

## CHAPTER 21

# The Progressive Era, 1895–1920

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After you have studied Chapter 21 in your textbook and worked through this study guide chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain the emergence of Progressivism and discuss the movement's basic themes.
2. Discuss the similarities and differences among the ideologies, goals, and tactics of the various groups that constituted the Progressive movement, and analyze the successes and failures of these groups in achieving political, social, and moral reform.
3. Explain the emergence of the Socialist movement, and indicate how it differed from Progressivism in ideology, goals, and tactics.
4. Discuss and evaluate the impact of Progressive ideas in education, law, and the social sciences; and examine the ideas associated with the Social Gospel and with eugenics.
5. Explain and evaluate the approaches of African Americans, American Indians, and women to the problems they faced during the Progressive era, and discuss the extent to which they were successful in achieving their goals.
6. Explain the relationship between Theodore Roosevelt's political, social, and economic beliefs and his approach toward the major issues of the day.
7. Indicate the reasons for the break between William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt, and explain the impact of this break on the 1912 election.
8. Examine the similarities and differences between Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.
9. Explain and evaluate the reform legislation of the Wilson presidency.
10. Assess the political, social, and economic impact of the Progressive era on American society.

### THEMATIC GUIDE

In Chapter 21, we focus on the Progressive era and Progressivism: a series of movements that brought together reform-minded individuals and groups with differing solutions to the nation's problems in the years 1895 to 1920. The Progressives were members of nationwide organizations that attempted to affect government policy. They were people interested in urban issues and urban political and social reform. Although Progressives came from all levels of society, new middle-class professionals formed the vanguard of the movement and found expression for their ideas in muckraking journalism.

Revolted by corruption and injustice, the new urban middle class called for political reform to make government more efficient, more accountable, and less corrupt. Such government, they believed, could be a force for good in American society. Some business executives argued for a society organized along the lines of the corporate model; women of the elite classes formed the YWCA and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Working-class reformers pressed for government legislation to aid labor and improve social welfare. Although some reformers turned to the Socialist Party, they were a decided

minority and cannot be considered Progressives. Progressives generally had far too great a stake in the capitalist system to advocate its destruction and as a result, were political moderates rather than radicals.

The many facets of Progressivism can be seen in the section “Governmental and Legislative Reform.” Progressives generally agreed that government power should be used to check the abuses associated with the industrial age, but they did not always agree on the nature of the problem. At the city and state levels, Progressives were initially interested in attacking the party system and in effecting political reform designed to make government more honest, more professional, and more responsive to the people. These aims can be seen through the accomplishments of Robert M. La Follette, one of the most effective Progressive governors, and in the Seventeenth Amendment, one of the major political reforms achieved by Progressives at the national level. Some Progressives also worked for social reform at the state level, to protect the wellbeing of citizens from exploitative corporate power. Still other Progressives believed in using the power of government to purify society by effecting moral reform. Such efforts were behind the Eighteenth Amendment and the Mann Act (White Slave Traffic Act).

In “New Ideas in Social Institutions” we find that the Progressive era also witnessed an assault on traditional ideas in education, law, and the social sciences. The ideas that constituted this assault and the changes resulting from this assault are examined and evaluated. This section also looks at Progressive reforms in public health, the religious foundations of the Social Gospel and of much Progressive reform, and the movement based on the pseudoscience of eugenics.

The Progressive spirit also had an impact on those seeking equal rights for African Americans, American Indians, and women. Some of the dilemmas faced by activists within these groups are highlighted by the contrasting approaches of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois toward white racism, the attempts by American Indians to advance their interests through the formation of the Society of American Indians, and the contrasting aims and goals of women involved in the women’s club movement, the feminist movement and the suffrage movement.

The Progressive era reached the national level of government when Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901. An examination of Roosevelt’s political, economic, and social frame of reference leads to an understanding of the Progressive legislation passed during his administration. The contrast between these years and the Taft administration that followed spurred Progressives to found the Progressive Party under Roosevelt’s leadership. The similarities and differences between Roosevelt’s New Nationalism and Woodrow Wilson’s New Freedom form a part of the foundation for Wilson’s election in 1912.

