

CHAPTER 13

The Progressive Era

From the beginning of Theodore Roosevelt's administration (1901–1909) until the entry of the United States into World War I in 1917, a spirit of active reform dominated national, state, and local politics. Those who sought change came to be known as *Progressives*.

VOICES OF PROTEST

Like the reformers of the Jacksonian era, Progressives were interested in a wide range of issues. In wanting to make politics more democratic, Progressives were like Populists. But there were important differences. Most of the Populists had been rural Americans from Southern and Western states. They were chiefly concerned with the problems of farmers. The majority of Progressives were middle-class city dwellers from the Midwest and Northeast. Their interests were broader than those of the Populists.

1. Muckrakers. Skillful reporters, popularly called *muckrakers*, exposed many of the conditions that the Progressives wanted to correct. One of the best-known muckrakers was Lincoln Steffens, an editor of *McClure's Magazine*. Steffens's descriptions of corruption in several cities were collected in *The Shame of the Cities* (1904). *McClure's* also printed the results of a full investigation of the Rockefeller oil trust and its business practices. Written by Ida Tarbell, these articles later appeared in book form as *The History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904). In *The Treason of the Senate* (1906), David Graham Phillips charged that most U.S. senators represented railroads and trusts rather than the American people. John Spargo, in *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (1906), described the dreadful working conditions of child laborers. Muckrakers also attacked living conditions in the slums, discrimination against African Americans, and unsanitary practices in the meatpacking industry.

2. Feminists. By 1900, a number of states had enacted laws to protect the property and earnings of married women. About 20 percent of American women were in the labor force. There were almost 130 women's colleges in the United States, and a fourth of the nation's college students were women.



Suffragists march in the nation's capital, April 7, 1913, the day before Woodrow Wilson took office as U.S. president.

Women, however, still did not have the right to vote. From the 1860s on, the main aim of feminists was to get the vote for women. In 1890, such *suffragists* as Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Anna Howard Shaw formed the National American Woman Suffrage Association. In the same year, Wyoming became the first state to provide for women's suffrage in its constitution. During the next three decades, several other states, most of them in the West, took similar steps. Progressives continued to urge the adoption of a constitutional amendment that would guarantee voting rights to *all* American women.

3. African-American Reformers. Several African-American leaders rose to prominence during the Progressive era. Booker T. Washington, a former slave, founded and headed Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He advised African Americans to be patient and responsible laborers, even though their position in American society was humble.

Washington's approach was too conservative for another African-American leader, W.E.B. DuBois. Educated at Harvard University, he was a professor of economics and history at Atlanta University. DuBois urged African Americans to be neither content with menial jobs nor silent about unjust treatment. In 1905, he founded the Niagara Movement, the first organization of African Americans to protest racial discrimination.

Three years later, a race riot broke out in Springfield, Illinois. Two African Americans were lynched and four whites killed, but the ringleaders of the mob were never punished. The riot led to the formation, in 1909, of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This group aimed to put an end to discrimination by means of legislation and court decisions. Another organization, the National Urban League, was founded in 1910 to help African Americans get better jobs and housing, particularly in cities.

REFORMS AT CITY AND STATE LEVELS

One goal of the Progressives was to eliminate corruption in local and state governments. Their reforms aimed at reducing the power of political machines and making elected leaders more responsible to the people. A reform adopted by one city or state often spread to others.

1. Cities. Samuel Jones, a Progressive mayor of Toledo, Ohio, introduced civil service into the police department, set a minimum wage for city employees, built public parks in the city's poorer sections, and established kindergartens. Tom Johnson, mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, brought about greater *home rule*—that is, independence from outside (in this case, state) control. As a result of his efforts, the state passed a law guaranteeing home rule to all Ohio towns.

Progressives backed two new types of city government. (1) Under the *commission plan*, voters elect a small group of commissioners whose political affiliations are not stated. Each commissioner heads a government department. Together, they carry out both the executive and legislative duties of the city. In 1901, Galveston, Texas, became the first city to adopt this plan of government. (2) The other new form of city government was the *city-manager plan*. Here voters elect commissioners, who, in turn, hire a professional manager to run the city. The first city to introduce this plan was Staunton, Virginia, in 1908. By the end of the Progressive Era, some 400 cities had adopted the commission plan, and about 50, the city-manager plan.

