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Radicals and Reformers in the Progressive Era

1900–1914

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On the warm spring afternoon of March 25, 1911, a small fire broke out in a bin of rags at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, a crowded garment factory on New York City's Lower East Side. The factory's fire escapes were poorly designed, and foremen had locked or blocked the exits, fearful that workers would sneak out to rest or would leave with stolen needles and thread. The spreading fire trapped the workers. In less than an hour, 146 people—most of them young Italian and Jewish women recently arrived in America—perished from smoke inhalation or from the desperate ten-story leap to escape the flames. Many more sustained injuries.

The Triangle fire horrified Americans and focused public attention on the human costs of industrialization. In the aftermath of the tragedy, middle-class reformers, socialists, and working people, including survivors of the fire, united to pressure lawmakers for factory regulation. This outpouring of concern was emblematic of the times. By the turn of the century, many Americans—wageworkers, the middle class, and elite humanitarians—sensed that corporate power was out of control and that the industrial order needed fundamental reform. In the first decades of the new century, they expressed this indignation through a growing chorus of public criticism of corporate giants and escalating labor challenges to capital. Running for president in 1912, Woodrow Wilson would declare that in this era of corporate capitalism, "the individual has been submerged" and "people are coming to feel they have no control over their affairs." In that election, three out of four voters agreed that something needed to be done to rein in great wealth and restore individual autonomy, even if they disagreed on who should do the job. Most backed Wilson, who ran as a

Solidarity and Skates
These children were distributing socialist leaflets during a New York streetcar drivers' strike in September 1916. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Democrat. Others placed their faith in the Progressive Party candidate, Theodore Roosevelt. And 6 percent of the popular vote went to the Socialist Eugene V. Debs. Even the most conservative candidate, Republican President William Howard Taft—who received less than one-quarter of the vote—had taken steps in his previous term to curb the power of giant corporations.

This statement at the polls reflected a wide-ranging set of movements or coalitions that had sprung up to address the cultural, economic, social, and political dislocations and inequities caused by the growth of industrial capitalism. Historians use the term *progressivism* to describe these movements. The term is confusing because it does not refer to a single movement or party; rather, it applies to a network of overlapping and sometimes conflicting organizations and coalitions that campaigned to reform American society between 1890 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Millions of Americans from all walks of life marched under the progressive banner—from working people battling for better pay and control over their lives to middle-class urban reformers striving to improve living and working conditions in the slums to black women campaigning against lynching. Some "reformers" had what we might consider conservative goals—to "Americanize" millions of new immigrants, to close working-class saloons, to make city government more businesslike, or to make American society more "orderly." Progressive politicians set goals of "trust busting," regulating corporate activity, and conserving the natural environment. And some parts of the movement addressed issues that were specific to a certain gender, race, or social group, such as women campaigning for the right to vote and African Americans protesting disenfranchisement and lynching.

In retrospect, progressivism accomplished less than it promised. Big business managed to avoid or subvert some of the most significant restrictions on its power, and African Americans actually experienced reversals during this period. Still, the ferment of the Progressive era did bring important improvements in the lives of many ordinary Americans and laid the foundations for the broader reforms of the New Deal era. But if it turned out to be less than promised, progressivism was also more than a series of events in the lives of a few famous men such as presidents Roosevelt and Wilson and their legislative reforms or just middle-class reformers. Middle-class Americans seeking to reorder their society were, of course, prominent in progressive reform. But progressivism was much more than that: it was an insurgency from below. Women of all classes spearheaded major reforms. Another critical influence came, ironically, from radicals who were skeptical of progressivism's potential for effectiveness. Groups who wanted a more thoroughgoing transformation of the system mobilized pressure that would lead to more moderate reforms. As these popular insurgencies moved party politics to the left, national political leaders—for one of the

few times in U.S. history—competed to be known as "reformers" and "progressives." Even if feminists, radicals, African Americans, and industrial workers failed to win all of their demands, they succeeded in setting the political agenda to which the more elite progressives such as Roosevelt and Wilson would respond.

Andru Karnegi and Mr. Rucevelt: Simplified Spelling and the Contours of Progressivism

One of the strangest of the many early twentieth-century reform movements was the effort to simplify the spelling of words, led by the Spelling Reform Association. This seemingly peripheral movement was actually a microcosm encompassing the themes and forces found in progressivism in that era: its focus on rationality and technical expertise; its strong support among the middle classes; its disdain for traditional political parties; its optimistic faith in the power of the state; its diverse constituency; its shifting coalitions, depending on the specific social, economic, cultural, and political issue; its international character; and its limited success.

Supporters of the reform complained bitterly that the English language lent itself to innumerable variations in spelling (one obsessive reformer counted 1,690 different spellings of *diarrhea* in Civil War pension applications) and that officially approved spellings were illogical and irrational. *Could*, they argued, should really be spelled *kud* or *cud*, and there were at least twenty ways of spelling the sound of *sh*—as in *ship*, *sure*, *ocean*, *partial*, and *mansion*. *Foolish*, they noted (in what was not the best choice of an example), could be just as logically spelled in 613,975 different ways.

Like many other early twentieth-century reformers, the advocates of simplified spelling engaged in what one historian calls a "search for order." They viewed the lack of standardization in American spelling as chaotic, inefficient, and irrational—hence, badly in need of reform. They complained about the "appalling and incalculable waste of nervous energy" on the teaching of English spelling and calculated that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* could (or kud) be published in twenty volumes instead of twenty-four.

Such searches for order and efficiency relied increasingly on professionals and experts. Progressives differed on many points, but they generally shared an optimistic belief in progress and trust in the ability of professionals to find rational, scientific solutions to social problems. Such ideas appealed particularly to members of the new professional class—physicians, businessmen, engineers, managers, and scholars—who believed that they could build a better society by analyzing social ills and taking intelligent, informed action. As shock troops of the progressive causes, these middle-class professionals and experts were often joined by other young members of the middle class, especially women, who brought a moral and

The Crusaders — Marching Embattled 'Gainst the Saracens of Graft

Using popular stereotypes about Christianity and civilization, this February 1906 *Puck* cartoon celebrated "muckraking" journalists and publications by depicting reformers as the European Crusaders who undertook campaigns during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries to wrest the Holy Land from Muslim control (here termed *Saracens* and representing corruption). Hassman, *Puck*, February 21, 1906 — New-York Historical Society.

sometimes religious fervor to reform. Crusading writers and photographers (dubbed "muckrakers" by Theodore Roosevelt), for example, played a vital role in spreading progressive ideas, linking reform elements, and informing the public about corruption and monopoly. Investigative reporters such as Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell (who wrote for magazines such as *McClure's*) and political novelists such as Upton Sinclair revealed political and corporate wrongdoing, targeting such major institutions as Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, the stock market, and the meatpacking industry.

These young middle-class progressives tended to distrust political parties. Although the Progressive Party was founded in 1912, most reformers worked outside the political party system; this was particularly true for women, who were still denied the right to vote at the time. While disdaining traditional political parties, however, progressives favored governmental action. Thus, the spelling reformers counted as their greatest success President Theodore Roosevelt's 1906 executive order directing that government publications would henceforth follow such simplified spellings as *kisst* for *kissed* and *thru* for *through*. This use of governmental power reflected the broader progressive conviction that the government should intervene in market relationships on behalf of the poor and of the public.

Despite the prominence of the middle-class experts in simplified spelling and other areas of reform, the progressive movement appealed to a much broader social spectrum. Radical activists worked side by side with more conservative colleagues, endorsing moderate reforms and spreading their more militant ideas at the same time. Black and white women cam-

paigned together for municipal trash collection, bridging the chasm of race. At times (as in the aftermath of the Triangle fire), working-class Americans with their own agendas worked with progressives. And on some issues—spelling reform was one of them—the reform agenda attracted leading industrialists such as Andrew Carnegie or politicians from old-line wealthy families such as Theodore Roosevelt. (Satirists lampooned them as Andru Karnegi and Mr. Rucevelt.) Rather than an internally coherent social movement with an easily definable program, the progressive movement was more of a series of shifting coalitions.

The ideas and values that became part of progressivism in the United States flowed across national boundaries. Factory reformers and public health activists studied the work of their colleagues abroad and met with them despite the expense and time involved in transatlantic travel. Sometimes—as with spelling reform, which the English protested vociferously—the proper nature of reform was debated internationally.

The diversity of participants reflected, in turn, the range of issues that progressives addressed, from seemingly trivial matters such as spelling reform to profound questions about the control of corporate enterprise. Broadly speaking, progressives worked in three areas that all responded in some way to the vast social and economic transformations accompanying industrial capitalism in the United States. Social and economic reformers most directly confronted the inequities of the new order. They crusaded for better housing, cleaner streets, improved sanitation, safer factories, and more humane working conditions, and they challenged the untrammeled

Steelworkers at a Russian Boarding House

Some progressive reformers turned to social science to understand the impact of industrial capitalism on turn-of-the-century America, and photography was one of the new documentary tools available to them. From 1907 to 1908, Lewis Hine was hired to photograph immigrant steelworkers in Homestead, Pennsylvania, for the Pittsburgh Survey, the first extensive study of a major industrial city. In addition to their value as documentary evidence, Hine's photos conveyed a new reform message about the immigrant to the American public. In contrast to the detachment and distaste apparent in Jacob Riis's pictures, Hine constructed a positive view of worthy newcomers, deserving of a role in American society and all the benefits that would bring.

4 1/2 × 6 1/2 inches — Photograph Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Wolfgang Pulverman, 1969. Copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

power of giant corporations and trusts. Not surprisingly, such reforms most often had working-class support. Working people were much less likely to share the agenda of the cultural reformers, who campaigned against what they saw as the immorality and vice embodied in prostitution, gambling, and—most especially—drinking. The third group, the political reformers, tried to rein in urban political machines and political corruption. Sometimes, they worked for expanded political franchise (as in the movement for woman's suffrage), but at other times, they actually restricted voting rights (by backing literacy tests that excluded many immigrants and African Americans).

Come, Brothers, You Have Grown So Big You Cannot Afford to Quarrel

William A. Rogers's 1901 *Harper's Weekly* cover depicted capital and labor as evenly matched — with commerce a beleaguered referee. Variations on this theme appeared frequently in the Progressive era's mainstream press. Commerce alternated with other allegorical figures such as "The Nation" or "The Public," suggesting that organized labor now represented a powerful interest, equal to capital and equally oblivious to how its actions affected the well-being of ordinary Americans. William A. Rogers, *Harper's Weekly*, June 1, 1901 — American Social History Project.

Spelling reform ultimately did not transform the written form of American English. Public protests led Roosevelt to rescind his order, although he vowed to continue it in his private correspondence. But some limited changes stuck—*labour* became *labor*, and *humour* and *rumour* also dropped their second *u* in the United States, although England retains the original forms. Progressivism had a similarly mixed fate. Despite the enormous energy and lofty ideas of progressives, their achievements were limited. But their legacy of an optimistic belief in the positive potential of government marked the beginning of a new relationship between working people and the government.

Women Progressives

Women's activism was central to the development of progressivism. Young middle-class women who created settlement houses in urban neighborhoods played a particularly notable role in pioneering reform causes. Yet even decades before the formation of the Progressive Party in 1912, progressive causes and organizations were identified with women leaders, who—despite or really because of their exclusion from electoral politics—created associations seeking action on issues of pressing concern such as health, child care, and public morality. Such female activism grew significantly at the turn of the century, and it came to focus increasingly on seeking governmental solutions to social problems.

Not surprisingly, much activism fed into the struggle to win the vote that women had been waging since the middle of the nineteenth century. But some women took a much broader view, calling for the full equality of the sexes, not just the right to vote. They also linked the suffrage cause to efforts to improve laboring conditions, especially by outlawing child labor. Although some support for the rights of working women came from middle- and upper-class female allies, the most important impetus for change came from below, from women who organized themselves into militant unions, particularly in the garment industry.

Social Settlements and Municipal Housekeeping Among the earliest and most dynamic vehicles of progressivism were the settlement houses that were established in working-class neighborhoods, largely by young women from middle- and upper-class homes who sought to ease the transition of immigrants into American life. Beginning in the late 1880s, hundreds of young people moved into immigrant working-class neighborhoods across the United States to live in nonreligious communities devoted to reform. Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago was the best known, but settlements were to be found in every urban center. In New York, Atlanta, and some smaller southern cities, middle-class African American women ran settlements in poor black neighborhoods. Seeking to provide social services that were otherwise unavailable to their neighbors, black and white settlement workers all over the country organized kindergartens, adult education classes, health programs, and unemployment bureaus. By 1910, hundreds of thousands of working people were using more than four hundred settlement houses nationwide.

