaker who used his position to influence public opinion. Despite his high-pitched voice, he could be heard at the back of the crowd in the days before microphones. Note the row of reporters decked out in their summer straw hats writing their stories as the president speaks. How have presidential speeches and the role of reporters changed since Roosevelt's time? (*Brown Brothers*)



Collage
Celebrating the
Career of Teddy
Roosevelt

people and the press. His appealing personality and sense of humor made him a good subject for the new mass-market newspapers and magazines. The American people quickly adopted him as their favorite. They called him “Teddy” and named a stuffed bear after him. Sometimes his exuberance got a little out of hand. On one occasion, he took a foreign diplomat on a nude swim in the Potomac River. You have to understand, another observer remarked, that “the president is really only six years old.”

Roosevelt was much more than an exuberant six-year-old. He was the strongest president since Lincoln. By revitalizing the executive branch, reorganizing the army command structure, and modernizing the consular service, he made many aspects of the federal government more efficient. He established the Bureau of Corporations, appointed independent commissions staffed with experts, and enlisted talented and well-trained men to work for the government. “TR,” as he became known, called a White House conference on the care of dependent children, and in 1905, he even summoned college presidents and football coaches to the White House to discuss ways to limit violence in football. Although he angered many social justice progressives who felt he did not go far enough, he was the first president to listen to the pleas of the progressives and to invite them to the White House. Learning from experts such as Frances Kellor, he gradually became more concerned with social justice. In 1904, running on a platform of a “Square Deal” for the American people, he was re-elected by an overwhelming margin.

Dealing with the Trusts

One of Roosevelt’s first actions as president was to attempt to control the large industrial corporations. He took office in the middle of an unprecedented wave of business consolidation. Between 1897 and 1904, some 4,227 companies combined to form 257 large corporations. U.S. Steel, the first billion-dollar corporation, was formed in 1901 by joining Carnegie Steel with its eight main competitors. The new company controlled two-thirds of the market, and financier J. P. Morgan made \$7 million on the deal.

The Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890 had been virtually useless in controlling the trusts, but muckrakers and progressives called for new regulation. Some even demanded a return to the age of small

business. Roosevelt opposed neither bigness nor the right of businessmen to make money. “We draw the line against misconduct, not against wealth,” he said.

To the shock of much of the business community, he directed his attorney general to file suit to dissolve the Northern Securities Company, a giant railroad monopoly put together by James J. Hill and J. P. Morgan. Morgan came to the White House to tell Roosevelt, “If we have done anything wrong, send your man to my man and they can fix it up.” A furious Roosevelt let Morgan and other businessmen know that they could not deal with the president of the United States as just another tycoon. The government won its case and proceeded to prosecute some of the largest corporations, including Standard Oil of New Jersey and the American Tobacco Company.

Roosevelt’s antitrust policy did not end the power of the giant corporations or even alter their methods of doing business, nor did it force down the price of kerosene, cigars, or railroad tickets. But it did breathe some life into the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and increased the role of the federal government as regulator. It also caused large firms such as U.S. Steel to diversify to avoid antitrust suits.

Roosevelt sought to strengthen the regulatory powers of the federal government in other ways. He steered the Elkins Act through Congress in 1903 and the Hepburn Act in 1906, which together increased the power of the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). The first act eliminated the use of rebates by railroads, a method that many large corporations had used to get favored treatment. The second act broadened the power of the ICC and gave it the right to investigate and enforce rates. Opponents in Congress weakened both bills, however, and the legislation neither ended abuses nor satisfied the farmers and small-business owners who had always been the railroads’ chief critics.

Roosevelt firmly believed in corporate capitalism. He detested socialism and felt much more comfortable around business executives than labor leaders. Yet he saw his role as mediator and regulator. His view of the power of the presidency was illustrated in 1902 during the anthracite coal strike. Led by John Mitchell of the United Mine Workers, the coal miners went on strike to protest low wages, long hours, and unsafe working conditions. In 1901, a total of 513 coal miners had died in industrial accidents. The mine owners refused to talk to the miners. They hired



Theodore
Roosevelt



TR as “Jack the
Giant Killer”—
Puck Cartoon



“The Verdict”—
Anti-Monopoly
Cartoon, 1899



TR and His “Big
Stick”

strikebreakers and used private security forces to threaten and intimidate the workers.

Roosevelt had no particular sympathy for labor, but in the fall of 1902, schools began closing for lack of coal, and it looked as if many citizens would suffer through the winter. Coal, which usually sold for \$5 a ton, rose to \$14. Roosevelt called the owners and representatives of the union to the White House, even though the mine owners protested that they would not deal with “outlaws.” Finally, the president appointed a commission that included representatives of the union as well as the community. Within weeks, the miners went back to work with a 10 percent raise, back pay, and a nine-hour day. But the agreement failed to recognize the union. Neither side was entirely happy with the agreement. Roosevelt often compromised and sought the middle ground; in fact, one of his critics called him “a man on two horsebacks.”

Meat Inspection and Pure Food and Drugs

Roosevelt’s first major legislative reform began almost accidentally in 1904 when Upton Sinclair, a 26-year-old muckraking journalist, started research on the Chicago stockyards. Born in Baltimore, Sinclair had grown up in New York, where he wrote dime novels to pay his tuition at City College. He was converted to socialism, but it was more a romantic, Christian socialism than a Marxist-style European radicalism. Though he knew little about Chicago, he wanted to expose the exploitation of the poor and oppressed in America. He boarded at the University of Chicago Settlement while he did research, conducted interviews, and wrote the story of the meat industry that was published in 1906 as *The Jungle*. Sinclair documented exploitation in his fictional account, but his description of contaminated meat drew more attention. He described spoiled hams treated with formaldehyde and sausages made from rotten meat scraps, rats, and other refuse. Hoping to convert his readers to socialism, Sinclair instead turned their stomachs and caused a public outcry for better regulation of the meatpacking industry.