2. States. Members of state legislatures, being poorly paid, were frequently bribed by big businesses and public utilities. To counter that, several Progressive reforms were enacted to increase citizen participation. One was the *direct primary*, which allowed voters to select a party's candidates for office. (Formerly, politicians at party conventions had chosen candidates.) Minnesota became the first

state to require a statewide direct primary, in 1901. In the next few years, most other states also adopted it. Another reform was the secret ballot. Voting in private protected citizens against pressure from observers who might influence them or buy their votes.

Three other political reforms also came into use at this time. One, the *initiative*, provides that the legislature must consider passing a law if a certain percentage of voters sign a petition in its favor. Another, the *referendum*, requires that a law or constitutional amendment passed by a legislature be submitted to voters for their approval. The first state to adopt the initiative and referendum was South Dakota, in 1898. A third reform, *recall*, permits voters to petition for, and vote upon, the removal of elected officials before their terms expire. In 1908, Oregon became the first state to adopt the recall.

In the early 20th century, Progressives helped elect many reformers as state governors. One of them was Wisconsin's Robert La Follette. He brought in experts from the University of Wisconsin to draft laws that lowered railroad rates, regulated public utilities, established workers' compensation, and reformed the tax system. Another reforming governor, Charles Evans Hughes of New York, succeeded in regulating public utilities in his state. Hiram Johnson of California was elected governor on the slogan "Kick the Southern Pacific out of politics," and he did so. This powerful railroad had dominated the state's political life for four decades.

IDENTIFY OR DEFINE: Progressive, suffragist, Niagara Movement, Urban League, commission plan, city-manager plan.

CRITICAL THINKING: In what ways were Populists and Progressives similar? In what ways were they different?

THEODORE ROOSEVELT: PROGRESSIVE PRESIDENT

Roosevelt brought Progressivism to the White House. After replacing the assassinated McKinley in 1901, he was elected president in his own right in 1904. Roosevelt was fond of saying that every American deserved a square deal. His term in office is often labeled the "Square Deal."

Roosevelt's presidency emphasized foreign affairs. As will be discussed in Chapter 14, he acquired the Canal Zone, began



construction of the Panama Canal, issued the Roosevelt Corollary, and arranged the Treaty of Portsmouth. One of his favorite slogans was “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” (By “big stick,” he meant a powerful military force.) Eager to impress the world with U.S. naval might, he sent a force of 16 battleships and 4 destroyers on a round-the-world cruise in 1907.

1. Regulating Business. Progressives worried that business combinations seemed to be running the country. Although Roosevelt shared this concern, he made a distinction between good and bad trusts. (At this time, the word “trust” was generally used to refer to any business monopoly.) And he vowed to bring the bad trusts under control.

Under Roosevelt’s direction, the Department of Justice succeeded in breaking up the Northern Securities Company, a powerful railroad holding company. Successful lawsuits were also brought against beef, oil, chemical, and tobacco trusts. Roosevelt became known as a trustbuster, although his approach was actually quite moderate. In fact, several big business owners made large contributions to his 1904 election campaign.

The Roosevelt administration also took action against railroad abuses. The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) had been unable to prevent such practices as rebates and unfair freight charges (discussed on page 239). The Elkins Act of 1903 made rebates illegal. And the Hepburn Act of 1906 gave the ICC the power to set railroad rates.

2. Public Health. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) brought the issue of unsafe food to the attention of the Roosevelt administration. This muckraking novel, set in and around the Chicago stockyards, described the ingredients used in sausage, including moldy meat, dirt, and dead rats. Horrified public reaction spurred passage of the Meat Inspection Act of 1906. This act gave the federal government power to enforce sanitary regulations in meatpacking plants and vehicles that shipped meat from state to state. The Pure Food and Drug Act (also 1906) banned the sale of harmful and impure foods and medicines and required truthful labels on foods and drugs.

