

Chapter 21 Outline - The Progressive Era, 1895–1920

- I. Introduction

The crises of the 1890s generated a broad, complex reform movement known as Progressivism. Progressives wanted to end abuses of power, replace corrupt power with humane institutions, and apply scientific principles and efficient management to economic, social, and political institutions. Many looked to government as the agent of change.

- II. The Varied Progressive Impulse

- A. National Associations and Foreign Influences

Organizations began to influence government policy in the 1890s, fragmenting politics and making them more issue-oriented. Furthermore, ideas from Europe had an impact on Progressive reformers in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

- B. The New Middle-Class and Muckrakers

The new middle class formed the vanguard of the Progressive movement. Journalists, called “muckrakers,” raised interest in reform, particularly among urban Americans. Many people, opposed to political parties and bosses, advocated nominating candidates through direct primaries. To make officeholders more responsible, they urged adoption of the initiative, the referendum, and the recall.

- C. Upper-Class Reformers

Some businessmen supported limited political and economic reform to protect themselves from radical changes, while others were humanitarians seeking social justice. Elite women encouraged social reform.

- D. Settlement Houses

Settlement Houses originated as places where an urban population could receive aid, education, and learn to adapt to contemporary problems. Services provided included English language instruction, Kindergarten, art exhibits, and nurseries among other things.

- E. Working-Class Reformers

The working class pushed for labor and safety reform, and inner-city voters elected Progressive legislators.

- F. The Social Gospel

Social Gospelers believed they could counter the brutality of competitive capitalism by applying Christian principles to worldly matters.

- G. Socialists

Some workers who wanted substantive changes in society turned to socialism. Many socialists united behind Eugene V. Debs. Most Progressives had too much of a stake in the capitalist system to want to overthrow it.

- H. Southern and Western Progressivism

The Progressive movement in the South was urban and middle class in nature, and its supporters worked toward the same goals as northern Progressives. Southern Progressives pioneered the direct primary, the city-commission plan, and the city-manager plan.

Western Progressives championed humanitarianism and regulation.

Just as in the North and East, both black and white southern and western women made important contributions to Progressive causes.

- I. Opponents of Progressivism

Many politicians and capitalists opposed Progressivism as too much government interference in the free market.

- III. Governmental and Legislative Reform

- A. Restructuring Government

Most Progressives believed that government should be the guardian of the people. Although reformers first tried to eliminate corruption from government at the city level, they began to shift their attention to the state level.

Several charismatic governors used their powers to enact reform. The most forceful Progressive governor was Wisconsin's Robert M. LaFollette.

- B. Labor Reform

State laws promoting social welfare, such as limited working hours for women and age limits for children, often had greater influence than did political reforms.

- C. Prohibition

Some reformers sought to create a better moral climate through movements such as an anti-liquor crusade.

Reformers successfully gained a nationwide ban on the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages with the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919.

- D. Controlling Prostitution

Reformers next attacked prostitution. Congress passed the White Slave Traffic Act in 1910, and by 1915, the states had effectively

criminalized prostitution.

- IV. New Ideas in Social Institutions

- A. John Dewey and Progressive Education

Progressive educators, most notably the philosopher John Dewey, believed that learning should focus on real-life problems and that children should learn to use their intelligence to control their environment.

- B. Growth of Colleges and Universities

College enrollment expanded during this era. Much of the growth stemmed from the creation of new institutions, from the increased numbers of women attending colleges, and, in the South, from the emergence of black schools.

- C. Progressive Legal Thought

Progressive lawyers argued that the law should be flexible enough to reflect the needs of society. Judges imbued with laissez-faire theories opposed this view.

- D. Social Science

In economics, young scholars argued that economic relationships should reflect prevailing social conditions. Sociologists insisted that planning would cure social ills. Progressive historians used the past to explain American society and to promote social change. In public health, the National Health Consumers League joined with physicians and social scientists to protect female and child laborers, advance consumer protection measures, and urge the funding of neighborhood clinics by city governments.

- E. Eugenics

Believing that human character and habits could be inherited,

eugenicists sought to protect American society from reproduction by “inferior” people by advocating sterilization and restrictions on immigration.

- V. Challenges to Racial and Sexual Discrimination

- A. Continued Discrimination for African Americans

Southern African Americans suffered under repressive Jim Crow laws. African Americans in the North faced job discrimination, inferior schools, and segregated housing.