Roosevelt ordered a study of the meatpacking industry and then used the report to pressure Congress and the meatpackers to accept a bill introduced by Albert Beveridge, the progressive senator from Indiana. In the end, the Meat Inspection Act of 1906 was a compromise. It enforced some federal inspection and mandated sanitary conditions in all companies selling meat in interstate commerce.

The meatpackers defeated a provision that would have required the dating of all meat. Some of the large companies supported the compromise because it gave them an advantage in their battle with the smaller firms. But the act was a beginning and an example of how muckrakers, social justice progressives, and public outcry eventually led to reform legislation. Passage of the act also shows how Roosevelt used the public mood and manipulated the political process to achieve his goals. Many of the progressive reformers were disappointed with the final result, but Roosevelt was always willing to settle for half a loaf rather than none at all. Ironically, the Meat Inspection Act restored the public’s confidence in the meat industry and helped the industry increase its profits.

Taking advantage of the publicity that circulated around *The Jungle*, a group of reformers, writers, and government officials supported legislation to regulate the sale of food and drugs. Americans consumed an enormous quantity of patent medicines, which they purchased through the mail, from traveling salesmen, and from local stores. Many packaged and canned foods contained dangerous chemicals and impurities. One popular remedy, Hosteter’s Stomach Bitters, was revealed on analysis to contain 44 percent alcohol. Coca-Cola, a popular soft drink, contained a small amount of cocaine, and many medicines were laced with opium. Many people, including women and children, became alcoholics or drug addicts in their quest to feel better. The Pure Food and Drug Act, which Congress passed on the same day in 1906 as the Meat Inspection Act, was not a perfect bill, but it corrected some of the worst abuses, including eliminating the cocaine from Coca-Cola.

Conservation

Although Roosevelt was pleased with the new legislation for regulating the food and drug industries, he always considered his conservation program his most important domestic achievement. An outdoorsman, hunter, and amateur naturalist since his youth, he announced soon after he became president that the planned protection of the nation’s forests and water resources would be one of his most vital concerns. Using his executive authority, he more than tripled the land set aside for national forests, bringing the total to more than 150 million acres.

Because he had traveled widely in the West, Roosevelt understood, as few easterners did, the problems created by limited water in the western states. In 1902, with his enthusiastic support, Congress passed the Newlands Act, named for its chief



Upton Sinclair,
The Jungle
(1906)



sponsor, Congressman Francis Newlands of Nevada. The National Reclamation Act (as it was officially called) set aside the proceeds from the sale of public land in 16 western states to pay for the construction of irrigation projects in those states. Although it tended to help big farmers more than small producers, the Newlands Act federalized irrigation for the first time.

More important than the conservation bills passed during Roosevelt's presidency, however, were his efforts to raise the public consciousness about the need to save the nation's natural resources. He convened a White House Conservation Conference in 1908 that included among its delegates most of the governors and representatives of 70 national organizations. A direct result of the conference was Roosevelt's appointment of a National Conservation Commission charged with making an inventory of the natural resources in the entire country. To chair the commission, Roosevelt appointed Gifford Pinchot, probably the most important conservation advocate in the country.

A graduate of Yale, Pinchot had studied scientific forestry management in Germany and France before becoming the forest manager of the Vanderbilts' Biltmore estate in North Carolina. In 1898, he was appointed chief of the U.S. Division of Forestry, and in 1900, he became the head of the Bureau of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture. An advocate of selective logging, fire control, and limited grazing on public lands, he became a friend and adviser to Roosevelt.

Pinchot's conservation policies pleased many in the timber and cattle industries; at the same time, they angered those who simply wanted to exploit the land. But his policies were denounced by the followers of John Muir, who believed passionately in preserving the land in a wilderness state. Muir had founded the Sierra Club in 1862 and had led a successful campaign to create Yosemite National Park in California. With his shaggy gray beard, his rough blue work clothes, and his black slouch hat, Muir seemed like an eccentric to many, but thousands agreed with him when he argued that preserving the

American wilderness was a spiritual and psychological necessity for overcivilized and overstimulated urban dwellers. Muir was one of the leaders in a “back to nature” movement at the turn of the century. Many middle-class Americans took up hiking, camping, and other outdoor activities, and children joined the Boy Scouts (founded in 1910) and the Camp Fire Girls (1912). The “back to nature movement” was not strictly American. The Boy Scouts were patterned after the British Boy Scouts, and hiking and mountain climbing were popular activities in many countries early in the twentieth century.

The conflicting philosophies of conservationist Pinchot and preservationist Muir were most dramatically demonstrated by the controversy over Hetch-Hetchy, a remote valley deep within Yosemite National Park. It was a pristine wilderness area, and Muir and his followers wanted to keep it that way. But in 1901, the mayor of San Francisco decided the valley would make a perfect place for a dam and reservoir to supply his growing city with water for decades to come. Muir argued that wilderness soon would be scarcer than water and more important for the moral strength of the nation. Pinchot, on the other hand, maintained that it was foolish to pander to the aesthetic enjoyment of a tiny group of people when the comfort and welfare of the great majority were at stake.

The Hetch-Hetchy affair was fought in the newspapers and magazines as well as in the halls of Congress, but in the end, the conservationists won out over the preservationists. Roosevelt and Congress sided with Pinchot and eventually the dam was built, turning the valley into a lake. But the debate over how to use the nation’s land and water would continue throughout the twentieth century.

