

## The Progressive Era (1900 – 1918)

### I. Sources of Progressive Reform

A. Industrialization, with all its increase in productivity and the number of consumer goods, created

- 1) Unemployment and labor unrest
- 2) Wasteful use of natural resources
- 3) Abuses of corporate power

B. Growing cities magnified problems of poverty, disease, crime, and corruption

C. Influx of immigrants and rise of new managerial class upset traditional class alignments

D. Massive depression (1893-1897) convinced many that equal opportunity was out of reach for many Americans.

### II. Who Were the Progressives?

A. New middle class composed of young professionals

1. Sought to apply principles of professions (medicine, law, business, teaching) to problems of society
2. Strong faith in progress and the ability of educated people to overcome problems
3. Rise in volunteer organizations organized to address issues (American Bar Association, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Municipal League, eg.)
4. Mainly urban in residence and orientation

B. Muckraking journalists attacked corruption and scandal with a sense of moral outrage

1. Lincoln Steffens exposed city machines in *The Shame of the Cities* (1904)
2. Ida Tarbell exposed Standard Oil Trust abuses
3. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) attacked the meat-packing industry

C. Political reformers (many opposed to traditional party politics)

D. Socialists--frustrated workers who promised to destroy capitalism. Led by Eugene Debs (who polled 900,000 votes for president in 1912), socialists were rejected by most Progressives as too extreme in their goals and methods

## II. Teddy Roosevelt & the Square Deal

A. Using the power of the presidency (a "bully pulpit") as no president since Lincoln, T.R. loved to lead and to fight those he felt were not acting in America's best interests.

1. Coal Strike--When coal mine owners refused to deal with the union in a 1902 strike, T.R. summonsed them and the head of the mine workers to the White House and threatened to use army troops to keep the mines open. Owners backed down and T.R. was credited with ending the strike
2. Northern Securities Case--T.R. used the Sherman Antitrust Act to attack a railroad monopoly. Supreme Court ordered the company to dissolve.
3. Added Departments of Labor and Commerce to the Cabinet
4. Pushed through the Hepburn Act (1906), strengthening the Interstate Commerce Commission
5. Urged Congressional approval of the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906), which forbade impure foods and required labeling of ingredients of foods and drugs.

B. Conservation reform added massive areas to the national forests (total of 190 million acres)

1. Transferred forests to the U.S. Forest Service headed by Gifford Pinchot, who insisted that trees be planted as well as harvested
2. Withdrew millions of acres of public land from sale to protect resources
3. Used public land sale revenues to build dams and canal systems

## III. City and State Government Reform

A. City government system changed to prevent boss or "machine" rule

1. City commissions replaced mayors and city councils in some areas
2. City managers (nonpolitical professional managers) were hired to run small cities

B. State level reform efforts championed by Robert La Follette of Wisconsin

1. Direct primary to give voters control over candidates
2. Competitive civil service and restrictions on lobbying
3. Many states passed workmen's compensation laws
4. Election reforms to bring direct democracy to voters
  - a) Initiative--allowed 5% of voters to "initiate" laws in state legislatures
  - b) Referendum--in some states voters could then pass initiatives into laws
  - c) Recall--by petition voters could force an official to stand for re-election at any time

## IV. Major Progressivism Programs

### A. Education

1. Progressive education--John Dewey led movement that focused on personal growth, not mastery of body of knowledge and learning through experience.
2. Charles Eliot of Harvard pioneered elective courses and new teaching techniques (such as seminars) to make university learning more meaningful
3. Women began attending colleges in large numbers (by 1920, 47% of total enrollment was female).
4. Believing that more education would help bring an enlightened population, Progressives pushed enrollments to record levels (86% of children in schools by 1920) without seriously assessing how schools were doing.

### B. Law--judges opinions needed to be based on factual information, not just oral arguments and precedents

1. Muller V. Oregon (1908)--limited women's working hours
2. Not all Progressive legal principles prevailed. In Lochner v. New York (1905), the Supreme Court overturned a New York law limiting bakers' working hours.