For a new generation of college-educated women searching for suitable work, settlement houses offered homes and occupations. These women generally did not have the option of combining careers with family life; instead, they eschewed family in order to forge new careers for women. Living and working in immigrant neighborhoods, settlement workers had a close-up view of the intense emotional bonds and self-sacrifice that sustained the immigrant urban working class. But most middle-class progressives viewed immigrant customs with incomprehension or disdain, and even the most sensitive settlement workers saw their mission as uplifting working-class culture. Lillian Wald, founder of New York's Henry Street Settlement, defended her neighbors fiercely against charges that they were "degraded," encouraged them to form trade unions, and mediated disputes between immigrant women and their Americanized daughters. But she also staged "coming-out" parties for these daughters, modeled on the debutante balls of the elite. In spite of their good intentions, settlement workers and other middle-class progressives often found themselves taking stands against

Settlement Houses and New Immigrants: Places of Caring or Control?

Immigrant men and women had a wide range of experiences with settlement house reformers. As these two documents reveal, some immigrants found the settlement houses to be places of refuge and caring; others encountered reformers who were arrogant and patronizing. The first document, which describes a positive encounter, is drawn from the oral memoirs of Rosa, an Italian immigrant who lived and worked at a Chicago settlement house, Chicago Commons. The second excerpt from "The Free Vacation House," a short story written by Jewish immigrant Anzia Yezierska, illustrates an unpleasant encounter between an immigrant and reformer.

"Then We'd Have Some Cake and Coffee"

In the first beginning we always came in to the club and made two circles in the room. One circle was for those ladies who could talk English and the other was for the ladies who talked German. Mrs. Reuter talked German to the German ladies and Miss Gray talked English to the other ladies. But I guess they both did the same 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, 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'd play the games—the Norwegian, the German, the English and me. Then we'd 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 the American people, and I was listening and listening how they talked. That's how I learned to talk such 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 starting the writing. . . .

I have to tell about another good thing the settlement house did for me. That winter my [baby] Leo died we were still living in that little wooden house in the alley. All my walls were thick with frosting from the cold, and I got bronchitis on the lungs, with blood coming-up. So one of those good ladies from the Commons, she arranged and sent me to a kind of home in the country where people go to get well. They had the nice nurses in that place and they cured me up good. I had a good time there, too.

Marie Hall Ets, *Rosa: The Life of an Italian Immigrant* (1970).

"For Why Must I Tell You All My Business?"

How came it that I went to the free vacation house was like this:

One day the visiting teacher from the school nursery comes to find out why don't I get the children ready for school in time; for why are they so often late.

I let out on her my whole bitter heart. I told her my head was on wheels from worrying. . . .

"My dear woman," she says, "you are about to have a nervous breakdown. You need to get away to the country for a rest and vacation. . . ."

Later, in a few days, I just finished up with Masha and Mendel and Frieda and Sonya to send them to school, and I was getting Aby ready for kindergarten, when I hear a knock on the door, and a lady comes in. She had a white starched dress like a nurse and carried a black satchel in her hand.

"I am from the Social Betterment Society," she tells me. "You want to go to the country?"

Before I could say something, she goes over to the baby and pulls out the rubber nipple from her mouth, and to me she says, "You must not get the child used to sucking this; it is very unsanitary."

"Gott im Himmel!" I beg the lady. "Please don't begin with that child, or she'll holler my head off. She must have the nipple. I'm too nervous to hear her scream like that."

When I put the nipple back again in the baby's mouth, the lady takes herself a seat, and then takes out a big black book from her satchel. Then she begins to question me. What is my first name? How old I am? From where come I? How long I'm already in this country? Do I keep any boarders? What is my husband's first name? How old is he? How long he is in this country? By what trade he works? How much wages he gets for a week? How much money do I spend out for rent? How old are the children, and everything about them.

"My goodness!" I cry out. "For why is it necessary all this to know? For why must I tell you all my business? What difference does it make already if I keep boarders, or I don't keep boarders? If Masha had the whooping-cough or Sonya had the measles? Or whether I spent out for my rent ten dollars or twenty? Or whether I come from Schnipshnock or Kovner Gubernie?"

"We must make a record of all the applicants, and investigate each case," she tells me. "There are so many who apply to the charities, we can help only those who are most worthy."

"Charities!" I scream out. "Ain't the charities those who help the beggars out? I ain't no beggar. I'm not asking for no charity. My husband, he works. . . ."

"If your application is approved, you will be notified," she says to me, and out she goes.

Anzia Yezierska, "The Free Vacation House," *Hungry Hearts* (1920).

workers' preferences on certain issues, such as banning alcohol. Middle-class progressives tended to view saloons and drinking with horror, whereas most male immigrant workers saw the saloon as a central social and cultural institution.

Settlement Worker and Immigrants

This photograph documenting the activities of a settlement-house worker captures the complicated relationship between reformers and the people they "served." The reformers' altruism was offset by their belief in the superiority of middle-class mores, which they imposed on immigrants to get them to relinquish "un-American" customs. People's Institute Papers — General Research Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Settlement houses trained not only immigrants but also an entire generation of reformers. Typically, they spent a few years helping immigrants in the urban slums before moving into better neighborhoods and wider political arenas and campaigning for social justice, improved public health and urban sanitation, and labor reform. Influenced by their experiences in the settlement houses and movements for women's rights, these women became spearheads of reform in a variety of movements, many of them steering middle-class women's clubs toward social and political issues. Although their work was initially humanitarian and nonpolitical, settlement-house workers and their allies ultimately helped to transform U.S. politics and government.

Women working in settlement houses joined forces, for example, with public health reformers to campaign for better sanitation. The Hull House Woman's Club documented more than a thousand violations of Chicago's sanitary ordinances, and Jane Addams became the garbage inspector for her ward. She and her colleagues were among the many women activists who flew the banner of "municipal housekeeping." Describing clean cities as extensions of clean houses, they lobbied municipal officials and volunteered to inspect the work of city contractors charged with picking up the garbage. A common interest in these issues united black and white women's groups, at least temporarily.

Sanitary reformers in government worked closely with activists who were concerned about public health, personal cleanliness, and civic beauty. As cities increased in population and density, the street-cleaning problem alone became cause for alarm. Over three million horses lived in U.S. cities at the turn of the century; Milwaukee's horses alone produced 133 tons of manure every day. City streets everywhere were littered with dead animals. Garbage and sewage disposal was an equally staggering problem. Reformers viewed piles of trash as both a menace to health and an eyesore. But landowners and merchants saw efforts at reform as an infringement of their property rights and a threat of higher property taxes for sanitary improve-

End of an Era

Around 1900, a photographer captured the unwholesome combination of children's play, open street sewers, and a dead horse in a New York street. Such scenes prompted reformers to campaign for better sanitation in U.S. cities. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

ments. To bridge this impasse, sanitary reform in many cities became part of a more general attack on the inadequacies of municipal government and the unchallenged power of the wealthy.

Women's Political Culture Throughout the nineteenth century, women reformers had used the idea of separate spheres for men and women to carve out a public space for themselves. Shut out of party and electoral politics, women had created organizations and movements that transferred their authority from the home to the rest of the world. They sought legislative action on a number of fronts—education, child care, health, public morality, and social welfare—and they did so through private charities, churches, and volunteer groups.

What was new at the end of the nineteenth century was the scale of women's activism and the ability of women's organizations to forge alliances among women of different classes and with powerful men who were interested in reform. Asserting a role that did not depend on the right to vote, women activists represented themselves as the embodiment of civic virtue. New types of women leaders—some with college and graduate school training in the analysis of social problems; some with experience in settlement work; some with backgrounds as activists in labor, suffrage, and temperance struggles—concluded that only the power of government could solve deep-rooted social problems. Undertaking new strategies and alliances based on this understanding, they formed highly organized groups with constitutions, officers, and bylaws, and they called on well-organized local activists in the temperance and woman suffrage movements. Both movements blossomed during the Progressive era, eventually producing the Eighteenth Amendment (Prohibition, 1919) and the Nineteenth Amendment (woman's suffrage, 1920).

A black women's political culture paralleled, and occasionally intersected with, many white women's movements, particularly the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the largest women's organization of the era (see Chapter 2). As Jim Crow laws restricted the political activity of black men, the women of the small but growing black middle class in the South had come to see themselves as leaders of their race and sex. Some supported themselves, primarily as teachers; others could afford to do volunteer work. Many of these women activists came from well-off families,

"Have the Women Organized in Separate Locals"

Women reformers in the Women's Trade Union League, such as Alice Henry, editor of the WTUL newspaper, worked with union organizers during the Progressive era. Many working-class women joined unions, but they often found it difficult to be active members or leaders in the labor movement. In this article, Henry analyzed some of the obstacles to women's participation and proposed a solution.

The commonest complaint of all is that women members of a trade union do not attend their meetings. It is indeed a very serious difficulty to cope with. . . .

At first glance it seems curious that the meetings of a mixed local composed of both men and girls, should have for the girls even less attraction than meetings of their own sex only. But so it is. A business meeting of a local affords none of the lively social intercourse of a gathering for pleasure or even of a class for instruction. The men, mostly the older men, run the meeting and often are the meeting. Their influence may be out of all proportion to their numbers. It is they who decide the place where the local shall meet and the hour at which members shall assemble. The place is therefore often over a saloon, to which many girls naturally and rightly object. Sometimes it is even in a disreputable district. The girls may prefer that the meeting should begin shortly after closing time so that they do no need to go home and return, or have to loiter about for two or three hours. They like meetings to be over early. The men mostly name eight o'clock as the time of beginning, but business often will not start much before nine. Then, too, the men feel that they have come together to talk, and talk they do while they allow the real business to drag. Of course, the girls are not interested in long discussions on matters that they do not understand and in which they have no part and naturally they stay away, and so make matters worse, for the men feel they are doing their best for the interests of the union, resent the women's indifference, and are more sure than ever that women do not make good unionists. . . .

Where the conditions of the trade permit it by far the best plan is to have the women organized in separate locals. The meetings of women and girls only draw better attendances, give far more opportunity for all members to take part in the business, and beyond all question form the finest training ground for the women leaders who in considerable numbers are needed so badly in the women's side of the trade union movement today.

Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby, eds., *America's Working Women* (1976).

Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C., c. 1894

Founded in 1892 by registered nurse Sara Iredell, the League is pictured here gathered with husbands and supporters on the steps of Cedar Hill, Frederick Douglass's home in Anacostia, Washington, D.C. The League's members, who were dedicated to "racial uplift," established day nurseries and adult evening schools and worked to improve social conditions in Washington. In 1896, various women's clubs, including the D.C. League, merged into the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. Luke C. Dilton — Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

but others, like Julia Sadgwar, a North Carolina teacher and activist, had risen from poverty.

Black women usually moved into community improvement from church organizations. Blending their religious values with activism legitimized their public role: they worked for what they called the "uplift" of their race. Like so many white women, they claimed a distinctly female moral authority. They organized in their communities and went downtown to interact with white officials and bureaucrats. They formed mothers' clubs, built playgrounds, and lobbied for better sanitation. And they campaigned for temperance. In these activities, they adopted white women's political styles, but unlike their white counterparts, black women had to build private institutions—schools, community centers, homes for the aged—to provide services that racist local governments denied to their communities.

Black women activists sometimes prodded white women to recognize their common class and gender across racial lines. Journalist and activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett brought her antilynching campaign to many white groups, including the WCTU, and worked with Jane Addams to block the segregation of Chicago public schools. But relationships between black and white women's organizations were sometimes strained or nonexistent. They were

weakened especially by white women whose idea of their own political role was limited to influencing men. The white women believed that since many black men were prevented from voting, black women were politically weak because they would be unable to influence the votes of their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. Moreover, white women reformers—like most white Americans—had trouble accepting black women as equals. The national WCTU condemned lynching at its 1893 convention but assigned African American delegates to a separate banquet table. The segregated delegates left the hall in protest before "their sisters had enough good sense and Christianity," reported a black woman teacher in a religious journal, "to call them back and treat them like sisters." But at least some of the time, women created coalitions that transcended race, class, and ethnicity. And although not always radical, women's political culture was inherently dedicated to changing the prevailing order.

Some women activists lived their private lives as well as their public ones in communities of women. In women's colleges, settlement houses, and reform organizations, a growing number of women began to live together as lifelong partners, passionately committed and devoted to each other. Mary Drier of the Women's Trade Union League shared a home with Progressive Party activist Frances Kellor. Countless others forged ties with other women out of the public eye.