3. Conservation. Roosevelt was the first president to take a role in preserving the environment. He worked for passage of the Newlands Act (1902), which provided that money from the sale of Western lands be used for irrigation projects. He stopped the public sale of about 80 million acres of mineral land and 1.5 million acres of land suitable for waterpower sites. During his administration, nearly 150 million acres of public land were set aside as national forest reserves.

In 1908, Roosevelt called the state governors to a national conference on how to preserve and develop the nation's natural resources. As a result of this meeting, Roosevelt appointed a National Conservation Commission, headed by Gifford Pinchot. It conducted the first scientific study of the country's water, forest, soil, and mineral resources.

4. Other Actions. Roosevelt was somewhat of a Progressive in his social policy. He invited Booker T. Washington to the White House for dinner. When coal mine owners refused to negotiate with the strikers in a 1902 Pennsylvania strike, Roosevelt appointed an impartial committee to try to settle the dispute. The miners won some of their demands and went back to work. But the mine owners did not have to recognize the union. For the first time, a president had intervened in a labor dispute without taking sides against labor.

Roosevelt tried to steer a middle course in immigration policy. The number of Japanese immigrants had begun to increase in the 1890s. Most of them settled in the Western states, where many people became concerned about increased competition for jobs. Nativists launched an emotional campaign against the "yellow peril," demanding that the government stop all Japanese immigration. In 1906, San Francisco announced plans to set up a segregated school for Japanese and other Asian students. When Japan protested, Roosevelt persuaded the city to cancel its plan. He then negotiated an

informal agreement with Japan, by which that country agreed to restrict the migration of Japanese laborers to the United States.

TAFT IN THE WHITE HOUSE

After the election of 1904, Roosevelt announced that he would not seek another term. Four years later, he persuaded the Republicans to nominate his friend, Secretary of War William Howard Taft. Taft won a sweeping victory over William Jennings Bryan in the 1908 election.

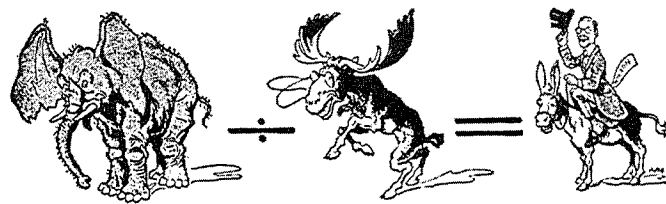
1. Progressive Accomplishments. Taft achieved a number of Progressive reforms. He initiated many lawsuits against trusts. Ninety antitrust suits were started during Taft's term in office, compared with 44 in Roosevelt's time.

Government-operated savings bank facilities were set up in post offices, and a parcel post service was begun. The Publicity Act required that contributions to campaigns for federal election be made public. The Mann-Elkins Act of 1910 placed telephone, cable, and wireless companies under the supervision of the ICC. Taft also supported the Sixteenth Amendment, ratified in 1913. It authorized Congress to impose an income tax.

2. Foreign Policy. In foreign affairs, Taft favored what he called *Dollar Diplomacy*. This meant encouraging American businesspeople to invest in countries of strategic importance to the United States. Dollar Diplomacy would have a great deal of impact in Latin America, where Americans invested heavily. But many Latin Americans would come to resent U.S. military intervention in their countries to protect the investments of U.S. citizens.

3. Political Blunders. Taft's policy on the tariff won him political enemies at home. Progressives wanted to lower tariff rates in order to stimulate competition and reduce prices for consumers. Taft had promised to work toward this goal. The Payne-Aldrich Tariff, passed by Congress in 1909, lowered rates somewhat, but less than what Progressives had wanted. Taft not only signed the measure but praised it as a progressive piece of legislation.

Taft further angered the Progressives by his stand on conservation. Gifford Pinchot, a Roosevelt appointee in the Department of Agriculture, criticized Richard Ballinger, Taft's secretary of the inte-



The arithmetic of Democratic victory. (Puck, 1912)

rior, for reopening federal waterpower sites to private developers. Pinchot also accused Ballinger of mishandling Alaskan coal reserves. Taft ended up supporting Ballinger and firing Pinchot.