- B. Booker T. Washington and Self-Help

Booker T. Washington encouraged African Americans to accommodate themselves to whites, at least temporarily. He believed that blacks should first acquire property and thus prove themselves worthy of other rights.

- C. W. E. B. Du Bois and the “Talented Tenth”

W. E. B. Du Bois opposed Washington. He believed that a select group of African Americans, the “Talented Tenth,” should use their skill to pursue racial equality. Believing that blacks should agitate for their rights, Du Bois helped form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909.

- D. Society of American Indians

Native Americans formed their own reform association, the Society of American Indians. The society could not resolve conflicts between tribal loyalties and pressure for assimilation, and it folded early in the 1920s.

- E. “The Woman Movement”

Before 1910, those who wanted women to move out of the home and into social activities, higher education, and paid labor called

themselves “the woman movement.”

- F. Women’s Clubs

Excluded from holding political office, women joined clubs that showed more interest in improving society than in reforming government.

- G. Feminism

Around 1910, many women began using a new term, “feminism,” to describe their reform efforts that stressed social justice, economic equality, and sexual freedom.

- H. Margaret Sanger’s Crusade

Feminists like Margaret Sanger pushed for widespread use of contraception.

- I. Woman Suffrage

Early advocates of women’s rights thought that only educated women should vote, but Progressive reformers wanted all women to have that right. The Nineteenth Amendment gave women the vote in national elections.

- VI. Theodore Roosevelt and the Revival of the Presidency

- A. Theodore Roosevelt

Theodore Roosevelt believed that the government should direct national affairs. In economic affairs he believed that government should act as an umpire by deciding when big business was good and when it was bad.

- B. Regulation of Trusts

Roosevelt first turned his attentions to big business. He triumphed in

1904 when the Supreme Court dissolved the Northern Securities Company. Roosevelt also successfully pushed for regulatory legislation.

- C. Pure Food and Drug Laws

With the publication of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* in 1906, Roosevelt supported the Meat Inspection Act. The Pure Food and Drug Act addressed abuses in the patent-medicine industry.

- D. Race Relations

Roosevelt believed in white superiority. In response to the 1906 Brownsville Incident, Roosevelt, waiting until after the midterm elections, discharged 167 black soldiers without a hearing or a trial and prevented them from receiving their pay and pensions.

- E. Conservation

Roosevelt favored *conservation* over *preservation*. Roosevelt supported the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902. He tripled the number and acreage of national forests and supported creation of the U.S. Forest Service.

- F. Gifford Pinchot

As chief forester with the U.S. Forest Service, Pinchot advanced his belief in scientific management of the nation's woodlands to prevent overuse.

- G. Panic of 1907

Roosevelt had to compromise his views in the face of economic crises.

- H. Taft Administration

William Howard Taft had to face problems with the tariff that Roosevelt had ignored. He angered Progressives by signing the Payne-

Aldrich Tariff.

Under Taft, the Progressive and conservative wings of the Republican party drifted apart.

Taft angered conservationists by firing Gifford Pinchot.

Although Taft was sympathetic to reform and prosecuted more trusts than Roosevelt, he was unlike Roosevelt in that he believed in the strict restraint of law.

- I. Candidates in 1912

When it became apparent that Taft's supporters controlled the 1912 Republican convention, Roosevelt's supporters walked out of the convention and formed the Progressive, or Bull Moose, Party. The Progressive Party nominated Roosevelt for the presidency.

- J. New Nationalism versus New Freedom

Roosevelt's New Nationalism sought national unity with government coordinating and regulating, not destroying, big business. Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom warned that concentrated economic power threatened liberty and insisted that monopolies should be broken up.

- VII. Woodrow Wilson and Extension of Progressive Reform

- A. Woodrow Wilson

Woodrow Wilson, a former president of Princeton University, supported passage of Progressive legislation while governor of New Jersey.

- B. Wilson's Policy on Business Regulation

Finding it necessary to blend his New Freedom ideas with Roosevelt's New Nationalism ideas, Wilson expanded the government's regulatory powers over business through the Clayton Antitrust Act

and a bill creating the Federal Trade Commission.

Wilson expanded banking regulation through the Federal Reserve Act of 1913.

- C. Tariff and Tax Reform

The Underwood Tariff lowered the tariff, but it created a graduated income tax. Wilson supported more reforms in 1916, especially in light of the war in Europe and the upcoming presidential election.

- D. Election of 1916

Republican Charles Evans Hughes ran unsuccessfully against Wilson in 1916. America's entry into World War I shifted focus from reform because the war required cooperation between the public and private sectors.