Woman Suffrage Women had been campaigning for the right to vote since the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1869, women activists had split into two rival groups, based on differing opinions about the priority that should be given to black male suffrage. The National Woman Suffrage Association, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, opposed the male-only Fifteenth Amendment; the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Lucy Stone, regarded black male suffrage as a step in the right direction. The development of the broader women's political culture motivated the two factions to unite in 1890, forming a revitalized National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

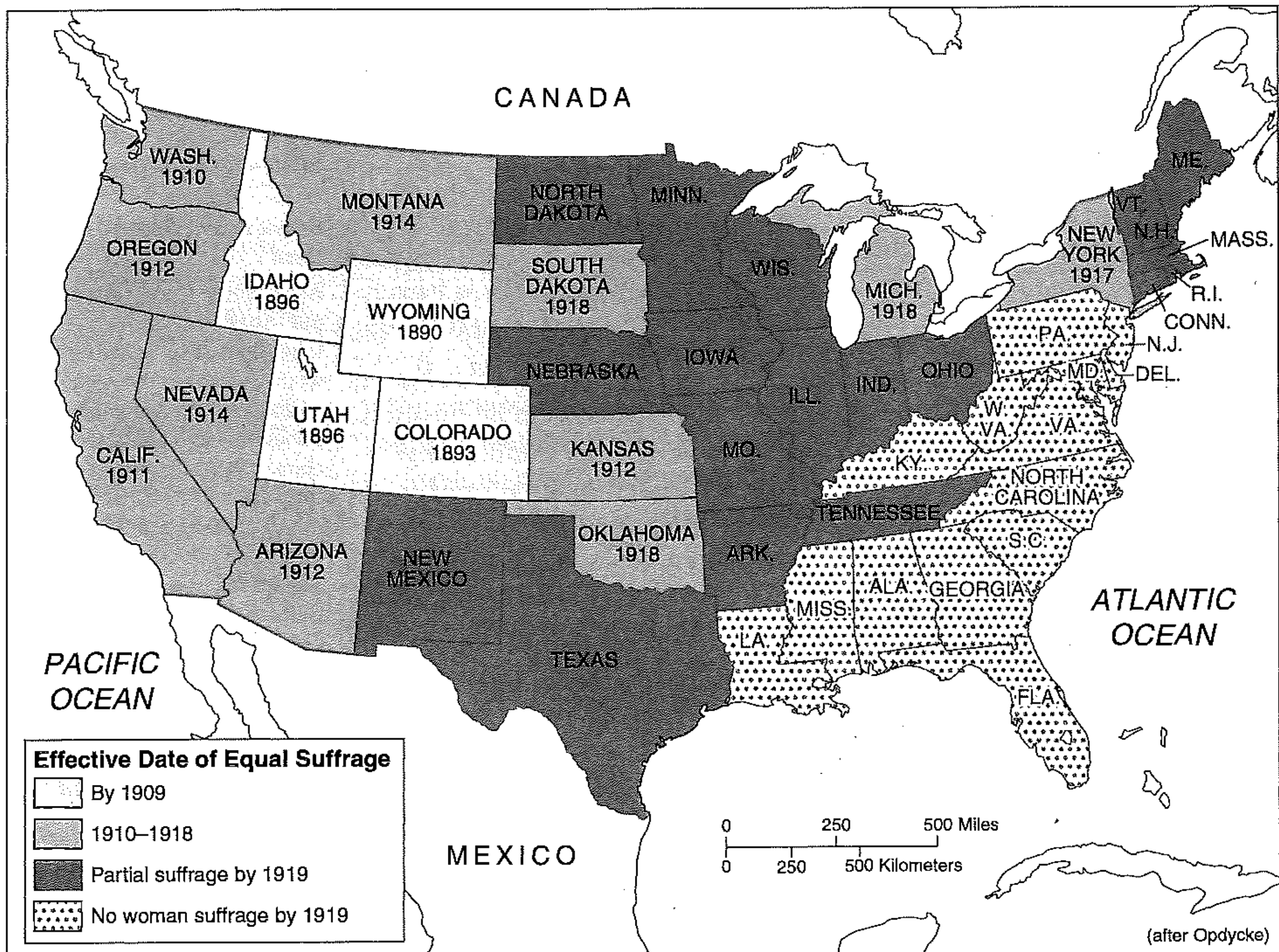
The ultimate strength of the suffrage movement was not in NAWSA, however, but at the local level. Three-quarters of the states had to ratify a constitutional amendment, which meant that suffragists had to win support for the vote state by state. Victories came first in the West. By 1914, women could vote in state, local, and school board elections in ten states west of the Mississippi (including Utah and Wyoming), in the territory of Alaska, and in Illinois. The woman suffrage movement in the West had skilled and articulate leaders, including the editors of women's rights papers in Colorado and Oregon and Jeannette Rankin in Montana, who would become the first woman elected to Congress. Middle-class suffragists and laboring people could sustain coalitions more easily in the West than in the East,

where opponents of woman suffrage exploited the divisions between Catholic immigrants and native-born Protestants over issues such as temperance. The coalition that won woman suffrage in Colorado in 1893 mobilized women's clubs, labor union women, and the WCTU to work with male Populists and organized labor. Oregon's Abigail Scott Duniway addressed her women's rights paper to women farmers and working-class women; she called for divorce reform, women's education, and equal responsibility for housework and child care (Map 5.1).

Working-class women saw the vote as only one element in the larger working-class struggle. As one woman wrote to a labor newspaper, "If women have the right of suffrage it will double the number of voices in the hands of the working people." After women reformers rallied to support striking female shirtwaist makers in 1909, young women from the sweatshops began marching in suffrage parades. Settlement-house workers and members of the Women's Trade Union League infused the suffrage movement with their commitment to social justice and the labor movement with

MAP 5.1 Where Women Could Vote, 1890–1918

This map shows the extent of American women's voting rights in the years before passage of the constitutional amendment granting woman suffrage in 1920. The state-level campaign proved successful mainly in western states where low population numbers may have helped suffrage organizers win legislative victories.



their feminism. It was only in this period that the term *feminism* came into general use to refer to a commitment to the full equality of the sexes and the overall emancipation of women rather than support for woman's suffrage.

Not all suffragists took a broad, feminist view. "All feminists are suffragists, but not all suffragists are feminists," declared one advocate of more sweeping change. Some suffragists, in fact, mobilized conservative arguments that enfranchising women would improve the "quality" of the electorate by increasing the percentage of white and native-born voters. They abandoned earlier demands for suffrage based on "justice" or "equal rights" and instead argued that women voters would bring special "female" qualities to the political process and would defend traditional family life in a time of stress and change.

Heavy, Heavy, Hangs o'er Thy Head

A 1911 antisuffrage cartoon published in a satirical weekly (and, unusually, drawn by a woman) presented woman suffrage — and its female proponents — as a threat to conventional family roles. While this idea was foremost in the minds of many women antisuffragists, historians have also argued that they organized to protect gendered class interests, as many of the most vocal antisuffragists were wealthy, educated women who already exercised political influence. Laura Foster, *Life*, September 28, 1911 — American Social History Project.

Nevertheless, by the 1910s, woman suffrage became a mass movement, embracing wealthy socialites and garment workers, local black and white women's clubs, left-wing and conservative women, and increasing numbers of men. As the movement grew, it shifted tactics. Local suffrage organizations with large working-class memberships held open-air meetings and massive parades—organizing techniques that had long been used by socialists and labor groups in both Europe and the United States.

But as support for the movement grew, so did resistance—from liquor interests, machine politicians, the Catholic Church, and some business groups that were concerned that women voters would support other progressive reforms. The battle over a constitutional amendment enfranchising women grew heated during the early 1910s but then stalled, as referenda on woman suffrage were defeated in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New York.

The Fight to End Child Labor The women of the settlement houses also led the successful drive to improve wages and working conditions in factories and to outlaw child labor. Hull House resident Florence Kelley headed a coalition that in 1893 achieved passage of an Illinois law providing for state investigation of factory conditions. As the state's first chief factory inspector, Kelley campaigned tirelessly for better working hours and conditions and against child labor, in Illinois and elsewhere. Women reformers worked closely with labor activists as they battled for protective legislation—laws that would regulate the hours and conditions of labor for women and children. Many argued that such laws would establish precedents for regulating

working conditions for men as well. Progressive politicians, such as Wisconsin's governor Robert La Follette, broadened their concerns to include women's and labor issues, realizing that they would need working people's support to prevail against political machines.

In 1908, the U.S. Supreme Court broke with previous legal doctrine and sanctioned some kinds of protective legislation. The Court's decision in *Muller v. Oregon* upheld an Oregon law limiting women's work in certain kinds of businesses (including the Portland laundry that was involved in the case) to ten hours a day. In its decision, however, the Court observed that women would always depend on men for "protection." This double-edged decision benefited working women but reinforced male domination in its underlying logic. Nevertheless, unlike previous legal doctrine, the decision set limits on employers' control over the terms of workers' employment. In *Muller*, the Court for the first time endorsed "sociological jurisprudence," an argument that was based as much on sociological evidence—such as the reports of factory inspectors—as on abstract legal reasoning.

The approval of state action in *Muller* greatly increased the legislative pace, at least in the North and the West. In 1912 alone, thirty-eight states passed child-labor laws and twenty-eight set maximum hours for women workers. By 1915, thirty-five states had workers' compensation laws. Twenty-five states had passed legislation limiting the working hours of some categories of male workers. Legislators in southern states fought such reforms. They especially resisted child-labor legislation, in deference to textile mill owners. More than one-quarter of the employees of southern cotton mills were children, half of them below the age of twelve years. These children earned less than older workers, but their wages helped to support the family in homes where parents took home too little to pay the bills.

In 1900, more than a quarter of a million children under age fifteen were working in mines, mills, and factories. Other boys (and a few girls) as young as ten sold newspapers, polished shoes, and scavenged for rags and scraps of metal on city streets. The Knights of Labor had advocated the abolition of child labor, but the progressives broadened the coalition of reformers agitating on behalf of children's welfare. Led by professional social workers and educators, activists promoted the building of playgrounds and compulsory school attendance. Settlement-house founder Lillian D. Wald had proposed the creation of a federal Children's Bureau to safeguard children's welfare. In 1912, Julia Lathrop, an Illinois reformer who had lived at Hull House, became the head of the new agency. Under Lathrop's direction, the bureau investigated such topics as infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, and mothers' pensions. The bureau's efforts were an important forerunner of social welfare provisions that emerged fully only during the New Deal years in the 1930s.

Despite the creation of the federal Children's Bureau, the child-labor movement's work was far from finished. The National Child

Breaker Boys in Coal Chute, South Pittston, Pennsylvania, January 1911

Lewis Hine took hundreds of pictures as staff photographer for the National Child Labor Committee from 1908 to 1918. Hine traveled across the country, photographing children in textile mills, canneries, glass and shoe factories, mines, and fields to reveal the extent of child labor and the need for enforcement of reform laws. "No anonymous or signed denials can contradict proof given with photographic fidelity," Hine wrote. "These pictures speak for themselves, and prove that the law is being violated." Lewis Hine, January 1911 — International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.

Labor Committee, one of a number of organizations that pioneered nonprofit advocacy by publicizing its cause through pamphlets, mass mailings, and lobbying, stood at the forefront of the movement. The committee sponsored investigations by experts, and it sent its staff photographer Lewis Hine around the country to photograph children working in cotton mills, mines, and canneries and on the streets as newsboys and scavengers. Congress passed federal laws regulating child labor in 1916 and 1918, but a conservative Supreme Court declared them unconstitutional. The movement had greater success at the state level. By 1920, most states forbade the employment of children under fourteen years, set an eight-hour day for workers under sixteen years, and mandated compulsory education.

But simply having laws on the books did not solve fundamental problems. Pauline Newman, a labor activist who had worked as a child in a New York City garment factory, remembered the monotony of cutting threads from 7:30 in the morning until 9:00 at night. "Well, of course, there were [child-labor] laws on the books," she recalled, "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 Garment Industry and Working Women's Activism The Triangle Shirtwaist fire that galvanized activists in 1911 occurred in an industry that was known for its labor militancy. Concentrated in New York City, the ready-made clothing industry was relatively new. For most of the nineteenth century, women had made their own clothing and their children's clothing at home, with or without the help of hired seamstresses, and men with money had used tailors. Consequently, workingmen's clothing dominated the small nineteenth-century ready-made industry. Much of that had changed by the end of the century, as new sewing and cutting machines increased workers' productivity and an organizational innovation — the sweatshop system — developed. Sweatshops employed a handful of workers, almost all of them immigrant Jewish or Italian women. They were supervised by contractors of their own nationality, mostly men, who got materials on credit from manufacturers, bought sewing machines on the installment plan, and rented lofts or tenement apartments for factories.

Thousands of small, marginal firms competed with a few large manufacturers. Workers sweated in steaming shops in summer and shivered in unheated conditions in winter; they had to pay for their own needles and thread. Contractors paid workers by the piece rather than by the hour, and at low piecework rates, workers pushed themselves hard and worked long days to make a living. Many workers participated in short, spontaneous strikes but created few lasting labor organizations.

In the fall of 1909 the industry exploded. Wage cuts and other grievances sparked a wave of small walkouts by workers who produced shirtwaists, the blouses that urban working- and middle-class women wore. The workers were mostly young women whose earnings not only helped to support their families, but also gave them a small measure of independence. In November, they turned out for a huge meeting at New York City's Cooper Union auditorium. The most dramatic and inspiring speaker that night was Clara Lemlich, a young Ukrainian-born activist who called for a general strike against all the companies in the industry. Within two days, between 20,000 and 30,000 workers had walked off their

On the Picket Line

This photograph captures the spirit of the young immigrant women shirtwaist workers who resisted strikebreaker violence and police intimidation during the 1909 Uprising of the Twenty Thousand in New York City. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

"A Pint of Trouble for the Bosses . . ."