Progressivism for Whites Only

Like most of his generation, Roosevelt thought in stereotyped racial terms. He called Native Americans “savages” and once remarked that blacks were “wholly unfit for the suffrage.” He believed that

blacks, Asians, and Native Americans were inferior, and he feared that massive migrations from southern and eastern Europe threatened the United States. This kind of racism was supported by scientific theories accepted by many experts in the universities. Supporters of eugenics, who believed that selective breeding

would improve the human race, advocated the forced sterilization of criminals, mental patients, and other undesirable types. Roosevelt was influenced by these theories, but he was first of all a

politician, so he made gestures of goodwill to most groups. He even invited Booker T. Washington to the White House in 1901, though many southerners viciously attacked the president for this breach of etiquette. Roosevelt also appointed several qualified blacks to minor federal posts, notably Dr. William D. Crum to head the Charleston, South Carolina, customs house in 1905.

At other times, however, Roosevelt seemed insensitive to the needs and feelings of black Americans. This was especially true in his handling of the Brownsville, Texas, riot of 1906. Members of a black army unit stationed there, angered by discrimination against them, rioted one hot August night. Exactly what happened no one was sure, but one white man was killed and several wounded. Waiting until after the midterm elections of 1906, Roosevelt ordered all 167 members of three companies dishonorably discharged. It was an unjust punishment for an unproven crime, and 66 years later, the secretary of the army granted honorable discharges to the men, although most of them were by that time dead.

The progressive era coincided with the years of greatest segregation in the South, and in southern states, progressivism meant keeping blacks outside the political process. Even the most advanced progressives seldom included blacks in their reform schemes. Like most social settlements, Hull House was segregated, although Jane Addams (more than most progressives) struggled to overcome the racist attitudes of her day. She helped found a settlement that served a black neighborhood in Chicago, and she spoke out repeatedly against lynching. Addams also supported the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, the most important organization of the progressive era aimed at promoting equality and justice for blacks.

The founding of the NAACP is the story of cooperation between a group of white social justice progressives and a number of courageous black leaders. Even in the age of segregation and lynching, blacks in all parts of the country—through churches, clubs, and schools—sought to promote a better life for themselves. In Boston, William Monroe Trotter used his newspaper to oppose Booker T. Washington’s policy of accommodation. In Chicago, Ida B. Wells, an ardent crusader against lynching, organized a women’s club for blacks and founded the Negro Fellowship League to help black migrants. The most important black leader who argued for equality and opportunity for his people was W. E. B. Du Bois. He differed dramatically from Washington on the proper position of



Theodore Roosevelt, ca. 1901



Booker T. Washington



An American History Class Tuskegee Institute followed Booker T. Washington's philosophy of black advancement through accommodation to the white status quo. Here students study white American history, but most of their time was spent on more practical subjects. This photo was taken in 1902 by Frances Benjamin Johnson, a pioneer woman photographer. How have classrooms changed in the last hundred years? How have they stayed the same? (*Library of Congress*)

blacks in American life (see Chapter 17). Whereas Washington advocated vocational education, Du Bois argued for the best education possible for the most talented tenth of the black population. Whereas Washington preached compromise and accommodation to the dominant white society, Du Bois increasingly urged aggressive action to ensure equality.

Denouncing Washington for accepting the "alleged inferiority of the Negro," Du Bois called a meeting of young and militant blacks in 1905. They met in Canada, not far from Niagara Falls, and issued an angry statement. "We want to pull down nothing but we don't propose to be pulled down," the platform announced. "We believe in taking what we can get but we don't believe in being satisfied with it and in permitting anybody for a moment to imagine we're satisfied." The Niagara movement, as it came to be called, was small, but it was soon augmented by a group of white liberals concerned with violence against blacks and race riots in Atlanta and even in Springfield, Illinois, the home of Abraham Lincoln. Jane Addams joined the new organization,

as did Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.

In 1910, the Niagara movement combined with the NAACP, and Du Bois became editor of its journal, *The Crisis*. He toned down his rhetoric, but he tried to promote equality for all blacks. The NAACP was a typical progressive organization, seeking to work within the American system to promote reform. But to Roosevelt and many others who called themselves progressives, the NAACP seemed dangerously radical.

William Howard Taft

After two terms as president, Roosevelt decided to step down. But he soon regretted his decision. Only 50 years old, he was at the peak of his popularity and power. Because the U.S. system of government provides little creative function for former presidents, Roosevelt decided to travel and to go big-game hunting in Africa. But before he left, he personally selected his successor.

William Howard Taft, Roosevelt's personal choice for the Republican nomination and winner over Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan in 1908, was a distinguished lawyer, federal judge, and public servant. Born in Cincinnati, Taft had been the first civil governor of the Philippines and Roosevelt's secretary of war. In some ways, he seemed more progressive than Roosevelt. His administration instituted more suits against monopolies in one term than Roosevelt had in two. He supported the eight-hour workday and legislation to make mining safer, and he urged the passage of the Mann–Elkins Act in 1910, which strengthened the ICC by giving it more power to set railroad rates and extending its jurisdiction over telephone and telegraph companies. Taft and Congress also authorized the first tax on corporate profits. He also encouraged the process that eventually led to the passage of the federal income tax, which was authorized under the Sixteenth Amendment, ratified in 1913. That probably did more to transform the relationship of the government to the people than all other progressive measures combined.

But Taft soon ran into difficulties. His biggest problem was his style. He was a huge man, weighing more than 300 pounds. (Rumors circulated that he had to have a special, oversize bathtub installed in the White House.) Easily made fun of, the president wrote ponderous prose and spoke uninspiringly. He also lacked Roosevelt's political skills and angered many of the progressives in the Republican party, especially the midwestern insurgents led by Senator Robert La Follette of Wisconsin. Many progressives were annoyed when he signed the Payne–Aldrich Tariff, which midwesterners thought left rates on cotton and wool cloth and other items too high and played into the hands of the eastern industrial interests.