4. The Election of 1912. Roosevelt turned against Taft early in 1910. Later that year, he went on a speaking tour to proclaim what he called the New Nationalism. This program called for stricter regulation of corporations and such social reforms as *workers' compensation*. With the latter, employers had to buy insurance to cover workers in case they were injured on the job.

Roosevelt hoped to be the Republican nominee for president in 1912. But the national convention chose Taft instead. Roosevelt's supporters then broke away, formed the Progressive party (also called the Bull Moose party), and nominated him as their candidate. Roosevelt's platform included a host of Progressive objectives: women's suffrage; initiative, referendum, and recall; workers' compensation; and strict business regulation.

The Democratic party nominated Woodrow Wilson, the Progressive governor of New Jersey and a former president of Princeton University. Both Roosevelt and Wilson advocated reform. But Wilson's program—which he called the New Freedom—differed from Roosevelt's. Roosevelt wanted to regulate trusts, not destroy them. Wilson believed that monopolies were a threat to free enterprise and should be abolished. The Progressive party attracted many Republicans, thus splitting the party vote between Taft and Roosevelt. As a result, Wilson carried 40 states and won the election.

IDENTIFY OR DEFINE: Elkins Act, Pure Food and Drug Act, conservation, Dollar Diplomacy, workers' compensation.

CRITICAL THINKING: Why did big business favor high tariffs? Why were Progressives opposed to them?

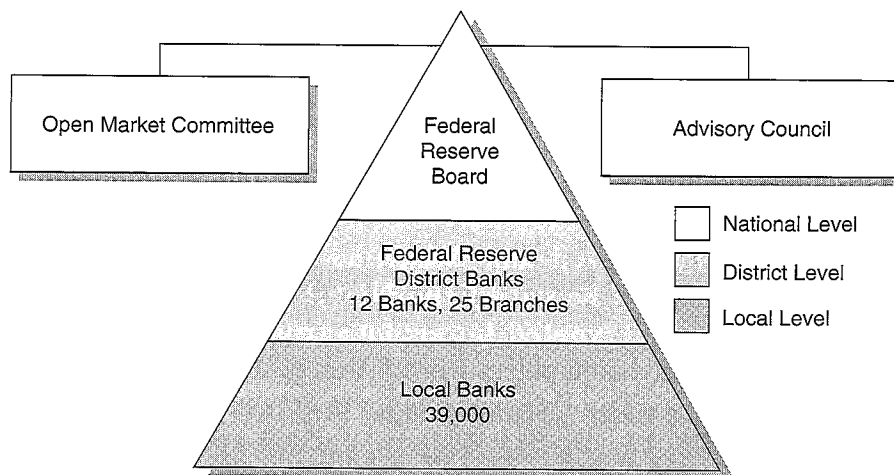
WILSON'S ADMINISTRATION

A man of high moral purpose, Woodrow Wilson was able to inspire the public. But he was rigid in his beliefs and reserved in his demeanor.

1. The New Freedom. During Wilson's two terms as president (1913–1921), he proposed, and Congress enacted, many Progressive laws. Wilson persuaded Congress to pass the Underwood Tariff in 1913. It reduced import duties to the lowest level since 1860. To make up for the expected loss of revenue, Congress levied an income tax, as permitted by the Sixteenth Amendment.

Another important financial measure, the Federal Reserve Act (1913), was designed to regulate credit and improve banking services. The law divided the country into 12 districts, each of which was assigned its own Federal Reserve Bank. A Federal Reserve Board controlled credit by increasing or decreasing the amount of money in circulation and by setting key interest rates.

The Structure of the Federal Reserve System



Although Wilson had campaigned on a platform of breaking up trusts, he took few steps to do so once elected. But he did favor two regulatory laws that Congress passed in 1914. One set up the Federal Trade Commission to investigate and stop unfair business practices. The other was the Clayton Antitrust Act. It broadened the Sherman Act by clearly defining unfair business practices and gave the federal government more power to deal with business combina-

tions. The act also exempted labor organizations from its antitrust provisions, a step that encouraged unionization.