The 1909 shirtwaist workers' strike saw young immigrant women step to the forefront of the labor struggle. Shirtwaist worker Clara Lemlich, a young Jewish immigrant, emerged as a key organizer and speaker. A reporter from the New York Sun *witnessed this attack by antiunion thugs on Lemlich and other strikers.*

The girls, headed by teen-age Clara Lemlich, described by union organizers as "a pint of trouble for the bosses," began singing Italian and Russian working-class songs as they paced in twos before the factory door. Of a sudden, around the corner came a dozen tough-looking customers, for whom the union label gorilla seemed well-chosen.

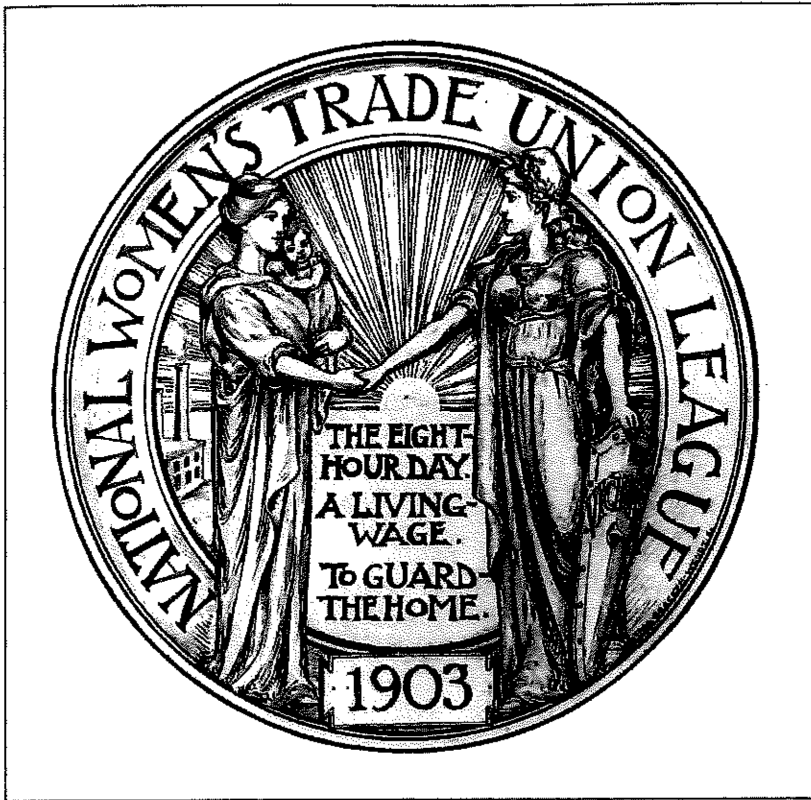
"Stand fast, girls," called Clara, and then the thugs rushed the line, knocking Clara to her knees, striking at the pickets, opening the way for a group of frightened scabs to slip through the broken line. Fancy ladies from the Allen Street red-light district climbed out of cabs to cheer on the gorillas. There was a confused melee of scratching, screaming girls and fist-swinging men and then a patrol wagon arrived. The thugs ran off as the cops pushed Clara and two other badly beaten girls into the wagon.

I followed the rest of the retreating pickets to the union hall, a few blocks away. There a relief station had been set up where one bottle of milk and a loaf of bread were given to strikers with small children in their families. There for the first time in my comfortably sheltered, Upper West Side life, I saw real hunger on the faces of my fellow Americans in the richest city in the world.

McAlister Coleman, "All of Which I Saw," *The Progressive* (May 1950).

jobs. A month later, the strike, which became known as "the Uprising of the Twenty Thousand," spread to Philadelphia.

The strikers appealed to the National Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) for help in countering police harassment. Founded in 1903, the WTUL was a coalition of women—some from the working class, some professionals such as Lillian Wald and Jane Addams, and some extremely wealthy women—devoted to bringing women into trade unions as a means of empowerment. League members believed that working women were more oppressed as workers than as women but that women of all classes shared important "bonds of womanhood." The elite WTUL members allied with their working colleagues. They provided funds for strikers, spoke to the press, and arranged for volunteer lawyers, but they also did their share of picket duty and even went to jail. Not everyone trusted them or their financial support. Trade unionist Leonora O'Reilly complained that strikers became reluctant to voice their own opinions because they felt bound to agree with the society women who donated money. Still, despite disputes between women of different classes, the women shared a commitment to making the WTUL a genuine arena for working-class feminism.



The Sun Rises on the Eight-Hour Day

Chicago sculptor Julia Bracken Wendt designed the National Women's Trade Union League seal. The design mixed symbols of both militancy and domesticity, showing a woman in armor holding a shield marked "Victory" while clasping the hand of a mother holding a child in her arms. The sun rises behind and above them, emanating the aims of the League: "The Eight-Hour Day. A Living Wage. To Guard the Home." The design was a great success, appearing on League publications, letterhead, and pins, and even on the wall of Samuel Gompers's office at the American Federation of Labor. National Women's Trade Union Records (54.13) — Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

The industrywide strikes of garment workers during 1909 and 1910 brought tens of thousands of women into the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), which had been established a decade earlier. Most of these new members were Jewish, but some were from other ethnic groups. Both in Philadelphia and New York, African American women joined the union and the strike. The conflict dragged on until February 1910, when the ILGWU reached an arbitrated settlement with manufacturers. Employers refused to recognize the union, but they reduced hours and improved working conditions, and at least some agreed to arbitrate future disputes through a board of community and religious leaders.

Within months of the February victory, two other groups of garment workers walked out. At Hart, Schaffner, and Marx, a huge Chicago manufacturer of men's clothing, fourteen young women struck over a cut in their piece rate. They picketed alone for three weeks before coworkers took them seriously, but eventually, 40,000 workers throughout the city's clothing industry joined them. That number was exceeded in New York when 60,000 cloakmakers, mostly male, began a general strike that ended with an agreement devised by Louis Brandeis, who had previously written the brief defending protective legislation in *Muller v. Oregon*. In the strike, Brandeis acted on behalf of Boston department store owner A. Lincoln Filene, who realized that stabilizing wages and working conditions might reduce cutthroat competition and ensure more predictable prices and supplies. By the eve of World War I, unions had made deep inroads into the clothing, fur, and millinery industries. Nearly 400,000 clothing workers became union members between 1909 and 1913.

But as the Triangle fire demonstrated, these partial settlements with garment industry employers did not provide for adequate fire escapes and open doors. By naming American Federation of Labor (AFL) president Samuel Gompers and New York Consumers' League representative Frances Perkins to the Factory Commission that was established after the disaster, politicians acknowledged well-established national reform forces. Crucial to the commission's success were two politicians allied with the Democratic political machine known as Tammany Hall: Robert Wagner and Alfred E. Smith, who served as its chairman and vice chairman. Over the course of

Off to Jail

A garment worker is arrested by the Chicago police during a 1910 strike in which workers protested a cut in their piece rate. Some 40,000 workers throughout the clothing industry eventually walked off the job. Chicago Historical Society [DN-56132].

four years, hundreds of workers testified to the commission about unsafe working conditions. To improve wages and protect the health and safety of New York workers, the commission sponsored fifty-six laws, many of which were passed by Democrats eager not only to wrap themselves in the banner of reform, but also to undercut the growing influence of socialists among working-class constituents.

Democrats felt no pressure to enact reforms to maintain working-class allegiance in the South, however, where a weak trade union movement and virulent racism divided and undermined reform efforts. Two weeks after the Triangle fire, a violent explosion ripped through the Banner coal mine outside Birmingham, Alabama, killing 128 convict miners, mostly African Americans who had been jailed for minor offenses. Although evidence supplied by the federal Bureau of Mines indicated high levels of dangerous methane gas, a state investigating commission declared that the miners' ineptitude had caused the explosion. Middle-class reformers and Alabama's trade union movement called for abolition of the policy of leasing out convicts as laborers, but a coalition of Democratic state legislators and big businessmen outmatched them. Both groups continued to receive substantial profits from convict labor until 1928, when Alabama finally abolished the system, and by the 1930s, every southern state had eliminated the practice.

Radical Challenges to the Status Quo

Radicals, including socialists (who favored public ownership of industries and a more egalitarian distribution of wealth), anarchists (who wanted shared ownership of the means of production but organized voluntarily and without a powerful government), and militant unionists offered a more fundamental critique of the capitalist system than the progressives. Never more than a minority of working people, radicals still influenced politics, society, and culture in the early twentieth century. Although socialist candidates such as Eugene Debs and militant strikes such as the Paterson, New Jersey, silk strike and the miners' strike in Ludlow, Colorado, often met defeat, radicals shifted the terms of debate to the left. Moderate reformers often adopted or adapted radical programs, in part because they sought to defuse the radical appeal and in part because radicals often offered persuasive solutions to the inequities of the day.

Socialists, Marxists, and Anarchists Many garment union activists belonged to or sympathized with the Socialist Party, whose best-known spokesperson was the labor leader Eugene V. Debs. "I am for Socialism," he wrote, "because I am for humanity. We have been cursed with the reign of gold long enough. Money constitutes no proper basis of civilization." American socialism developed from a variety of movements, some home-grown and others imported from abroad. For much of the nineteenth century, religious and secular utopian communities such as the Shakers and Brook Farm in Massachusetts exemplified the possibilities of egalitarian living. Germans who immigrated after the failed European revolutions of 1848 brought with them the radical ideas of Karl Marx, whose writings about the historical inevitability of class struggle had stimulated socialist organizing in industrialized countries everywhere. Although Marxism did not dominate American socialist thought, immigrants who had been influenced by Marx and the international socialist movement had had a major impact on the national railroad strike of 1877 and the eight-hour movement.

The first American socialist political party, the Socialist Labor Party, was formed in 1877, with Daniel De Leon at its head. It and a number of other socialist groups suffered from poor organization and infighting, but the ideal of socialism spread nevertheless. Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward* (1888), for example, sparked considerable interest in the idea of a classless society brought about without bloodshed. Thousands of Americans joined clubs promoting Bellamy's ideas; others devoted their lives to socialist ideals.

Debs joined the Socialist Labor Party in 1897 and helped to foster the merger of several groups into the new Socialist Party in 1901. Within seven years, the party had 41,000 dues-paying members in more than three

"The Red Special"
Eugene Debs, Socialist Party staffers, and the "Red Special" train on which the presidential candidate traveled during his 1908 whistle-stop campaign.
Thomas Mooney, 1908 — The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

thousand local branches. Running for president on the Socialist ticket in 1908, Debs received more than 400,000 votes. The rapid increase in support for the Socialist Party owed something to Debs's charisma but even more to the social unrest of those years and the party's ability to tap the discontent of workers, farmers, and immigrants. Urban workers formed the core of the party's strength. At first, it was popular mostly with skilled workers, including many German immigrants, but by 1909, it was winning more and more support from newer immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. The party also enjoyed substantial rural backing, especially in the Southwest, where many farmers were losing ownership of their land. Middle-class women reformers and Christian socialists added to the mixture of groups and traditions that made the Socialist Party a volatile and exciting organization. Its influence went well beyond its membership; its electoral and legislative successes helped to radicalize the debates about progressive reform. At the time of the presidential election of 1912, for example, party membership peaked at 118,000, but Debs, the Socialist candidate, received 900,000 votes.

Debs Attacks "the Monstrous System" of Capitalism

The 1912 Socialist Party nominee, Eugene V. Debs, called for the abolition of capitalism rather than for its reform. In this speech accepting the party's nomination, he proclaimed the Socialist Party "the party of progress, the party of the future."

The Socialist party is fundamentally different from all other parties. It came in the process of evolution and grows with the growth of the forces which created it. Its spirit is militant and its aim revolutionary. It expresses in political terms the aspiration of the working class to freedom and to a larger and fuller life than they have yet known.

The world's workers have always been and still are the world's slaves. They have borne all the burdens of the race and built all the monuments along the track of civilization; they have produced all the world's wealth and supported all the world's governments. They have conquered all things but their own freedom. They are still the subject class in every nation on earth and the chief function of every government is to keep them at the mercy of their masters.