In “Woodrow Wilson and the Extension of Reform,” we analyze Wilson’s frame of reference and evaluate the legislation passed during his two administrations. The chapter ends with a summation of the Progressive era.

## IDENTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

After studying Chapter 21 of *A People and a Nation*, you should be able to identify fully *and* explain the historical significance of each item listed below.

- Identify each item in the space provided. Give an explanation or description of the item. Answer the questions *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when*.
- Explain the historical significance of each item in the space provided. Establish the historical context in which the item exists. Establish the item as the result of or as the cause of other factors existing in the society under study. Answer this question: *What were the political, social, economic, and/or cultural consequences of this item?*

1. muckrakers
2. the initiative, the referendum, and the recall
3. the Seventeenth Amendment
4. the war on alcohol
5. the Eighteenth Amendment
6. the expansion of colleges and universities
7. the Social Gospel
8. eugenics
9. Booker T. Washington

10. W. E. B. Du Bois

11. the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

12. the feminist movement

13. Margaret Sanger

14. the Nineteenth Amendment

15. Theodore Roosevelt

16. *The Jungle*

17. the Pure Food and Drug Act

18. the Sixteenth Amendment

19. the Progressive Party

20. Woodrow Wilson

21. the presidential election of 1912

22. the presidential election of 1916

## IDEAS AND DETAILS

### Objective 1

1. Organizations such as the American Bar Association, the National Consumers League, and the National Municipal League
  - a. increased the loyalty of the electorate to political parties.
  - b. introduced charismatic personalities to political campaigns.
  - c. stifled debate on major urban issues.
  - d. made politics more issue oriented than in previous eras.

### Objectives 1 and 2

2. With regard to governmental reform, Progressives wanted to
  - a. bargain with different interest groups to accomplish needed reforms.
  - b. use the principles of scientific management to achieve political efficiency.
  - c. require literacy tests for voting to ensure that the electorate was educated and responsible.
  - d. require full financial disclosure by all political candidates to ensure their independence from special-interest groups.

**Objective 2**

3. Which of the following is true of working-class Progressives such as Alfred Smith and Robert Wagner?
  - a. They were more interested in political reform than in social reform.
  - b. They rejected the idea that the government should regulate the workplace.
  - c. They usually supported moral reform movements such as prohibition.
  - d. They believed that government should take responsibility for lessening the hardships associated with urban-industrial growth.

**Objectives 1, 2, and 3**

4. Most Progressives did not ally with the Socialists because Progressives
  - a. were offended by the abrasive personality of Eugene Debs.
  - b. had a stake in the capitalist system and did not want to overthrow it.
  - c. rejected the nationalist appeals of the Socialists.
  - d. accepted the basic tenets of the laissez-faire philosophy.

**Objective 2**

5. Governor Robert M. La Follette believed that
  - a. corporations should be driven out of politics.
  - b. the working classes could never gain social justice in a capitalist society.
  - c. regulatory commissions represented a threat to the free enterprise system.
  - d. the federal government should nationalize the railroads.

**Objective 2**

6. Those Progressives who urged ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment demonstrated the belief that
  - a. government should accept responsibility for alleviating the hardships associated with industrialization.
  - b. the separation of church and state should be absolute.
  - c. it is appropriate for government to attempt to purify society through legislation.
  - d. government has the right to outlaw child labor in order to protect the nation's future.

**Objective 4**

2. John Dewey believed that
  - a. public education should concentrate on the teaching of basic moral principles.
  - b. public school teachers should be accredited by a national accreditation agency.
  - c. mastery by students of a given body of knowledge should be the primary aim of public education.
  - d. public school curricula should focus on personal development.

**Objective 5**

3. Which of the following best expresses the beliefs of Booker T. Washington?
  - a. Blacks should passively accept their inferior position in a white-dominated society.
  - b. Blacks should prove themselves worthy of equal rights by working hard and acquiring property.
  - c. Blacks should demand political and social equality in American society.
  - d. Blacks should challenge discriminatory legislation in the courts.