### C. Settlement houses--Jane Addams and others established group homes in city slums to aid poor urban residents.

1. Promoted public health reform in cities, chlorinating water and tightening sanitary regulations
2. Developed education and craft programs for residents
3. Created neighborhood health clinics and dispensaries

### D. Racial anti-discrimination efforts

1. Booker T. Washington (Atlanta Compromise) argued for self-help and accommodation on the part of blacks to white society
2. W.E.B. DuBois (Niagara Movement--1905) urged blacks to assert themselves and agitate for political and economic rights. Formed NAACP to use legal means to end racial discrimination

### E. Women's rights

1. While the number of employed women stayed constant from 1900-1920(20%), the type of work switched from domestic labor (servants, cooks, laundresses) to clerical work (clerks, typists, bookkeepers), factory work, and professionals.
2. Most women still held the lowest paying and least opportune jobs
3. Significant Progressive feminists called for greater reform

- a) Charlotte Perkins Gilman attacked the male monopoly on opportunity and declared that domesticity was an obsolete value for American women
- b) Margaret Sanger led the movement to provide birth control to prevent unwanted pregnancies among poor women
- c) Suffragists urged that women be given the franchise, which came on the national level with the 19th Amendment (1919).

F. Child labor laws--most states passed minimum working age laws and prohibited children from working more than 10 hours per day, but enforcement was difficult to achieve.

G. Temperance--Anti-Saloon League and Women's Christian Temperance Union fought alcoholism on the state level through blue laws and on the national level with the 18th Amendment which prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of liquor.

## V. Presidential Election of 1912

A. Republican successor Taft proved to be less progressive than T.R. in the areas of tariff reform and conservation.

- 1. Payne-Aldrich Tariff (heralded by Taft as "the best tariff passed by the Republican Party") protected industries and kept consumer prices high
- 2. A public land sale scandal in Alaska pitted Pinchot against Secretary of Interior Ballinger. Taft fired Pinchot

B. T.R. organized the National Progressive or "Bull Moose" Party after Progressive Republicans bolted the Taft-controlled Republican convention. Party platform included long list of Progressive demands

C. Democrats nominated Woodrow Wilson, the scholarly governor of New Jersey who called for moral revival and reform, including low tariffs, the breaking up of all monopolies, and for the government to be an umpire in disputes between labor and business.

D. Socialists nominated Debs, who called for public ownership of all natural resources and major industries.

E. Wilson won 40/48 states as Republicans split between Taft and TR. Height of Progressivism as Wilson, TR, and Debs totaled 11 million votes to 3.5 million for Taft.

## VI. Wilson's New Freedom and Progressivism

A. Tariff reform--Underwood Tariff (1913) gave first significant tariff reduction since 1860s as Wilson personally delivered his goals to Congress.

B. Currency and banking reform-- Creation of Federal Reserve System

1. Acted as bankers' banks and prevent "runs" on bank assets
2. Federal reserve notes issued a flexible new currency to the banking system

C. Clayton Antitrust Act (1914) to restrict monopolies and set up a Federal Trade Commission to stop unfair practices that may arise

## VII. Evaluation of Progressivism

A. Weaknesses of Progressive reform

1. Material progress of Americans weakened zeal of reformers
2. Myriad of Progressive goals were often confusing and contradictory
3. Opposition to Progressivism apparent as initiatives failed and courts struck down Progressive legislation
4. Government remained mainly under the influence of business and industry
5. Outbreak of World War I dampened enthusiasm of attempts to use governments to create just societies on earth

B. Progressive accomplishments

1. Trust-busting forced industrialists to notice public opinion
2. Legislation gave federal and state governments the tools to protect consumers.
3. Income tax helped build government revenues and redistribute wealth
4. Progressives successfully challenged traditional institutions and approaches to domestic problems.