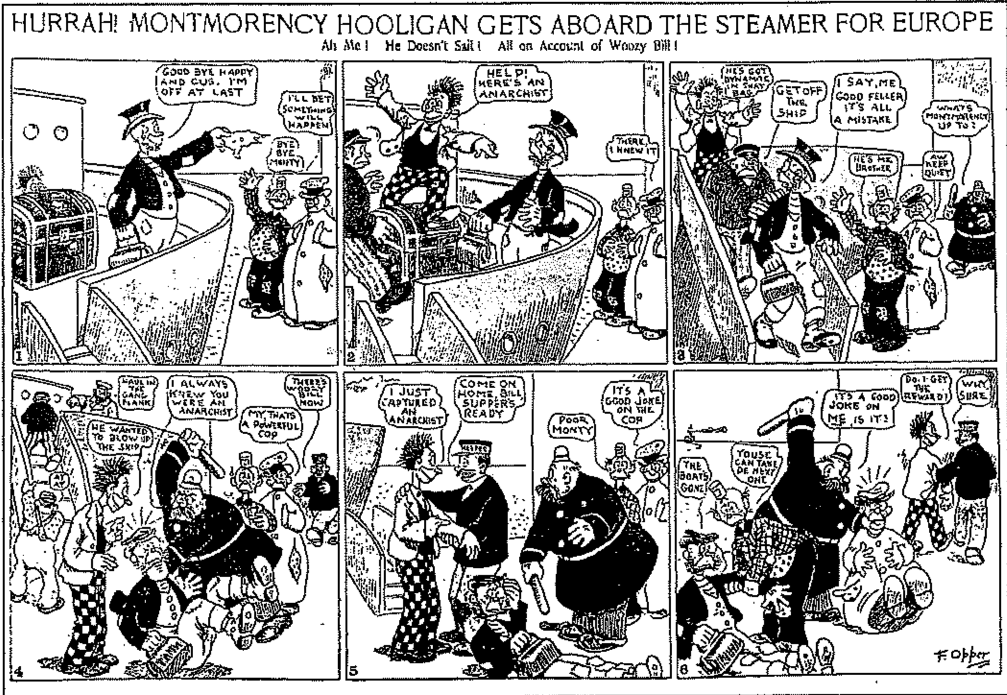
The workers in the mills and factories, in the mines and on the farms and railways never had a party of their own until the Socialist party was organized. They divided their votes between the parties of their masters. They did not realize that they were using their ballots to forge their own fetters.

But the awakening came. It was bound to come. Class rule became more and more oppressive and wage slavery more and more galling. The eyes of the workers began to open. They began to see the cause of the misery they had dumbly suffered so many years. It dawned upon them that society was divided into two classes—capitalists and workers, exploiters and producers; that the capitalists, while comparatively few, owned the nation and controlled the government; that the courts and the soldiers were at their command, and that the workers, while in a great majority, were in slavish subjection. . . .

The Socialist party's mission is not only to destroy capitalist despotism but to establish industrial and social democracy. To this end the workers are steadily organizing and fitting themselves for the day when they shall take control of the people's industries and when the right to work shall be as inviolate as the right to breathe the breath of life.

Standing as it does for the emancipation of the working class from wage-slavery, for the equal rights and opportunities of all men and all women, for the abolition of child labor and the conservation of all childhood, for social self-rule and the equal freedom of all, the Socialist party is the party of progress, the party of the future, and its triumph will signalize the birth of a new civilization and the dawn of a happier day for all humanity.

Eugene Debs, "Speech of Acceptance," *International Socialist Review* (October, 1912).



Happy Hooligan

Beginning in 1900, Frederick Opper's comic strip featuring the hapless tramp was a major attraction of William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*. Unlike Riebe's Mr. Block Happy Hooligan was the undeserving victim of the abuses and insanities of American society, including, in this strip, popular hysteria about anarchists and the police penchant for summary justice. American Social History Project.

Socialists had considerable influence in many unions, including those of the machinists, mineworkers, and garment workers. Many attacked the AFL for neglecting unskilled workers, arguing that organizing unions only of skilled workers along narrow craft lines instead of more broadly by industry had turned the federation into the "American Separation of Labor." Critical of AFL policies, they denounced Samuel Gompers for cooperating with businessmen.

Within the labor movement and in radical organizations, socialists associated with — and sometimes opposed — representatives of another radical force: the anarchists. Anarchists believed that the ideal society must be achieved without increasing the power of governments, which they viewed as inevitably oppressive, and that instead a society based on shared ownership could be organized voluntarily through communes. Resistance to political organizations sometimes inspired solitary acts of violence directed against government, big business, and their leaders. In 1892, Alexander Berkman attempted to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, the manager of the Homestead plant; nine years later, Leon Czolgosz killed President William McKinley. But after the McKinley assassination, most anarchists abandoned this kind of "propaganda of the deed" as counterproductive. The best-known anarchist in the United States was Emma Goldman. After emigrating from Russia in 1885 at age sixteen to avoid an arranged marriage, she worked in the garment industry in Rochester, New York. A charismatic speaker, Goldman lectured on topics ranging from anarchism and the mod-

Mr. Block

Ernest Riebe's comic strip about a willfully ignorant and gullible worker appeared in the IWW's *Industrial Worker*. The strip conveyed the organization's attitude toward workers who lacked class-consciousness or subscribed to the AFL's conservative craft unionism, inspiring IWW songwriter Joe Hill's lyrics: "Oh, Mr. Block, you were born by mistake. / You take the cake. / You make me ache. / Tie a rock to your block and jump in the lake. / Kindly do that for Liberty's sake." The adventures of the beleaguered Mr. Block, as indicated here, also took swipes at the reform wing of the Socialist party. Ernest Riebe — Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., Chicago, Illinois.

ern theater to birth control and free love, asserting that women had the right to decide not to bear children and to enter into spiritual and sexual unions outside of marriage.

The IWW: Lawrence and Paterson Although most working people embraced neither anarchism nor socialism, radical ideas about the need for fundamental changes influenced working-class communities in the early twentieth century. The clearest indication of this sentiment was the creation of a new labor organization, the Industrial Workers of the World—popularly known as the IWW, or Wobblies. "An injury to one is an injury to all," the IWW declared. "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common."

The IWW sought to abolish the wage system and to create a society in which workers would own and control the factories, mines, lumber camps, and railroads where they labored. IWW leaders believed that the vehicle for revolutionary change should be a union, not a political party. Organizing all workers into one militant union, they asserted, would lead to a massive general strike. Capitalism would be overthrown, and the people would run industry in a decentralized, democratic fashion.

Socialists, including Eugene V. Debs, together with other radicals and industrial unionists organized the IWW in 1905. Leadership came, in part, from the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), which represented 30,000 hard-rock miners in the Rocky Mountains. During a decade of bitter strikes against some of the largest corporations in America, the WFM's leaders had come to reject capitalism and to embrace unions that spanned an entire industry (steelworkers or railroad workers) rather than a specific craft (carpenters or machinists). The federation's efforts to build alliances with workers in the East culminated in the founding convention of the IWW in Chicago. "Fellow workers," western miner Big Bill Haywood proclaimed, "this is the Continental Congress of the working class." The new movement, he declared, "shall have for its purpose the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism."

Spirited, colorful, and proud in the face of jail sentences and vigilante attacks, the IWW was the most egalitarian labor organization in American history. It believed in organizing all workers—skilled and unskilled, men and women, black and white, Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese. The Wobblies drew on long-standing traditions: the Knights' belief in organizing

"The Lumberjack's Prayer"

Lumberjacks often worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week, faced incredible dangers on the job, and lived under horrendous conditions. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was the only labor organization to pay any attention to workers in the lumber camps of the South and the Pacific Northwest. Although humorous in tone, the poem "The Lumberjack's Prayer" captured the grueling conditions that most lumbermen faced on and off the job.

I pray dear Lord for Jesus' sake,
Give us this day a T-Bone Steak,
Hallowed be thy Holy name,
But don't forget to send the same. . . .
Observe me on my bended legs,
I'm asking you for Ham and Eggs,
And if thou havest custard pies,
I like, dear Lord, the largest size.
Oh, hear my cry, All Mighty Host,
I quite forgot the Quail on Toast,
Let your kindly heart be stirred,
And stuff some oysters in that bird.
Dear Lord, we know your Holy wish,
On Friday we must have a fish,
Our flesh is weak and spirit stale,
You better make that fish a whale.
Oh, hear me Lord, remove these "Dogs,"
These sausages of powder'd logs,
Your bull beef hash and bearded Snouts.
Take them to hell or thereabouts.
With Alum bread and Pressed-Beef butts,
Dear Lord you damn near ruin'd my guts,
Your white-wash milk and Oleorine,
I wish to Christ I'd never seen.
Oh, hear me Lord, I am praying still,
But if you won't, our union will,
Put pork chops on the bill of fare,
And starve no workers anywhere.

I am happy to say this prayer has been answered—by the "old man" himself. He tells me He has furnished—plenty for all—and that if I am not getting mine it's because I am not organized SUFFICIENTLY strong to force the master to loosen up. . . .

He further informs me the Capitalists are children of His—and that He absolutely refuses to participate in any children's squabbles. He believes in letting us fight it out along the lines of Industrial Unionism.

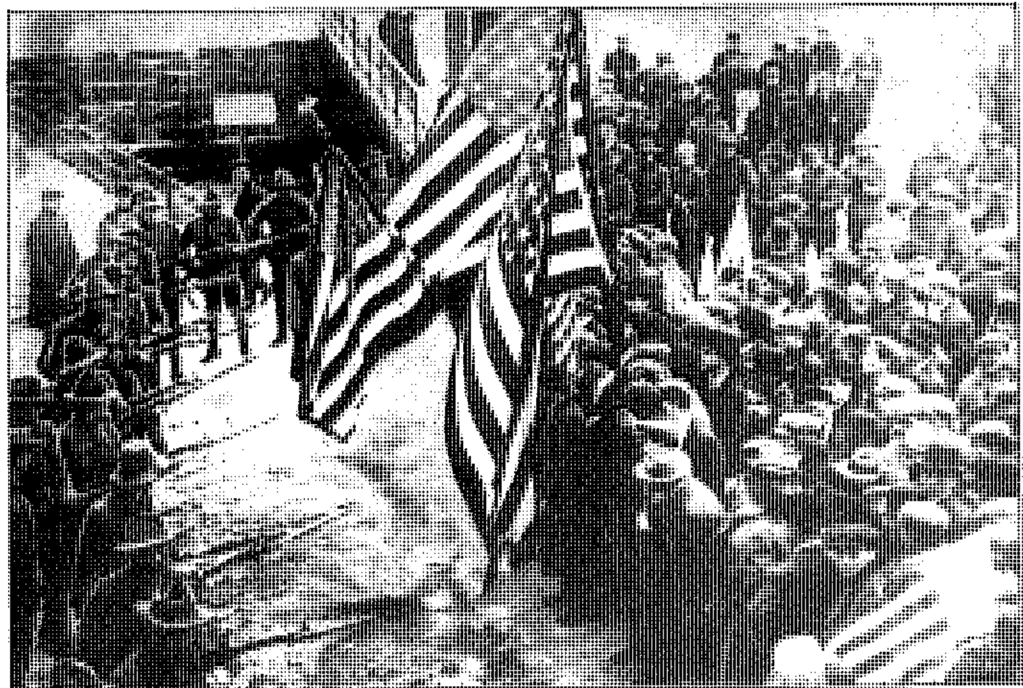
Yours in faith, T-BONE SLIM.

"The Lumberjack's Prayer," Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library.

across ethnic and racial lines, the shop-floor control enjoyed by skilled craftsmen, and the industrial unionism of coal miners and the American Railway Union.

At first, factionalism, government harassment, and an economic downturn frustrated the IWW. But in 1909, it won nationwide attention by leading a successful strike among unskilled immigrant steelworkers in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania. In 1909 and 1910, the IWW also led a series of "free speech" fights in western cities, which served as hiring centers for jobs in forests, mines, and fields. But the union's reputation soared in 1912, when it led a massive textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. A new Massachusetts state law requiring employers to cut workers' hours had backfired when employers retaliated by speeding up the looms to compensate for the lost time. The last straw for Lawrence's 30,000 textile workers came when mill owners announced a pay cut. Young women between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, many of whom suffered from malnutrition and overwork, made up half of the mills' labor force. Two days after the pay cut announcement, more than 20,000 workers of forty nationalities went on strike. "We want bread and roses, too," the strikers declared memorably, an indication that they sought not just material gain, but also an acknowledgment of their dignity and their entitlement to some of the finer things in life.

The IWW organized separate strike and relief committees for workers of different nationalities and translated speeches and literature into dozens of languages. Strikers threw up massive picket lines around the mills and paraded through the streets. Mill owners and government officials



"We Want Bread and Roses, Too"

Shouting that slogan, strikers confronted national guardsmen during the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike of 1912. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.

responded with a massive show of force, including a declaration of martial law and a ban on public meetings. With an entire town deprived of the workers' meager wages, hunger was widespread. Eventually, New York socialists, concerned about the effects of hunger on the strikers' children, organized to care for them. Margaret Sanger, a nurse who later became famous for promoting birth control, arrived in Lawrence to transport children out of the strife-torn town. "Out of the 119 children, only four had underwear on . . . their outerwear was almost in rags . . . their coats were simply torn to shreds," she later testified.

The departure of the children generated so much sympathy for the strikers that Lawrence authorities decreed that children would no longer be allowed to leave the city. Two days later, a group of Philadelphia socialists arrived to transport 200 children. As a member of the Philadelphia Women's committee testified, "The police closed in on us with their clubs, beating right and left with no thought of the children who were in the most desperate danger of being trampled to death. The mothers and children were thus hurled in a mass and bodily dragged to a military truck, and even then clubbed, irrespective of the cries of the panic-stricken women and children." This turned public opinion across the country against the employers. In March, the mill owners agreed to a settlement that provided raises and overtime pay to workers.