### Objective 5

4. The most decisive factor in the decision to extend the right to vote to women was
- acceptance of the argument that all Americans are equal and deserve the same rights.
  - acceptance of the idea that women would humanize politics.
  - the contributions made by women on the home front during the First World War.
  - the militant tactics of women like Carrie Chapman Catt.

### Objective 6

5. President Roosevelt's handling of trusts suggests that he accepted which of the following beliefs?
- Businesses must be allowed to operate and organize without government interference.
  - Antitrust laws should be used to prosecute unscrupulous corporations that exploit the public and refuse to regulate themselves.
  - Bigness is bad in and of itself.
  - The tax power of the government should be used to punish irresponsible corporations.

### Objective 7

6. Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft differed in which of the following ways?
- Roosevelt acted assertively to expand presidential power; Taft was cautious in his use of power.
  - Roosevelt took care not to offend business leaders; Taft was tactless and abrasive.
  - Roosevelt insisted on operating within the letter of the law; Taft was willing to bend the law to his purposes.
  - Roosevelt was sympathetic to reform; Taft found reform dangerous and unnecessary.

### Objective 8

7. Roosevelt's New Nationalism, unlike Wilson's New Freedom, called for
- the destruction of big business.
  - a restoration of laissez faire.
  - cooperation between big business and big government through the establishment of regulatory commissions.
  - equality of economic opportunity.

### Objectives 8 and 9

8. By advocating passage of the Clayton Anti-Trust Act and the creation of the Federal Trade Commission, President Wilson
- demonstrated his belief that it was possible to legislate open competition.
  - indicated his determination to challenge rulings of the Supreme Court.
  - stubbornly challenged the pro-business Democratic leadership in Congress.
  - accepted a blending of the idea of competition embodied in New Freedom and the need for regulation embodied in New Nationalism.

### Objective 9

9. The Underwood Tariff
- fostered competition by lowering tariff rates.
  - was rejected by President Wilson because it levied a tax on personal income.
  - established a 50 percent tax on incomes over \$100,000.
  - led to a trade war among the major trading nations.

**Objective 10**

10. In the final analysis, the Progressives were able to
  - a. bring about a redistribution of power in the United States.
  - b. remove state and national government from the influence of business and industrial interests.
  - c. establish the principle that government should intervene in social and political affairs to ensure fairness, health, and safety.
  - d. unite behind a comprehensive reform program for American society.

**ESSAY QUESTIONS****Objectives 1 and 2**

1. Explain the social, political, and economic ideas of middle-class Progressives, and evaluate their accomplishments at the local level of American society.

**Objective 5**

2. Discuss the similarities and differences between the approaches of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois to the problems faced by black Americans.

**Objective 5**

3. Discuss and evaluate the varying approaches of women to the problems they faced in early twentieth-century America.

**Objective 6**

4. Explain Theodore Roosevelt's approach to big business and the philosophy behind that approach.

**Objectives 8 and 9**

5. Defend the following statement: "As president, Wilson had to blend his New Freedom ideals with New Nationalism precepts, and in so doing he set the direction of federal economic policy for much of the twentieth century."

**Multiple-Choice Answers**

1.
  - d. Correct. Organizations such as those mentioned lobbied for their own interests and as a result, caused politics to become more fragmented. At the same time, however, their attempts to educate the public stimulated debate and made politics more issue oriented.
  - a. No. Voter loyalty to political parties began to decline during the Progressive era.
  - b. No. These organizations were not responsible for introducing charismatic personalities to political campaigns.
  - c. No. These organizations often served to stimulate debate on urban issues rather than stifle it.
2.
  - b. Correct. Professionals of the new middle class generally formed the Progressive movement's leadership. They believed that practices important in their professions, such as systematic



investigation and application of the scientific method, could be used by government to plan, control, and predict, thus achieving the goal of social and political efficiency.