Even Roosevelt was infuriated when his successor reversed many of his conservation policies and fired chief forester Gifford Pinchot, who had attacked secretary of the interior Richard A. Ballinger for giving away rich coal lands in Alaska to mining interests. Roosevelt broke with Taft, letting it be known that he was willing to run again for president. This set up one of the most exciting and significant elections in American history.

The Election of 1912

Woodrow Wilson won the Democratic nomination for president in 1912. The son and grandson of Presbyterian ministers, Wilson grew up in a comfortable and intellectual southern household and early on

seemed more interested in politics than in religion. He graduated from Princeton University in 1879, studied law at the University of Virginia, and practiced law briefly before entering graduate school at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. His book, *Congressional Government* (1885), established his reputation as a shrewd analyst of American politics. Less flamboyant than Roosevelt, he was an excellent public speaker, possessing the power to convince people with his words. In 1902 Wilson was elected president of Princeton University, and during the next few years he established a national reputation as an educational leader. Wilson had never lost interest in politics, however, so when offered a chance by the Democratic machine to run for governor of New Jersey, he took it eagerly. In his two years as governor, he showed courage as he quickly alienated some of the conservatives who had helped elect him. Building a coalition of reformers, he worked with them to pass a direct primary law and a workers' compensation law. He also created a commission to regulate transportation and public utility companies. By 1912, Wilson not only was an expert on government and politics but had also acquired the reputation of a progressive.

Roosevelt, who had been speaking out on a variety of issues since 1910, competed with Taft for the Republican nomination, but Taft, as the incumbent president and party leader, was able to win it. Roosevelt then startled the nation by walking out of the convention and forming a new political party, the Progressive party. The new party would not have been formed without Roosevelt, but it was always more than Roosevelt. It appealed to progressives from all over the country who had become frustrated with the conservative leadership in both major parties.

Many social workers and social justice progressives supported the Progressive party because of its platform, which contained provisions they had been advocating for years. The Progressives supported an eight-hour workday, a six-day workweek, the abolition of child labor under age 16, and a federal system of accident, old age, and unemployment insurance. Unlike the Democrats, the Progressives also endorsed woman suffrage.

Most supporters of the Progressives in 1912 did not realistically think they could win, but they were convinced that they could organize a new political movement that would replace the Republican party, just as the Republicans had replaced the Whigs after 1856. To this end, Progressive leaders led by Frances Kellor set up the Progressive Service,



Taft's
Inefficient—
Puck Cartoon



William Howard
Taft



Herbert Croly,
Progressive
Democracy
(1914)

designed to apply the principles of social research to educating voters between elections.

The Progressive party convention in Chicago seemed to many observers more like a religious revival meeting or a social work conference than a political gathering. The delegates sang “Onward Christian Soldiers,” “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” and “Roosevelt, Oh Roosevelt” (to the tune of “Maryland, My Maryland”). They waved their bandannas, and when Jane Addams rose to second Roosevelt’s nomination, a large group of women marched around the auditorium with a banner that read “Votes for Women.”

The enthusiasm for Roosevelt and the Progressive party was misleading, for behind the unified facade lurked many disagreements. Roosevelt had become more progressive on many issues since leaving the presidency. He even attacked the financiers “to whom the acquisition of untold millions is the supreme goal of life, and who are too often utterly indifferent as to how these millions are obtained.” But he was not as committed to social reform as some of the delegates. Perhaps the most divisive issue was the controversy over seating black delegates from several

southern states. A number of social justice progressives fought hard to include a plank in the platform supporting equality for blacks and for seating the black delegation. Roosevelt, however, thought he had a realistic chance to carry several southern states, and he was not convinced that black equality was an important progressive issue. In the end, no blacks sat with the southern delegates, and the platform made no mention of black equality.

The political campaign in 1912 became a contest primarily between Roosevelt and Wilson; Taft, the Republican candidate and incumbent, was ignored by most reporters who covered the campaign. On one level, the campaign became a debate over political philosophy. What is the proper relationship of government to society in a modern industrial age? Roosevelt spoke of a “New Nationalism.” In a modern industrial society, he argued, large corporations were “inevitable and necessary.” What was needed was not the breakup of the trusts but a strong president and increased power in the hands of the federal government

to regulate business and industry and to ensure the rights of labor, women and children, and other groups. The government should be the “steward of the public welfare.” He argued for using Hamiltonian means to ensure Jeffersonian ends, for using strong central government to guarantee the rights of the people.

Wilson responded with a program he called the “New Freedom.” Drawing on the ideas of Louis Brandeis, he emphasized the need for the Jeffersonian tradition of limited government with open competition. He spoke of the “curse of bigness” and argued against too much federal power.

The level of debate during the campaign was impressive, making this one of the few elections in American history in which important ideas were actually discussed. It also