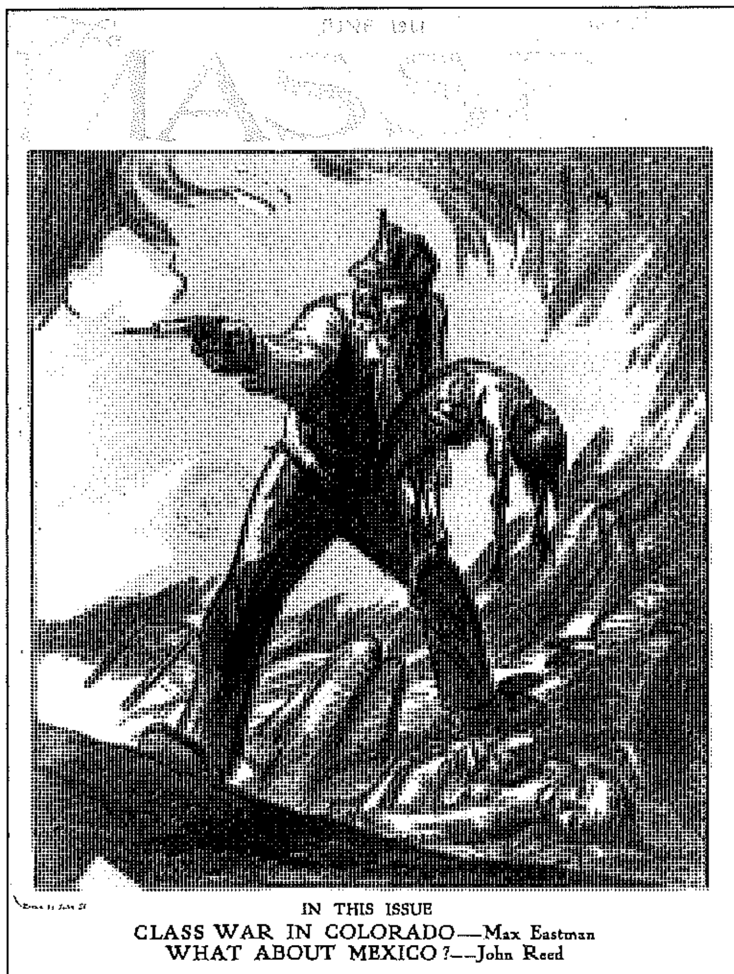
The Lawrence textile strike demonstrated that immigrant workers could unite to win a strike, but the victory did not open the way for widespread industrial organization. A year later, in 1913, the IWW met serious defeat in a silk workers' strike in Paterson, New Jersey, where thousands of immigrant women, men, and children had walked out of the mills. Over the course of seven months, IWW leaders again organized picket lines and called enthusiastic rallies, and again the authorities responded with repression, even arresting socialist Frederick Sumner Boyd for reading the free-speech clause of the New Jersey state constitution at a strike meeting. But Paterson employers, unlike their Lawrence counterparts, exploited divisions within the silk workers' ranks. The skilled, English-speaking workers and their craft unions, put off by the radicalism and anarchism of many of the Italian and Jewish workers, were slow to join the strike. The strike collapsed when the English-speaking mill workers agreed to return to work on a shop-by-shop basis, leaving the unskilled immigrants without support.

The Ludlow Massacre and the Center Shifting to the Left In mining communities in the Appalachian and Rocky mountains, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) overcame the cultural difficulties that defeated the strikers in Paterson. Although highly skilled, coal miners had no tradition of apprenticeship and therefore little control over who entered

their trade. Thus, recent immigrants or African Americans could find work as miners more easily than in other trades. Drawing on the legacy of interracial unionism inherited from the Knights of Labor and black UMWA activists, the UMWA extended itself to organize all who worked in and around the mines. By 1910, nearly one-third of all coal miners were unionized, compared with one-tenth of the broader U.S. labor force.

But the mine owners fought back fiercely. In late 1913, John D. Rockefeller's Colorado Fuel and Iron Company led other companies in an open-shop drive — an attempt to guarantee the right to work without union membership — that prompted more than 10,000 miners to strike. The battle was long and bitter. Despite the determination of the miners and their wives, who were active in the struggle, the owners refused to recognize the union. They evicted strikers from their company-owned homes and brought in deputies and the state militia to quell the protest. On Easter night in 1914, the troops attacked a strikers' tent camp in Ludlow. Firing machine guns and setting fire to the tents, they killed sixteen people, including twelve children.

Class War in Colorado
John Sloan's April 1914 cover illustration for *The Masses* portrays the devastation and death wrought by the Colorado militia and Rockefeller-hired private police on the miners' tent colony but also emphasizes the strikers' continued resistance. John Sloan, *The Masses*, June 1914 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



In the wake of the Ludlow massacre, the UMWA issued a "call to arms." For ten days, war raged between miners and the state militia, until federal troops finally disarmed the miners. IWW leader Bill Haywood concluded that the country was gripped by "an irreconcilable class struggle" between workers and capitalists. Most progressives would have avoided those terms, but many of them agreed that in Lawrence, Paterson, and Ludlow, the industrial system had generated a terrifying conflict that threatened the very stability and promise of American society.

Like the electoral challenge by the Socialist Party, the militant agitation of the Wobblies and mine workers moved the terms of progressive debate to the left. Moderate reformers took up more radical ideas for two reasons. First, they worried about the threat posed by socialists and Wobblies. They sought to counter the appeal of the radicals — and prevent the more fundamental changes those groups fa-vored — by offering changes that responded, in part, to the radical critique. When the radicals publicized the inequities and degradations brought by industrial

"It Was a Murder and Nothing Less"

The brutal massacre of strikers and their families at Ludlow, Colorado, stunned the nation and led to numerous investigations and reports. Following are two documents about the massacre. The first is an excerpt from a newspaper reporter's account that appeared in the New York World. *The second is a portion of John D. Rockefeller's testimony before the Commission on Industrial Relations, set up by the U.S. government in 1914 to investigate labor conditions. Rockefeller was questioned by Commission chairman Frank Walsh, a noted reformer.*

New York World:

Then came the killing of Louis Tikas, the Greek leader of the strikers. We saw the militiamen parley outside the tent city, and a few minutes later, Tikas came out to meet them. We watched them talking. Suddenly an officer raised his rifle, gripping the barrel, and felled Tikas with the butt.

Tikas fell face downward. As he lay there we saw the militiamen fall back. Then they aimed their rifles and deliberately fired them into the unconscious man's body. It was the first murder I had ever seen, for it was a murder and nothing less. Then the miners ran about in the tent colony and women and children scuttled for safety in the [underground] pits which afterwards trapped them.

We watched from our rock shelter while the militia dragged up their machine guns and poured murderous fire into the arroyo . . . Then came the firing of the tents. . . . The militiamen were thick about the northwest corner of the colony where the fire started and we could see distinctly from our lofty observation place what looked like a blazing torch waved in the midst of militia a few seconds before the general conflagration swept through the place.

Testimony of John D. Rockefeller:

ROCKEFELLER: There is just one thing . . . which can be done, as things are at present, to settle this strike, and that is to unionize the camps; and our interest in labor is so profound . . . that interest demands that the camps shall be open [nonunion].

CHAIRMAN: And you will do that if it costs all your property and kills all your employees?

ROCKEFELLER: It is a great principle.

CHAIRMAN:And you would do that rather than recognize the right of men to collective bargaining? Is that what I understand?

ROCKEFELLER: No, sir. Rather than allow outside people to come in and interfere with employees who are thoroughly satisfied with their labor conditions—it was upon a similar principle that the War of the Revolution was carried on. It is a great national issue of the most vital kind.

New York World, May 5, 1913; Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress on Industrial Relations, 64th Congress, 1st Session (1916).

capitalism, progressives proposed ways in which reform and regulation could make capitalism more humane while also preserving it.

The second reason moderate reformers incorporated some radical ideas is that they found them attractive. They agreed with the radicals about the threats posed by unregulated big business and great concentrations of wealth. They also adopted the radicals' view that only a strong national state could tame the giant national corporations—an idea that socialist activists had long argued but that broke with deep-seated U.S. traditions of limiting the power of the federal government. Although Democratic and Republican progressives did not endorse as powerful a state as the socialists did, the moderate reformers did come to accept and endorse a new regulatory function for the federal government.

Progressivism and Politics

Women and radicals pressed the mainstream political parties from the outside, whether because they were excluded from the vote or because they sought more far-reaching changes than the conventional parties would contemplate. Still, they succeeded in getting those parties to consider issues (worker safety) and approaches (public ownership of utilities) that were not originally on their agendas. Nevertheless, the actual changes implemented through political reform were often limited and sometimes not even in the interests of poor and working people. For example, some urban reform efforts displaced political machines that had working-class ties in favor of business-oriented city manager or city commission systems. Other "progressives" pushed political reform measures that made it more difficult for immigrants to vote, undercut the efforts of farmer and labor parties, and disenfranchised African Americans.

But if the reform glass was sometimes half (or entirely) empty, the early twentieth century did offer up some remarkably strong reform brews. Indeed, all three presidents of this era served at least a diluted reform elixir. Even the most conservative of the three, William Howard Taft, backed such once-radical measures as the eight-hour workday and the graduated income tax. The high point of progressive sentiment came in the 1912 election when Woodrow Wilson won the presidency and American voters more resoundingly endorsed reform than had occurred at any previous time in U.S. history.

Urban Reform Reformers on the local and state levels borrowed some ideas from radicals and socialists. Many reformers viewed the corporations that provided municipal services—streetcars, water, gas, and electricity—as rapacious monopolies. The socialist idea of public ownership seemed an

"Give the Property Owner a Fair Show"

Some reformers sought to eliminate from urban government the power and influence of what they thought of as the ignorant working masses. The first document comes from the elite Voters' League of Pittsburgh, which campaigned in 1911 for removing workingmen from local school boards, suggesting that "a man's occupation ought to give a strong indication of his qualifications for membership." In the second document, Rear Admiral F. E. Chadwick, a leader in the municipal reform movement in Newport, Rhode Island, argued for changing local government to ensure a larger voice for "property owners."

Voters' League of Pittsburgh:

Employment as ordinary laborer and in the lowest class of mill work would naturally lead to the conclusion that such men did not have sufficient education or business training to act as school directors. . . . Objection might also be made to small shopkeepers, clerks, workmen at many trades, who by lack of educational advantages and business training, could not, no matter how honest, be expected to administer properly the affairs of an education system . . . where millions of dollars are spent each year.

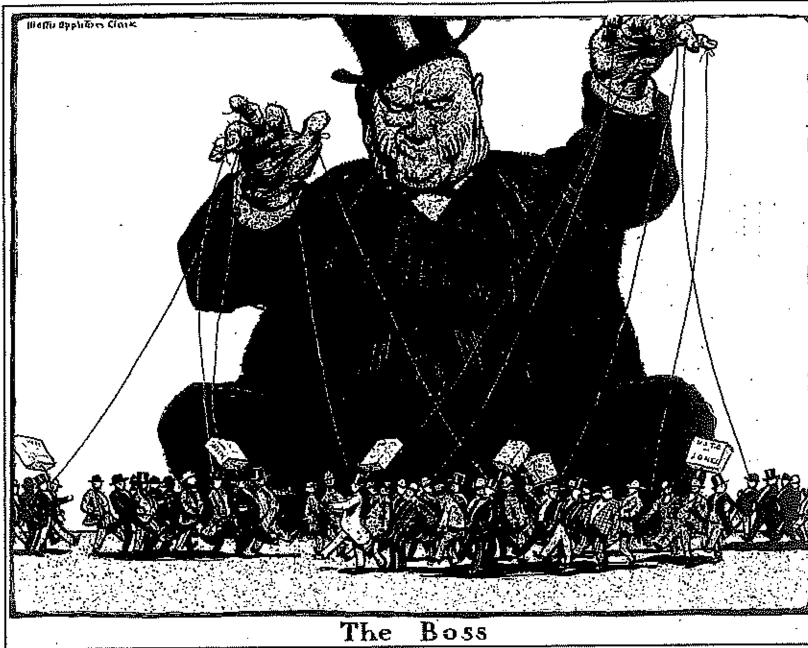
Rear Admiral F. E. Chadwick:

Our present system has excluded in large degree the representation of those who have the city's well-being most at heart. It has brought in municipalities . . . a government established by the least educated, the least interested class of citizens.

It stands to reason that a man paying $5,000 in taxes in a town is more interested in the well-being and development of his town than the man who pays no taxes. . . . It equally stands to reason that the man of the $5,000 tax should be assured a representation in the committee which lays the tax and spends the money which he contributes. . . . Shall we be truly democratic and give the property owner a fair show or shall we develop a tyranny of ignorance which shall crush him?

Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform," in Blaine A. Brownell and Warren E. Stickle, eds., *Bosses and Reformers: Urban Politics in America, 1880–1920* (1973).

attractive alternative, and many urban reformers, even though they rejected the concept of public ownership of all corporate enterprises, endorsed public ownership of public utilities. The Socialist Party's success in providing clean and efficient government to cities like Milwaukee reinforced the appeal of municipal socialist programs. In elections in 1910 and 1911, Socialist party candidates won more than four hundred public offices, including twenty-eight mayorships, in such communities as Butte, Montana; Schenectady, New York; and Reading, Pennsylvania. In most cases, however, these administrations lasted only one or two terms.



The Boss
The standard reform perspective of the urban political machine appeared in *Collier's* in 1906. Graphically, the conception of the Boss had changed very little since Thomas Nast's Tweed Ring caricatures of the 1870s. Walter Appleton Clark, *Collier's*, November 10, 1906 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Although urban reformers embraced some socialist views and coalitions, the goals of the two groups differed substantially. Where socialists campaigned for social justice, most urban reformers worked for efficient and responsive government. Above all, they wanted to stamp out corruption and curb the power of machines and bosses, some of whom had working-class ties. On the East Coast and in the South, businessmen and other elites seeking more efficient and less costly government dominated local reform efforts. These municipal reformers aimed to destroy corrupt political machines, but they often saw working-class voters—especially immigrants and African Americans—not as allies but as antagonists. Consequently, they sought to strip them of their votes. In the urban East, reformers pushed social programs to "improve" immigrant behavior and immigration reform to reduce the influx of "undesirable" newcomers.

The influence of businessmen and professionals was also evident in new governmental systems that were established in hundreds of small and middle-size cities, especially in the South. These city commission or city manager systems shifted power from popularly elected councilmen to professional administrators. Designed, as John Patterson, president of the National Cash Register Company, put it, to place municipal government "on a strict business basis," such systems took power away from working-class communities. One new form, the commissioner system, originated in Galveston, Texas, in the wake of a 1900 flood that killed 6,000 people. When the local government proved incapable of handling the emergency, a group of businessmen proposed a new charter that gave authority to five commissioners who would serve as both the city council and the city administration. By 1917, more than five hundred cities had adopted the plan. Another system, first tried in Staunton, Virginia, in 1908, combined an elected city council with an appointed city manager, a professional executive. The council set broad policies, and the city manager administered them.

A more democratic type of reform had grown up in midwestern cities such as Milwaukee and St. Louis and in western ones such as San Francisco. In these areas, reformers' attacks on corrupt state and local governments had a strong antibusiness character, and reforms opened up the political

system to the influence of working people. One of the leaders of the more democratic reform movement was four-term Detroit mayor Hazen Pingree. First elected in 1889, Pingree increased corporate taxes and provided public services such as electricity and sewers. This program and his support of striking railroad workers won Pingree the backing of immigrants and trade unions. In 1896, he began to draw national attention when he organized a municipal streetcar company. Within a few years, campaigns for public ownership of urban utilities were triumphing throughout the nation.

Pingree, Wisconsin progressive governor Robert La Follette, and others moved to strengthen their reform coalition by opening up the political process to their working-class allies. With the support of unions and some middle-class groups, they pushed for direct primaries, which shifted the power to choose candidates from party bosses to voters. They also established the initiative and the referendum, which put popular issues directly on the ballot, and recall, which allowed voters to remove an official from office before the end of his or her term. Reformers also helped to win passage of the Seventeenth Amendment (1913), which provided for the direct popular election of U.S. senators (instead of election by state legislators, as the Constitution had decreed).

Progressivism and Participation While some reformers worked to open up the political system to working people, others instituted changes that undercut the power and influence of marginal groups. For example, ballot reforms created barriers to voting and to third-party political movements. After decades of promotion, reformers succeeded in having the publicly printed "Australian ballot," which listed all the candidates, replace ballots issued by political parties for voters to carry to the polls. Although the new system discouraged corruption, it made voting more difficult for immigrants who could not read English. It also gave public officials the power to eliminate minor party candidates from the ballot.

"Antifusion" laws further diminished the effectiveness of electoral protests in the South. Throughout the late nineteenth century, disgruntled workers and farmers had organized their own parties and had later thrown their support to major party candidates who backed their demands. The "fusion" of the Populists and Democrats in 1896 was the most powerful example of this tactic. But by the turn of the century, numerous states had passed laws prohibiting two parties from supporting the same candidate, thus making it more difficult for third parties to wield power. In some instances, reformers changed electoral procedures specifically to check the growth of the Socialist Party, which was achieving considerable success on the local level.

Literacy requirements offered a more direct method of limiting workers' political power. Election officials used these requirements to disfran-

"Hammering at the Truth"

Although Progressive era reforms in southern states limited the rights of African Americans, the diverse progressive movement also included individuals who fought for racial justice and equality such as W. E. B. DuBois, an eloquent and insightful African American scholar and activist. In this 1906 speech, he laid out the demands of the Niagara Movement.

The men of the Niagara Movement coming from the toil of the year's hard work and pausing a moment from the earning of their daily bread turn towards the nation and again ask in the name of ten million the privilege of a hearing. In the past year the work of the Negro hater has flourished in the land. Step by step the defenders of the rights of American citizens have retreated. The work of stealing the black man's ballot has progressed and the fifty and more representatives of stolen votes still sit in the nation's capital. Discrimination in travel and public accommodations has so spread that some of our weaker brethren are actually afraid to thunder against color discrimination as such and are simply whispering for ordinary decencies.

Against this the Niagara Movement eternally protests. We will not be satisfied to take one jot or tittle less than our full manhood rights....

In detail our demands are clear and unequivocal.

First, we would vote; with the right to vote goes everything: Freedom, manhood, the honor of your wives, the chastity of your daughters, the right to work, and the chance to rise....

Second. We want discrimination in public accommodation to cease. Separation in railway and street cars, based simply on race and color, is un-American, undemocratic, and silly....

Third. We claim the right of freedmen to walk, talk, and be with them that wish to be with us ...

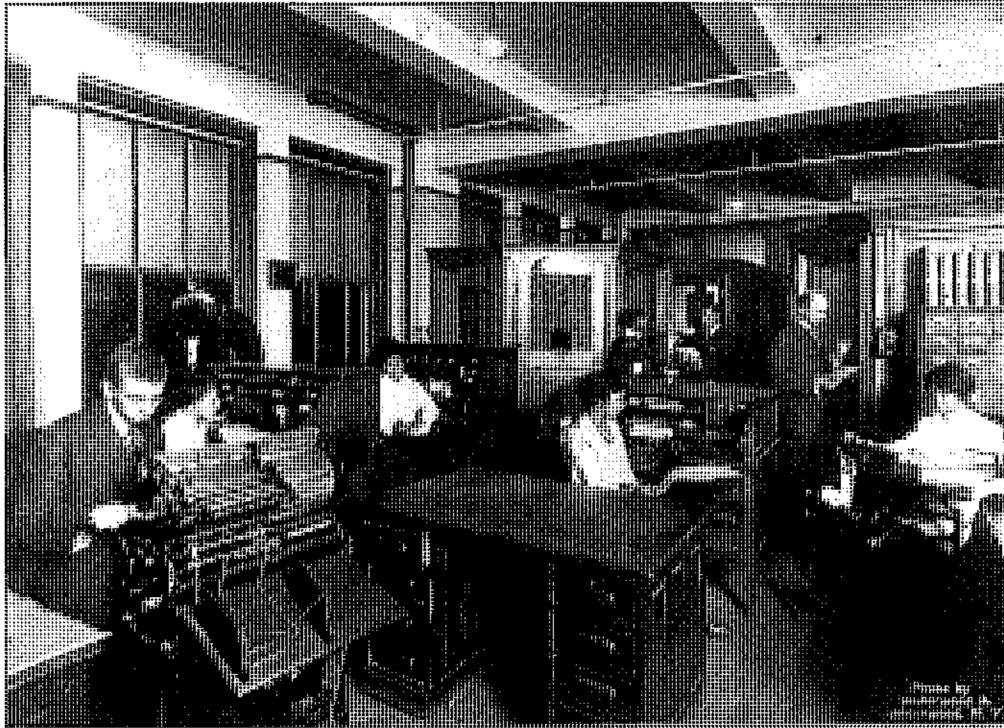
Fourth. We want the laws enforced against rich as well as poor; against Capitalist as well as Laborer; against white as well as black....

Fifth. We want our children educated.... And when we call for education, we mean real education. . . . Education is the development of power and ideal. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be, and we will fight for all time against any proposal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings....

These are some of the chief things which we want. How shall we get them? By voting where we may vote, by persistent, unceasing agitation, by hammering at the truth, by sacrifice and work....

Courage brothers! The battle for humanity is not lost or losing. All across the skies sit signs of promise. The Slav is rising in his might, the yellow millions are tasting liberty, the black Africans are writhing toward the light, and everywhere the laborer, with ballot in his hand, is voting open the gates of Opportunity and Peace. The morning breaks over the bloodstained hills. We must not falter, we may not shrink. Above are the everlasting stars.

Virginia Hamilton, ed. *The Writings of W. E. B. DuBois* (1975).



Working Against Discrimination

An undated photograph shows editor W. E. B. DuBois and his young staff in the New York City office of *The Crisis*, preparing an edition of the NAACP's publication. The DuSable Museum of African American History, Chicago.

chise African Americans and, in some places, poor whites. By 1920, all southern states and nine states outside the South had adopted such laws. Literacy requirements were one factor in a dramatic decline in voter participation across the country. In an average 1870s election, 80 percent of those who were legally eligible voted; by 1920, the figure had fallen to 60 percent in the northern states and less than 30 percent in the South. The decline in voting also reflected a broader erosion of popular politics—the intense partisanship and heated election campaigns—that had flourished in the nineteenth century. Once-vibrant party loyalties declined, and a new, less participatory style of party politics emerged.

The decline in formal voter participation was in part countered—and possibly generated—by the spread of nonelectoral forms of citizen participation. Large numbers of Americans used other means to confront the problems of the industrial age. Some favored municipal and national commissions, which gave wide publicity to issues and problems. Others joined voluntary associations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909–1910 by white and black reformers, including the black historian and intellectual W. E. B. DuBois (see Chapter 3), to fight the rise of segregation and the lynching of African Americans. Women reformers, who had never had the option of voting, had pioneered the practice of participating in nonparty organizations in order to influence politicians. Their methods would continue to define the struggle for political and social change well beyond the Progressive era.

Republican Progressivism: Roosevelt and Taft Not all political leaders shared the broad-based impulse for reform that infected so many arenas of American life. But at the end of the nineteenth century, few people would have predicted that such a broad spectrum of national politicians—including all three presidents in the first two decades of the twentieth century—would have backed at least a moderate version of progressive reform. The United States seemed a more conservative place in 1896, when the probusiness Republican William McKinley triumphed decisively over the populist Democrat William Jennings Bryan. The Republicans dominated Congress, led by such Old Guard conservatives as the wealthy Senator Nelson Aldrich of Rhode Island and the autocratic House Speaker Joseph G. Cannon of Illinois.

But then the party regulars made a mistake. Theodore Roosevelt, who had turned himself into a national hero through his role in the Spanish-Cuban-American War, posed a threat to the conservative Republican leadership of the major state of New York as the reform-minded governor. Why not "bury" him in the then-insignificant job of vice president, the regulars cleverly proposed? Their proposal became history, and McKinley and Roosevelt won an easy victory in the 1900 rematch with William Jennings Bryan. Mark Hanna, part of the conservative Republican leadership, was uneasy at the ploy: "Don't you realize that there's only one life between that madman and the White House?" he warned. In September 1901, that one life fell to the bullet of Leon Czolgosz. "Now look," declared an exasperated Hanna, "that damned cowboy is president of the United States."

Roosevelt's path to reform was both implausible and inconsistent. The offspring of an old and established family, he had thrown himself into the rough and tumble of New York politics, becoming a state assemblyman in 1881 at age twenty-three. His energetic opposition to machine politics and his push for civil service reform won him the nickname of "Cyclone Assemblyman." With the same energy and intensity, he threw himself into a series of other careers: cattle rancher in the Dakotas, member of the U.S. Civil Service Commission, president of the New York City Police Board, and assistant secretary of the Navy. Despite his reputation for reform, Roosevelt always described himself as a conservative who supported progressive reform as the best alternative to the radicalism represented by the socialists and Wobblies. "The friends of property, of order, of law," he argued, "must realize that the surest way to provoke an explosion of wrong and injustice is to be shortsighted, narrow-minded, greedy, and arrogant."