- a. No. Progressives were not necessarily against compromise, but they disliked the bargaining associated with “old style” politics.
  - c. No. Although the evidence indicates that Progressives wanted political reforms designed to make government more responsive to “the people” by correcting the ills of “boss-ridden” party politics, Progressives did not advocate literacy tests as a requirement for voting.
  - d. No. Although Progressives advocated political reforms designed to make politicians more responsive to “the people,” they did not suggest requiring full financial disclosure by all political candidates.
3. d. Correct. Working-class Progressives, often trained in the trenches of machine politics, believed that government should intervene to alleviate the hardships associated with urban-industrial growth. Therefore, they advocated “bread-and-butter reforms” such as safe factories, shorter workdays, workers’ compensation, better housing, and health safeguards.
- a. No. Evidence indicates that most middle-class Progressives were interested in political reform (creation of the initiative, referendum, and recall), and most working-class Progressives were interested in social reform (improvements in housing, safe factories, and workers’ compensation).
  - b. No. By advocating reforms that would shorten working hours and ensure safe factories, working-class Progressives demonstrated their belief that government should ensure the safety and welfare of the worker by regulating the workplace.
  - c. No. Working-class Progressives usually rejected moral reforms such as prohibition and Sunday closing laws.
4. b. Correct. Most Progressives of the middle and working classes accepted the capitalist system, had relatively comfortable economic and social positions within that system, and had too much of a stake in that system to advocate its overthrow.
- a. No. Eugene Debs’s personality is not the reason that most Progressives rejected Socialist ideology.
  - c. No. A nationalist appeal is one that emphasizes devotion to country and nation. Progressives had a strong sense of devotion to the United States and often saw socialism as a radical attack against the nation’s fundamental principles.
  - d. No. Progressives rejected the basic tenets of the laissez-faire philosophy as outdated and obsolete in an age of urban-industrial growth.
5. a. Correct. La Follette believed that corporate involvement in politics was a source of political corruption and that corporations had amassed power at the expense of the people. Therefore, he advocated that corporations be driven out of politics.
- b. No. Although this was a belief held by Eugene Debs (the leader of the Socialist Party), La Follette, a Progressive, did not share this belief.
  - c. No. La Follette’s program (known as the “Wisconsin Idea”) involved the establishment of regulatory commissions staffed with experts.

- d. No. Although La Follette advocated regulation of railroad rates, he did not advocate nationalization (government ownership) of the railroads.
6. c. Correct. The Eighteenth Amendment prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating liquors in the United States. The amendment’s ratification represents the triumph of reformers who wanted to purify society through legislation.
- a. No. The Eighteenth Amendment did not address the problems and hardships associated with industrialization.
- b. No. The Eighteenth Amendment did not deal with separation of church and state.
- d. No. The Eighteenth Amendment did not deal with child labor.
7. d. Correct. Dewey believed that education should focus on personal development by dealing with real-life problems and by teaching students to use ingenuity to control their environment.
- a. No. Dewey did not believe that the teaching of moral principles should be the primary concern of public education. Furthermore, when such principles were dealt with, Dewey, who rejected the idea of moral absolutes, believed that they should be subjected to scientific inquiry.
- b. No. Dewey did not propose the accreditation of public school teachers by a national accreditation agency.
- c. No. Dewey rejected the idea that there was a fixed body of knowledge to be conveyed to students. He favored the “student-centered” as opposed to the “subject-centered” school.
8. b. Correct. Washington argued that while temporarily accepting their inferior position in American society, blacks should prove themselves worthy of equal rights by adopting a strategy of self-help.
- a. No. It is incorrect to say that Washington believed that black Americans should “passively” accept their position in American society.
- c. No. Washington believed that actively demanding and fighting for their political and social rights would prove to be counterproductive for black Americans.
- d. No. Although it is true that Washington secretly contributed money to support legal challenges to discriminatory legislation, he did not believe that black Americans should challenge such legislation in an open, direct, or active manner.
9. c. Correct. The efforts of women during the First World War were probably the most decisive factor in convincing legislators to extend the vote to women.
- a. No. Although the suffrage crusade grew out of the 1830s abolitionist argument in favor of equal rights for all Americans, the idea was rejected by many Americans in the 1910s just as it had been rejected in the 1830s.
- b. No. Since most Americans accepted traditional gender roles and the restrictions such roles placed on women, some suffragists did use a traditionalist view (that women have “unique” qualities) to defend female suffrage. However, use of this argument was not “the most decisive factor” in the extension of the vote to women.
- d. No. Although Carrie Chapman Catt organized women at the precinct level so that pressure could be put on male politicians who opposed the extension of the vote to women, she is considered a moderate and did not engage in militant tactics.