Other measures also helped labor. The La Follette Seamen's Act (1915) regulated working conditions of sailors on American ships. The Adamson Act (1916) set a shorter workday for railroad workers. Two laws were passed to end child labor, but the Supreme Court later declared both unconstitutional.

2. Three New Amendments. During Wilson's administration, three amendments were added to the Constitution.

a. 17th. The Constitution had specified that state legislatures elect senators, but this method had encouraged bribery. The Seventeenth Amendment (1913) made the Senate more democratic by providing that senators be elected directly by the people.

b. 18th. The Eighteenth Amendment (1919) established a nationwide prohibition on the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages.

c. 19th. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment granted women throughout the nation the right to vote. By this time, 29 states had already allowed women to vote in some elections.

3. Foreign Affairs. Wilson did not approve of Dollar Diplomacy. But his policies led to much U.S. intervention overseas anyway. When trouble broke out in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Wilson sent troops into both countries and took over management of their finances. U.S. marines remained in the Dominican Republic until 1924, and in Haiti until 1934.

Wilson's major foreign involvement (before U.S. entry into World War I) was with Mexico. Early in 1913, Victoriano Huerta led a successful revolution against Mexico's reform government. Mexican President Francisco Madero was murdered. When Wilson became president, he refused to recognize the new regime. In addition, he placed an embargo on American arms shipments to Mexico. To keep European military equipment from reaching Huerta, he stationed U.S. ships off the port of Veracruz.

In 1914, Huerta's troops arrested a group of U.S. sailors in Tampico. Then, when a German ship carrying a cargo of arms approached Veracruz, U.S. ships bombarded and captured the city. Only the combined diplomatic efforts of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile prevented war between Mexico and the United States. Huerta resigned, and a president more acceptable to the United States—Venustiano Carranza—took office. The United States then withdrew its troops.

But troubles continued. In 1916, one of Carranza's former generals, Pancho Villa, tried unsuccessfully to overthrow him. Villa then tried to start a war between the United States and Mexico by invading the American Southwest. Wilson sent an Army force under John J. Pershing into Mexico to punish Villa. Pershing's pursuit was unsuccessful. In 1917, the U.S. troops were recalled.

IDENTIFY OR DEFINE: Federal Trade Commission, Clayton Antitrust Act, Eighteenth Amendment, Mexican Revolution.

CRITICAL THINKING: Explain why the Seventeenth and Nineteenth Amendments can be considered extensions of democracy.

Chapter Review

MATCHING TEST

Column A

1. Lincoln Steffens
2. Ida Tarbell
3. Susan B. Anthony
4. Pancho Villa
5. Robert La Follette

Column B

- a. Mexican who led raids into Southwestern United States
- b. leader in the struggle to gain women's suffrage
- c. Progressive governor of Wisconsin
- d. author of *The Shame of the Cities*
- e. author of *The History of the Standard Oil Company*

MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST

1. The Progressive era lasted from (a) 1865 to 1900 (b) 1880 to 1917 (c) 1900 to 1950 (d) 1901 to 1917.
2. From the 1860s to 1920, the main feminist effort was to (a) increase the number of jobs open to women (b) broaden women's educational opportunities (c) gain the vote for women (d) elect more women to Congress.
3. The main aim of the Federal Reserve Act of 1913 was to (a) guarantee the safety of depositors' money (b) regulate credit by