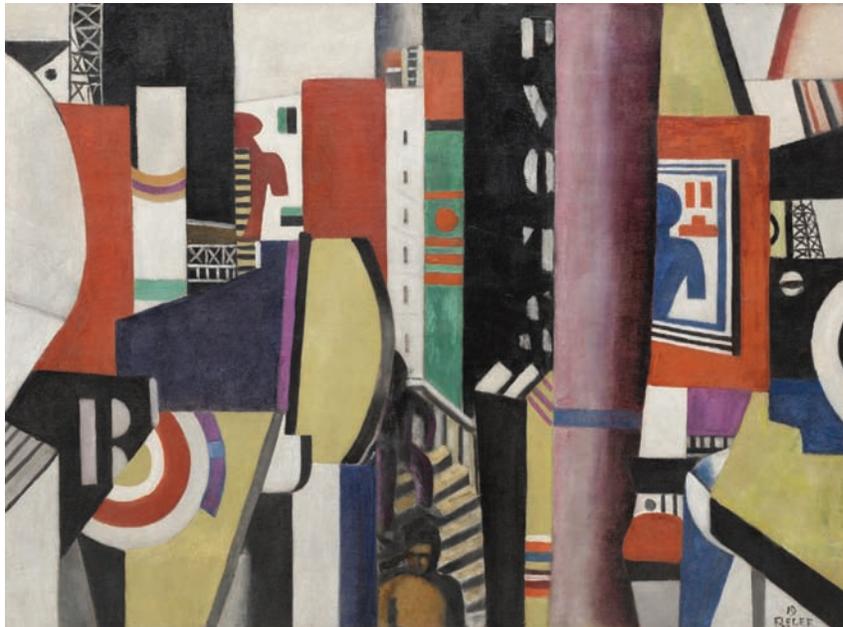
Bull Moose Campaign Speech



Theodore Roosevelt, 1912 Campaign Speeches



Theodore Roosevelt, “The New Nationalism” (1910)



Fernand Léger, *La Ville (The City)*, 1919 The Armory Show held in New York in 1913 introduced modern art, most of it European and much of it abstract, to the American public. It was a cultural moment of great importance during the progressive era. Many Europeans (as well as many Americans) viewed the United States as a country with little culture, but French artist Fernand Léger was enthralled by New York, especially at night. “I was struck by the illuminated advertisements that swept the streets,” he wrote. “You were there talking to someone, and suddenly he became blue. Then the colour disappeared and another came, and he became red, yellow. That kind of projected colour is free, it is in space. I wanted to do the same thing in my canvases.” What do you make of this painting? Is the United States still viewed by foreign visitors as a land of little culture? (*Fernand Léger, La Ville, 1919. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY. © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris*)



Woodrow Wilson, *The New Freedom* (1913)

Presidential Elections of the Progressive Era

Year	Candidate	Party	Popular Vote	Electoral Vote
1900	WILLIAM MCKINLEY	Republican	7,218,039 (51.7%)	292
	William Jennings Bryan	Democratic, Populist	6,358,345 (45.5%)	155
1904	THEODORE ROOSEVELT	Republican	7,628,834 (56.4%)	336
	Alton B. Parker	Democratic	5,084,401 (37.6%)	140
	Eugene V. Debs	Socialist	402,460 (3.0%)	0
1908	WILLIAM H. TAFT	Republican	7,679,006 (51.6%)	321
	William J. Bryan	Democratic	6,409,106 (43.1%)	162
	Eugene V. Debs	Socialist	420,820 (2.8%)	0
1912	WOODROW WILSON	Democratic	6,296,547 (41.9%)	435
	Theodore Roosevelt	Progressive	4,118,571 (27.4%)	88
	William H. Taft	Republican	3,486,720 (23.2%)	8
	Eugene V. Debs	Socialist	897,011 (6.0%)	0
1916	WOODROW WILSON	Democratic	9,129,606 (49.4%)	277
	Charles E. Hughes	Republican	8,538,221 (46.2%)	254
	Allan L. Benson	Socialist	585,113 (3.2%)	0

Note: Winners' names appear in capital letters.

marked a watershed for political thought for liberals who rejected Jefferson's distrust of a strong central government. It is easy to exaggerate the differences between Roosevelt and Wilson. There was some truth in the charge of William Allen White, the editor of the Emporia, Kansas, *Gazette*, when he remarked, "Between the New Nationalism and the New Freedom was that fantastic imaginary gulf that always had existed between Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee." Certainly, in the end, the things that Roosevelt and Wilson could agree on were more important than the issues that divided them. Both Roosevelt and Wilson urged reform within the American system. Both defended corporate capitalism, and both opposed socialism and radical labor organizations such as the IWW. Both wanted to promote more democracy and to strengthen conservative labor unions. And both were very different in style and substance from the fourth candidate, Eugene Debs, who ran on the Socialist party ticket in 1912.

In 1912, Debs was the most important socialist leader in the country. Socialism has always been a minority movement in the United States, but it reached its greatest success in the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century. Thirty-three cities, including Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Reading, Pennsylvania; Butte, Montana; Jackson, Michigan; and Berkeley, California, chose socialist mayors. Socialists Victor Berger from Wisconsin and Meyer London from New York were elected to Congress. The most important socialist periodical, *Appeal to Reason*, published in

Girard, Kansas, increased its circulation from about 30,000 in 1900 to nearly 300,000 in 1906. Socialism appealed to a diverse group. In the cities, some who called themselves socialists merely favored municipal ownership of street railways. Some reformers, such as Florence Kelley and William English Walling, joined the party because of their frustration with the slow progress of reform. The party also attracted many recent immigrants, who brought with them a European sense of class and loyalty to socialism.

A tremendously appealing figure and a great orator, Debs had run for president in 1900, 1904, and 1908, but in 1912 he reached much wider audiences in more parts of the country. His message differed radically from that of Wilson or Roosevelt. Unlike the progressives, socialists argued for fundamental change in the American system. Debs polled almost 900,000 votes in 1912 (6 percent of the popular vote), the best showing ever for a socialist in the United States. Wilson received 6.3 million votes; Roosevelt, a little more than 4 million; and Taft, 3.5 million. Wilson garnered 435 electoral votes; Roosevelt, 88; and Taft, only 8.

WOODROW WILSON AND THE NEW FREEDOM

Wilson was elected largely because Roosevelt and the Progressive party split the Republican vote. But once elected, Wilson became a vigorous and aggressive chief executive who set out to translate his ideas about progressive government into legislation. Wilson



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

was the first southerner elected president since the Civil War, but Wilson, like Roosevelt, had to work within his party, and that restricted how progressive he could be. But he was also constrained by his own background and inclinations. Still, like Roosevelt, Wilson became more progressive during his presidency.