10. b. Correct. Roosevelt preferred cooperation between government and business and preferred that business regulate itself. However, he was willing to prosecute trusts that unscrupulously exploited the public and refused to regulate themselves.
- a. No. Roosevelt’s policy toward the Northern Securities Company and his support of the Hepburn Act, the Pure Food and Drug Act, and the Meat Inspection Act demonstrate his rejection of the idea that business must be allowed to organize and operate without government interference.
- c. No. Roosevelt, recognizing that business consolidation could bring efficiency, did not see bigness as bad in and of itself.
- d. No. Roosevelt’s handling of the trusts does not indicate that he believed in using the tax power of the government (which was minimal since there was no income tax) to punish irresponsible corporations.
11. a. Correct. Roosevelt’s handling of the trusts, his labor policy, and his actions on the issue of conservation indicate an assertion of presidential power. On the other hand, Taft’s handling of the tariff issue and his inability to publicize issues he supported indicate caution and restraint.
- b. No. Although Roosevelt preferred cooperation between business and government to confrontation, he often offended business leaders by speaking against their unscrupulous abuse of power. In contrast, although Taft supported federal regulation of business, he was quieter and his accomplishments were less publicized.
- c. No. On the contrary, Roosevelt was far more willing to bend the law to his purposes than was Taft, who believed in the strict restraint of the law.
- d. No. Both Roosevelt and Taft were sympathetic to reform.
12. c. Correct. Roosevelt called for federal regulatory commissions to establish cooperation between big business and big government, thereby protecting citizens’ interests; but Wilson emphasized breaking up monopolies, returning to open competition, and using government to accomplish both.
- a. No. Neither Roosevelt nor Wilson called for the “destruction” of big business.
- b. No. Neither Roosevelt nor Wilson called for a restoration of the laissez-faire philosophy.
- d. No. Both Roosevelt and Wilson supported equality of economic opportunity.
13. d. Correct. As president, Wilson realized that economic concentration had gone so far that a return to free competition, an idea central to the concept of New Freedom, was impossible. With this realization, Wilson accepted expansion of the government’s regulatory powers to deal with the reality of economic concentration in the hands of big business. In doing so, Wilson accepted a blending of New Freedom and New Nationalism. This is demonstrated by Wilson’s support of the Clayton Anti-Trust Act and creation of the FTC.
- a. No. Wilson’s support of the Clayton Anti-Trust Act and creation of the FTC demonstrates his acceptance of the fact that a return to open competition was impossible.
- b. No. Neither the Clayton Anti-Trust Act nor the bill creating the FTC was passed as a consequence of Supreme Court rulings. Therefore, they do not indicate a challenge by Wilson to the Court.
- c. No. The Democratic leadership in Congress favored passage of the Clayton Act and the bill creating the FTC.

14. a. Correct. By reducing tariffs and thus encouraging imports, the Underwood Tariff encouraged free competition and free trade.
- b. No. President Wilson proposed and actively supported passage of the Underwood Tariff, including the income-tax provision.
- c. No. The Underwood Tariff imposed a graduated income tax on residents of the United States; the maximum rate was 6 percent, and that rate was applied to incomes over \$500,000.
- d. No. Since the Underwood Tariff dramatically reduced tariff rates on imports, it did not lead to a trade war.
- 
15. c. Correct. By gaining public support for trust-busting and for legislation such as the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act, Progressives established the principle that government power should be used for the common good by ensuring fairness, health, and safety.
- a. No. The strength of opposition to reform, court rulings against Progressive legislation, and shortcomings of regulatory agencies are a few indications that in many respects, Progressives failed to bring about a redistribution of power. In 1920 government remained under the influence of business and industry.
- b. No. Use of such devices as the initiative, the referendum, and the recall by special interests indicates that business and industrial interests still had influence and power at the state level, and the shortcomings of regulatory agencies indicate the same was true at the national level.
- d. No. Progressives stressed different themes and different causes and often worked at cross-purposes.