- increasing or decreasing the amount of money in circulation (c) make state banks illegal (d) make private banks unprofitable.
4. All of the following were political reforms adopted during the Progressive era *except* (a) election of U.S. senators by state legislatures (b) initiative and referendum (c) recall (d) the direct primary.
 5. Theodore Roosevelt's administration is known as the (a) Square Deal (b) New Deal (c) New Freedom (d) New Nationalism.
 6. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* led to passage of the (a) Interstate Commerce Act (b) Newlands Act (c) Meat Inspection Act (d) Hepburn Act.
 7. Theodore Roosevelt was the first president to intervene in a labor dispute (a) on the side of labor (b) on the side of management (c) as an enemy of labor and management (d) in a neutral capacity.
 8. The Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution (a) provided for prohibition (b) allowed Congress to impose an income tax (c) created the Federal Reserve System (d) set aside millions of acres of land for national parks.
 9. Taft lost the support of many Progressives when he (a) spoke out in favor of the Payne-Aldrich Tariff (b) persuaded Congress to pass the Underwood Tariff (c) fired Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger (d) advocated Dollar Diplomacy.
 10. The election of Woodrow Wilson to the presidency in 1912 came about mainly because of (a) Taft's refusal to run (b) the death of Theodore Roosevelt (c) a split in the Republican party (d) the U.S. entry into World War I.



ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Who were the muckrakers? Where did their name come from? What goal did they have in common?
2. How did Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois differ in their approach to opposing discrimination against African Americans?
3. Briefly explain initiative, referendum, and recall. How did these three reforms help promote democracy?

4. Did the Clayton Antitrust Act broaden or narrow the Sherman Antitrust Act? Explain your answer.
5. Compare and contrast Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson as Progressives.

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

This question is based on the accompanying documents (1–5). It will improve your ability to work with historical documents.

Historical Context:

During the years 1901–1921, social reformers called Progressives asked for key changes in American society. The three U.S. presidents during these years were also reformers. Theodore Roosevelt attacked business trusts, promoted federal regulation of the food industry, and took steps to conserve natural resources. William Howard Taft continued the attack on trusts and the emphasis on conservation. Woodrow Wilson backed new laws to regulate businesses, aid factory workers and farmers, and create a new central banking system.

Task:

Using information from the documents and your knowledge of United States history, read each document and answer the question that follows it. Your answers to the questions will help you write the document-based essay.

Document 1. Study at the cartoon on page 252.

How did the cartoonist show that President Theodore Roosevelt was not going to give “good trusts” total freedom of action?

Document 2. Excerpt from *The Shame of the Cities* by Lincoln Steffens, 1904:

Philadelphia is, indeed, corrupt. . . . The [political] machine controls the whole process of voting, and practices fraud at every stage. The [tax] assessor’s list is the voting list, and the assessor is the machine’s man. . . . The assessor pads the list with the names of dead dogs, children, and non-existent persons.

Source: Steffens, Lincoln. *The Shame of the Cities*. NY: Macmillan, 1904, pp. 193–194. Available at: http://faculty.washington.edu/qtaylor/Courses/101_USH/101_manual_6.htm

What did Steffens see as the shame of Philadelphia? Explain your answer.

Document 3. Excerpt from the “Principles of the Niagara Movement,” written by W.E.B. DuBois, 1905:

We repudiate the monstrous doctrine that the oppressor should be the sole authority as to the rights of the oppressed. The Negro race in America, stolen, ravished and degraded, struggling up through the difficulties and oppression, needs sympathy and receives criticism; needs help and is given hindrance; needs protection and is given mob violence; needs justice and is given charity; needs leadership and is given cowardice and apology; needs bread and is given a stone. This nation will never stand justified before God until these things are changed.

Source: www.niagrafallsreporter.com/menagerie9.html

What do you think DuBois meant by the first sentence in the excerpt?

Document 4. Excerpt from Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle*, in which he described meatpacking plants in Chicago, 1910:

There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. . . . [R]ats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together [to make the sausages].

Source: Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*. NY: Amsco School Publications, n.d., p. 146.

Even though *The Jungle* was a novel, a work of fiction, Sinclair was trying to arouse the public to demand reforms. What problems did he portray?

Document 5. Look at the photograph on page 249.

What were the suffragists hoping to achieve by marching in Washington, D.C.?

DOCUMENT-BASED ESSAY

Using information from the above documents and your knowledge of United States history, write an essay in which you:

- Explain to what extent the debate on the issues raised in the above documents and the rest of the chapter led to real reforms by 1921.