Tariff and Banking Reform

Wilson was not as charismatic as Roosevelt. He had a more difficult time relating to people in small groups, but he was an excellent public speaker who dominated through the force of his intellect. He probably had an exaggerated belief in his ability to persuade and a tendency to trust his own intuition too much. Ironically, his early success in getting his legislative agenda through Congress contributed to the overconfidence that would get him into difficulty later in foreign affairs. But his ability to push his legislative program through Congress during his first two years in office was matched only by Franklin Roosevelt during the first months of the New Deal and by Lyndon Johnson in 1965.

Within a month of his inauguration, Wilson went before a joint session of Congress to outline his legislative program. He recommended reducing the tariff to eliminate favoritism, freeing the banking system from Wall Street control, and restoring competition in industry. By appearing in person before Congress, he broke a precedent established by Thomas Jefferson.

The first item on Wilson's agenda was tariff reform. The Underwood Tariff, passed in 1913, was

not a free-trade bill, but it did reduce tariff rates on hundreds of items for the first time in many years. Attached to the Underwood bill was a provision for a small and slightly graduated income tax, which had been made possible by the passage of the Sixteenth Amendment. It imposed a modest rate of 1 percent on income over \$4,000 (thus exempting a large portion of the population), with a surtax rising to 6 percent on high incomes. The income tax was enacted to replace the money lost from lowering the tariff. Wilson seemed to have no interest in using it to redistribute wealth in America.

The next item on Wilson's agenda was reform of the banking system. A financial panic in 1907 had revealed the need for a central bank, but few people could agree on the exact nature of the reforms. A congressional committee, led by Arsène Pujo of Louisiana, had revealed a massive consolidation of banks and trust companies and a system of interlocking directorates and informal arrangements that concentrated resources and power in the hands of a few firms, such as the J. P. Morgan Company. The progressive faction of the Democratic party, armed with the Pujo Committee's findings, argued for a banking system and a currency controlled by the federal government. But talk of banking reform raised the specter among conservative Democrats and the business community of socialism, populism, and the monetary ideas of William Jennings Bryan.

The bill that passed Congress was a compromise. In creating the Federal Reserve System, it was the



Louis Brandeis,
*Other People's
Money and
How Banks Use
It* (1913)

Opposing Woman Suffrage Many men opposed suffrage for women because they feared the vote would change gender roles and destroy women's feminine ways. They also believed that women with the vote would support prohibition and other dangerous reforms. They often argued that women had no place in the masculine and corrupt world of politics. Many women also opposed suffrage because they believed their husbands and fathers or because they feared change. Would you have supported the vote for women if you had been alive in 1920? How have women's votes changed America? (*Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-25338]*)



Key Progressive Legislation

National Reclamations Act (Newlands Act), 1902

Used proceeds from sale of public lands in the western states to finance construction and maintenance of irrigation projects.

Elkins Act, 1903

Strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission Act primarily by eliminating rebates to selected corporations.

Hepburn Act, 1906

Strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission by giving it power to fix rates and broadening its jurisdiction to include express companies, oil pipelines, terminals, and bridges.

Meat Inspection Act, 1906

Provide for federal inspection of all companies selling meat in interstate commerce.

Pure Food and Drug Act, 1906

Prohibited the manufacture, sale, or transportation of adulterated or fraudulently labeled foods or drugs in interstate commerce.

Mann–Elkins Act, 1910

Put telephone, telegraph, cable, and wireless companies under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission.

Mann Act, 1910

Prohibited interstate transportation of women for immoral purposes.

Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution, 1913 (proposed in 1909)

Gave Congress the power to impose a federal tax on income from all sources. An inheritance tax was added in 1916.

Federal Child Labor Law (Keatings–Owen Act), 1916

Barred products of child labor from interstate commerce; declared unconstitutional in 1918. Another act passed in 1919 was declared unconstitutional in 1920. In 1924 a child labor amendment to the Constitution was submitted to the states, but was never ratified.

Adamson Act, 1916

Provided for an eight-hour day and time and a half for overtime on interstate railroads.

Federal Farm Loan Act, 1916

Provided farmers with long-term credit.

Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, 1919 (proposed in 1917)

Prohibited the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating beverages; repealed by the Twenty-First Amendment in 1933.

Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, 1920 (proposed in 1919)

Provided that the right of citizens of the United States to vote should not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex.

first reorganization of the banking system since the Civil War. The bill provided for 12 Federal Reserve banks and a Federal Reserve Board appointed by the president. The bill also created a flexible currency, based on Federal Reserve notes, that could be expanded or contracted as the situation required. The Federal Reserve System was not without its flaws, as later developments would show, and it did not end the power of the large eastern banks; but it was an improvement, and it appealed to the part of the progressive movement that sought order and efficiency.

Despite these reform measures, Wilson was not very progressive in some of his actions during his first two years in office. In the spring of 1914, he failed to support a bill that would have provided long-term rural credit financed by the federal government. He opposed a woman suffrage amendment, arguing that the states should decide who could vote. He also failed to support an anti-child labor bill after it had passed the House. Most distressing to some progressives, he ordered the segregation

of blacks in several federal departments. When southern Democrats, suddenly in control in many departments, began dismissing black federal officeholders, especially those “who boss white girls,” Wilson did nothing. When the NAACP complained that the shops, offices, restrooms, and lunchrooms of the post office and treasury departments and the Bureau of Engraving were segregated, Wilson replied, “I sincerely believe it to be in [the blacks’] best interest.” When the president endorsed the blatantly racist movie *Birth of a Nation*, others doubted that he believed in justice for the African American people. “Have you a ‘new freedom’ for white Americans and a new slavery for your African-American fellow citizens?” Boston journalist William Monroe Trotter asked.

Moving Closer to a New Nationalism

How to control the great corporations in America was a question Wilson and Roosevelt had debated

extensively during the 1912 campaign. Wilson's solution was the Clayton Act, submitted to Congress in 1914. The bill prohibited a number of unfair trading practices, outlawed the interlocking directorate, and made it illegal for corporations to purchase stock in other corporations if doing so tended to reduce competition. It was not clear how the government would enforce these provisions and ensure the competition that Wilson's New Freedom doctrine called for. Labor leaders protested that the bill had no provision exempting labor organizations from prosecution under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. When a section was added exempting both labor and agricultural organizations, Samuel Gompers hailed it as labor's Magna Carta. It was hardly that, because the courts interpreted the provision so that labor unions remained subject to court injunctions during strikes despite the Clayton Act.

More important than the Clayton Act, which both supporters and opponents realized was too vague to be enforced, was the creation of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), modeled after the ICC, with enough power to move directly against corporations accused of restricting competition. The FTC was the idea of Louis Brandeis, but Wilson accepted it even though it seemed closer to the philosophy of New Nationalism than to Wilson's New Freedom.

The Federal Trade Commission and the Clayton Act did not end monopoly, and the courts in the next two decades did not increase the government's power to regulate business. The success of Wilson's reform agenda appeared minimal in 1914, but the outbreak of war in Europe and the need to win the election of 1916 would influence him in becoming more progressive in the next years (see Chapter 22).

Neither Wilson nor Roosevelt satisfied the demands of the advanced progressives. These two progressive presidents spent most of their efforts on trying to regulate economic power rather than promoting social justice. Yet the most important legacy of these two powerful politicians was their attempts to strengthen the office of president and the executive branch of the federal government. The nineteenth-century American presidents after Lincoln had been relatively weak, and much of the federal power had resided with Congress. The progressive presidents reasserted presidential authority, modernized the executive branch, and began the creation of the federal bureaucracy, which has had a major impact on the lives of Americans.

Both Wilson and Roosevelt used the presidency as a bully pulpit to make pronouncements, create news, and influence policy. Roosevelt strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission and Wilson created

TIMELINE

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1901 McKinley assassinated; Theodore Roosevelt becomes president
Robert La Follette elected governor of Wisconsin
Tom Johnson elected mayor of Cleveland
Model tenement house bill passed in New York
U.S. Steel formed</p> <hr/> <p>1902 Anthracite coal strike</p> <hr/> <p>1903 Women's Trade Union League founded
Elkins Act</p> <hr/> <p>1904 Roosevelt re-elected
Lincoln Steffens writes <i>The Shame of the Cities</i></p> <hr/> <p>1905 Frederic C. Howe writes <i>The City: The Hope of Democracy</i>
Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) formed</p> <hr/> <p>1906 Upton Sinclair writes <i>The Jungle</i>
Hepburn Act
Meat Inspection Act
Pure Food and Drug Act</p> <hr/> <p>1907 Financial panic</p> <hr/> <p>1908 <i>Muller v. Oregon</i>
Danbury Hatters case (<i>Loewe v. Lawler</i>)
William Howard Taft elected president</p> | <p>1909 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded</p> <hr/> <p>1910 Ballinger–Pinchot controversy
Mann Act</p> <hr/> <p>1911 Frederick Taylor writes <i>The Principles of Scientific Management</i>
Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire</p> <hr/> <p>1912 Progressive party founded by Theodore Roosevelt
Woodrow Wilson elected president
Children's Bureau established
Industrial Relations Commission founded</p> <hr/> <p>1913 Sixteenth Amendment (income tax) ratified
Underwood Tariff
Federal Reserve System established
Seventeenth Amendment (direct election of senators) passed</p> <hr/> <p>1914 Clayton Act
Federal Trade Commission Act
AFL has more than 2 million members
Ludlow Massacre in Colorado</p> |
|--|--|

the Federal Trade Commission, both of which were the forerunners of many other federal regulatory bodies. By breaking precedent and delivering his annual message in person before a joint session of Congress, Wilson symbolized the new power of the presidency.

The nature of politics was changed by more than just the increased power of the executive branch. The new bureaus, committees, and commissions brought to Washington a new kind of expert, trained in the universities, at the state and local level, and in voluntary organizations. Julia Lathrop, a coworker of Jane Addams at Hull House, was one such expert.

Appointed by President Taft in 1912 to become chief of the newly created Children's Bureau, she was the first woman ever appointed to such a position. She used her post not only to work for better child labor laws but also to train a new generation of women experts who would take their positions in state, federal, and private agencies in the 1920s and 1930s. Other experts emerged in Washington during the progressive era to influence policy in subtle and important ways. The expert, the commission, the statistical survey, and the increased power of the executive branch were all legacies of the progressive era.

Conclusion

The Limits of Progressivism

The progressive era was a time when many Americans set out to promote reform because they saw poverty, despair, and disorder in the country transformed by immigration, urbanism, and industrialism. But unlike the socialists, the progressives saw nothing fundamentally wrong with the American system. Progressivism, part of a global movement to regulate and control rampaging industrialism, was largely a middle-class movement that sought to help the poor, the immigrants, and the working class. Yet the poor were rarely consulted about policy, and many groups, especially African Americans, were almost entirely left out of reform plans. Progressives had an optimistic view of human nature and an exaggerated faith in statistics, commissions, and committees. They talked of the need for more democracy, but they often succeeded in promoting bureaucracy and a government run by experts. They believed there was a need to regulate business, promote efficiency, and spread social justice, but these were often contradictory goals. In the end, their regulatory laws tended to aid business and strengthen corporate capitalism, while social justice and equal opportunity remained difficult to achieve. By contrast, most of the industrialized nations of western Europe, especially Germany, Denmark, and Great Britain, passed

legislation during this period providing for old-age pensions and health and unemployment insurance.

Progressivism was a broad, diverse, and sometimes contradictory movement that had its roots in the 1890s and reached its height in the early twentieth century. It began with many local movements and voluntary efforts to deal with the problems created by urban industrialism and then moved to the state and finally the national level, where it enlisted government to regulate the private sector and to promote reform. Women played important roles in organizing reform, and many became experts at gathering statistics and writing reports. Eventually, they began to fill positions in the new agencies in the state capitals and in Washington. Frances Kellor was one of those professional women who devoted her life to reform and to helping immigrants. Neither Theodore Roosevelt nor Woodrow Wilson was an advanced progressive, but during both their administrations, progressivism achieved some success. Both presidents strengthened the power of the presidency, and both promoted the idea that the federal government had the responsibility to regulate and control and to promote social justice. Progressivism would be altered by World War I, but it survived, with its strengths and weaknesses, to affect American society through most of the twentieth century.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. What contributions did women make to the Progressive movement?
2. Why did the United States lag behind several European countries in passing social legislation?
3. Was Prohibition a Progressive measure?
4. How did progressivism differ from socialism?
5. What was the long-range legacy of the Progressive movement?

Recommended Reading

Recommended Readings are posted on the Web site for this textbook. Visit www.ablongman.com/nash

Fiction and Film

Three books written in the early 1900s help readers understand what life was like during the progressive era. Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) is a classic of social realism that was controversial at the time it was published. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) is about the meatpacking industry and the failure of the American dream. *Susan Lenox* (1917), written by David Graham Phillips, is an epic of slum life and political corruption. *Birth of a Nation* (1915) is an important film not only because of its innovative technique but also because it is a mirror of the racism of

the progressive era. *Hester Street* (1975), a later film, creates a realistic picture of the immigrant experience and the conflict between husbands and wives created by assimilation. According to some critics, *Citizen Kane* (1941) is the best American film ever made. Based loosely on the life of newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, the film deals with much of the history of the early twentieth century. The documentary *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (2005) deals with the racism and popular culture (especially boxing) in the progressive era.

Discovering U.S. History Online

How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York

www.cis.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/rjis/title.html

This site presents the full text, including illustrations, of this classic work.

Turn-of-the-Century America, 1880–1920

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/detroit/dethome.htm>

This Library of Congress collection has thousands of photographs from turn-of-the-century America.

American Sweatshops

www.americanhistory.si.edu/sweatshops/

This site presents a history of American sweatshops from 1820 to 1997 through images and text.

The Triangle Factory Fire

www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/

The Kheel Center has put together this site composed of oral histories, cartoons, images, and essays about the shirtwaist factory fire of March 1911.

The Westinghouse World

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/papr/west/westgorg.html>

Part of the Westinghouse Works Collection, this special exhibition presents an overview of this turn-of-the-century factory, the working conditions, projects, and a brief biography of the founder.

The Trial of Bill Haywood

www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/haywood/haywood.htm

Bill Haywood was a labor radical accused of ordering the assassination of former governor of Idaho Frank Steunenberg in 1907. This site contains images, chronology, and court and official documents.

Memories of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5202/rebelgirl.html

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn gave this speech presenting her memoirs of IWW two years before her death.

IWW Historical Reclamation Project

<http://parsons.iww.org/~iw/info/books/>

A cooperative effort of present union members to preserve the history of IWW, this site presents a collection of pamphlets, writings, Web references, and so on.

Arts and Crafts Archives

www.arts-crafts.com/archive/archive.shtml

This site serves as a guide to materials on the arts and crafts movement, which lasted roughly from 1890 to 1929.

The Evolution of the Conservation Movement, 1850–1920

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/conshome.html>

This Library of Congress site brings together scores of primary sources and photographs about “the historical formation and cultural foundations of the movement to conserve and protect America’s natural heritage.”

America 1900

www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/amex/1900

This is the companion site to the PBS documentary *America 1900*. It includes audio clips of respected historians on the economics, politics, and culture of 1900; a primary-source database; a timeline of the year; downloadable software to compile your family tree; and other materials.

Chicago in 1900

www.chipublib.org/004chicago/1900/intro.html

This site presents a sketch of Chicago in 1900, including its architecture, commerce, crime, education, family, eco-

nomics, amusements, geography, government, health, population, and transportation.

The Anthracite Coal Strike, 1902

www.history.ohio-state.edu/projects/coal/1902anthracitestrike/

As an example of turn-of-the-century strikes, this site presents the anthracite strike of 1902, including a chronology of the strike, primary documents, a description of the issues, and political cartoons.

The Wright Brothers in Photographs

www.libraries.wright.edu/special/wright_brothers/dmc.html

This image database “provides thorough coverage of the Wrights’ early inventive period documenting their experimental gliders and flight testing in both North Carolina and Ohio.”

Theodore Roosevelt Association

www.theodoreroosevelt.org

Chartered by Congress in 1920 to “preserve the memory and ideals of the 26th President of the United States,” the Theodore Roosevelt Association presents a thorough site containing much biographical and research information.

Theodore Roosevelt

www.potus.com/troosevelt.html

This site contains basic factual data about Roosevelt’s election and presidency, speeches, and online biographies.

William Howard Taft

www.potus.com/whtaft.html

This site contains basic factual data about Taft’s election and presidency, speeches, and online biographies.

Woodrow Wilson

www.potus.com/wwilson.html

This site contains basic factual data about Wilson’s election and presidency, speeches, and online biographies.