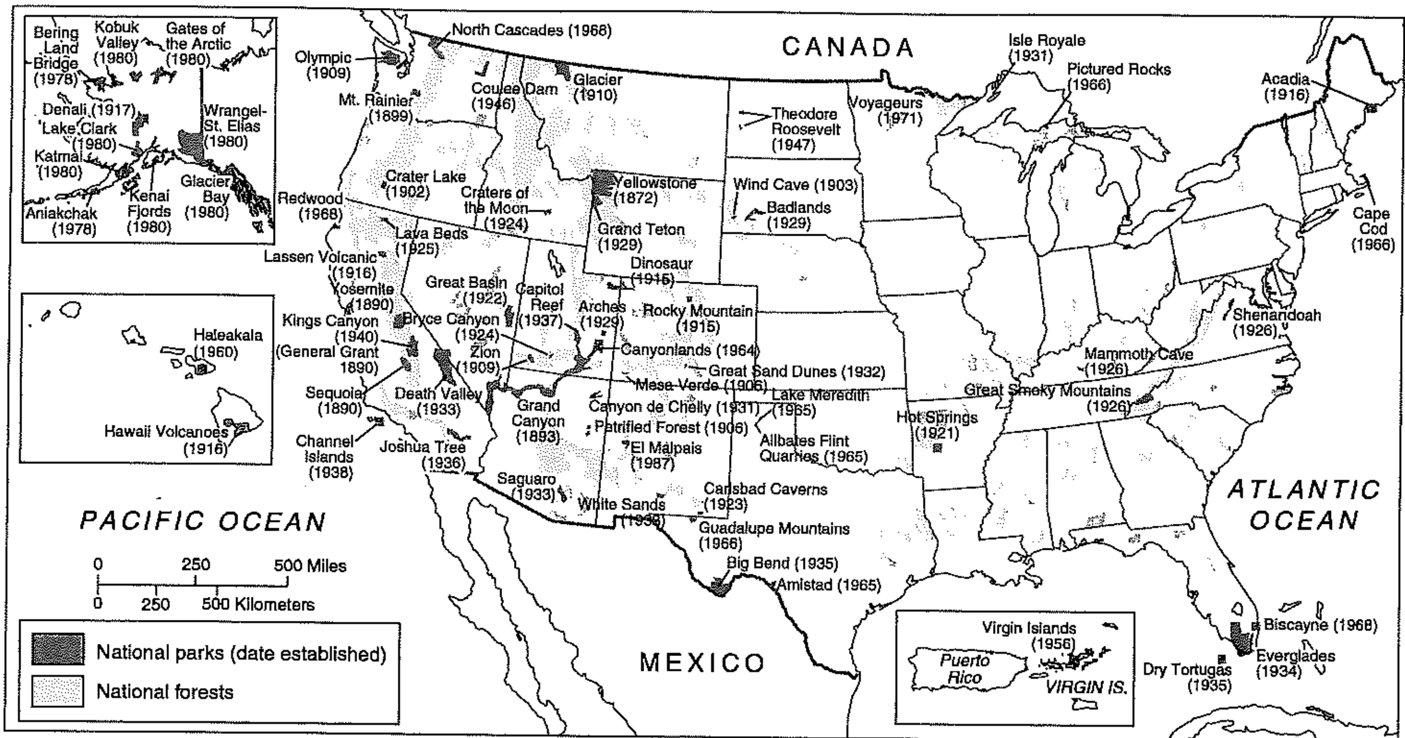
As president, Roosevelt followed policies in line with this view of conservative reform. He initially sympathized with mine owners when the UMWA called a major strike in Pennsylvania's anthracite coalfields in 1902, a year after he took office. Then public opinion began to turn against the

mine owners after they refused to bargain with the UMWA. Worried that a strike would cripple the economy and leave the nation without fuel for the winter, Roosevelt pressed the operators to settle. By threatening to seize the mines and by calling on the influence of the financier J. P. Morgan, he finally got them to negotiate. The ensuing settlement boosted the cause of the UMWA and of the union movement nationwide.

The coal strike taught Roosevelt that bashing big business could be good politics. That same year, he took the popular step of ordering the Justice Department to prosecute the Northern Securities Company, a monopolistic combine of northwestern railroads organized by J. P. Morgan. This was the first use of 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act against such a powerful corporation—but not the last. The Justice Department filed forty-five cases under the act during Roosevelt's presidency, earning him the nickname "Trustbuster." The most celebrated case was in 1907 against Standard Oil, whose monopoly control of the nation's oil business had been exposed in Ida Tarbell's muckraking articles in *McClure's* and her *History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904). In 1911, the Supreme Court upheld the forced breakup of the company. Roosevelt, a passionate outdoorsman, also restricted businesses such as lumber and mining in the interest of conservation. He brought 125 million acres of public land into the national forest system, doubled the number of national parks, and established numerous national monuments and wildlife refuges (Map 5.2).

But Roosevelt was not a radical and did not oppose all trusts. He dropped many government actions against corporations after industry leaders visited the White House seeking presidential assistance. The president believed, in fact, that "bigness" had become inevitable and rather than challenging that, the federal government needed the power to regulate corporate behavior so that no corporation would be above the law.

This view of an activist federal government seemed an extension of Roosevelt's activist personality and his craving for the limelight. It was once said of him that he wanted to be "the bride at every wedding, the corpse at every funeral." The flamboyant Roosevelt easily won reelection in 1904 over the colorless Democrat Alton B. Parker, a New York judge. Elected on the promise of a "square deal" for all Americans, Roosevelt used his second term to move in more decisively reformist directions and toward expanded government regulation of the economy. In 1906, for example, he won passage of the Hepburn Act, which enabled the previously weak Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to regulate railroad rates. The same year, after Upton Sinclair's sensational novel *The Jungle* exposed unhealthy practices in the meatpacking industry and *McClure's* and the *Ladies' Home Journal* exposed fraud in patent medicines, a popular uproar spurred passage of the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act.



MAP 5.2 Expanding the Public Domain: National Parks and Forests

From 1850 to 1920, as the nation became more urban, a political and cultural conservation movement emerged. Conservationists perceived American "nature" as part of American national identity and promoted the wise and scientific use of natural resources. The movement stressed the importance of nature as an economic, aesthetic, and spiritual resource. The conviction that nature's resources were increasingly imperiled led conservationists during the Progressive era to dramatically expand wilderness and wildlife preservation.

Some big corporations actually supported some of these reforms or turned them to their advantage. The biggest meatpacking companies, for example, supported federal inspections because they would place a burden on smaller competitors. But at the time, most Americans had trouble finding an appropriate label for this president. Many conservatives viewed him as a dangerous radical, but radicals did not recognize him as one of their own. The more aggressive reformer Robert La Follette complained that Roosevelt "filled the air with noise and smoke" but accomplished little. Whatever the label, Roosevelt did take some increasingly progressive stances, supporting an eight-hour day for federal workers, a workers' compensation law, and federal income and inheritance taxes. He also angered conservative defenders of the sanctity of private property by putting his conservation principles ahead of the interests of western cattlemen, lumbermen, and mine owners. In 1907, for example, he delayed signing legislation he had opposed that prohibited new additions to the forest reserve without congressional approval long enough to annex sixteen million acres that the Forest Service had long eyed. "The opponents of the Forest Service turned handsprings in their wrath," Roosevelt later recalled, "and dire were their threats against the Executive; but the threats could not be carried out, and were really only a tribute to the efficiency of our action."

As Roosevelt became bolder in his advocacy of reform, Republican conservatives, who still dominated Congress, became increasingly uncooperative. Some blamed his attacks on big business for the financial panic that

hit the nation in 1907. When Roosevelt announced that he would honor his earlier pledge to leave office after one full term, they breathed a sigh of relief. In response to the news that Roosevelt would go on an African safari, conservatives in Congress reportedly raised their glasses in the toast: "Health to the lions!"

Although William Howard Taft, who defeated William Jennings Bryan in the 1908 election, was Roosevelt's handpicked successor, they were a study in contrasts. Where Roosevelt was flamboyant and gregarious, the Cincinnati judge was shy. Where Roosevelt was energetic and physically fit, Taft was slow moving and struggled with a serious weight problem. (In college, he was known as "Big Lub"; while he was president, his weight reached 332 pounds, and he once got stuck in the White House bathtub.) Taft did, however, share some of Roosevelt's reform inclinations, backing the eight-hour workday, mine safety legislation, the graduated income tax (ratified as the Sixteenth Amendment in 1913), and a federal Children's Bureau, as well as helping to strengthen the Interstate Commerce Commission and filing ninety more antitrust suits.

Teddy the Trustbuster

A critical view of Theodore Roosevelt's reputation as a regulator of corporate abuses appeared in the *Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch* during the 1912 presidential campaign. William A. Ireland, *Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch*, reprinted in *Cartoons Magazine*, November 1912 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

But Taft's conservative judicial temperament made him reluctant to use the office of the presidency as aggressively as Roosevelt had done. He also annoyed progressive reformers by going along with the Payne-Aldrich Tariff, which did not cut tariffs as progressives had hoped. Progressives opposed high tariffs claiming they limited competition and aided trusts, and Taft had campaigned for tariff reform. Then he failed to back progressive efforts to limit the powers of conservative House Speaker Cannon. Taft particularly irritated Roosevelt and other conservationists by firing Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot, a Roosevelt friend and appointee, in an environmental controversy, which progressives saw as capitulation to corporate greed. "For the first time in the history of the country," editorialized the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, "a president of the United States has openly proclaimed himself the friend of thieves and the enemy of honest men."

"One of the Little Victims"
An April 1907 article in the *Ladies' Home Journal* featured a young victim of patent medicine, Baltimore toddler John D. Goddard. The article's title succinctly stated the danger posed by patent medicines: "Their Well-Meaning Parents Just 'Gave Them a Little Something' to Soothe Them or Make Them Sleep, — and They Slept!" *The Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1907 — American Social History Project.

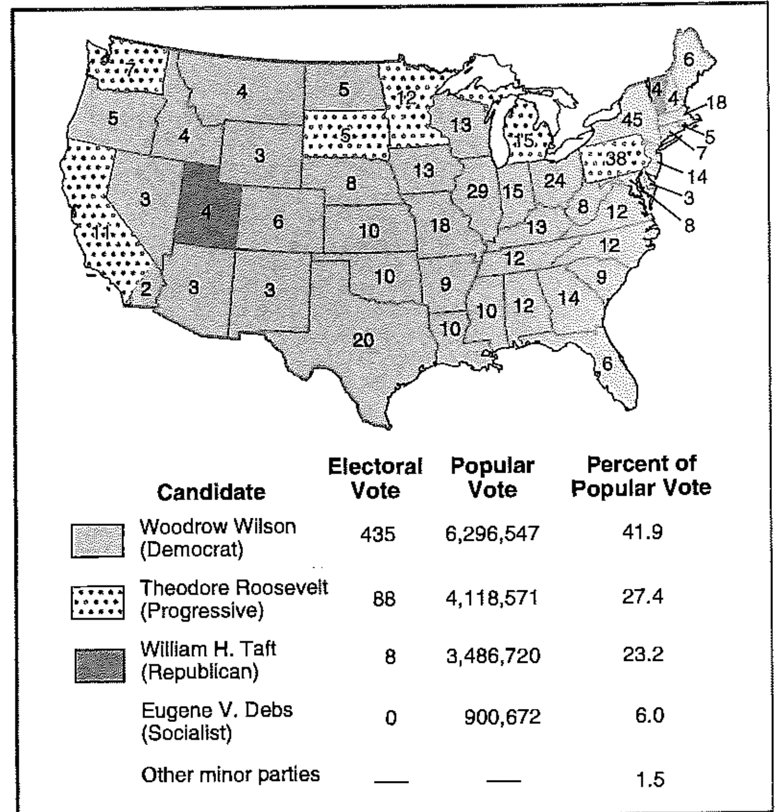
Democratic Progressivism: Wilson and the Limits of Reform Taft's firing of Pinchot, his embarrassment of Roosevelt in a controversy over U.S. Steel, and the Republican's loss of control of the House of Representatives in 1910 led the former president to challenge his successor for the 1912 Republican nomination. Although Roosevelt won most of the primaries, the Republican bosses handed the nomination to Taft. As a result, Roosevelt left the party to run as the nominee of the insurgent Progressive Party. His proposed program, dubbed "the New Nationalism," called for greater government involvement in regulating industrial capitalism, including labor legislation to prevent, in the words of progressive reformer and Roosevelt supporter Jane Addams, "industrial accidents, occupational diseases, overwork, involuntary unemployment, and other injurious effects incident to modern industry." Although Taft had some progressive credentials, he ran — "walked" might be a better description of his lethargic campaign — as the candidate of conservative Republicans.

If the Democrats had also nominated a conservative, Roosevelt might have won a third-party victory. But the Democratic nominee turned out to be Woodrow Wilson, who had established a reform reputation as governor of New Jersey. A stern Presbyterian, Wilson differed sharply from the effervescent Roosevelt in both style and rhetoric. Whereas Roosevelt's New Nationalism called for an expanded national state to regulate capitalism, Wilson trumpeted a "New Freedom," in which antimonopoly policies would restore competition and small-scale business. But the two men shared a fundamental critique of the excesses of industrial capitalism. An even more thoroughgoing critique came from the Socialist candidate, Eugene V. Debs. He dismissed Roosevelt's Progressive Party as "a party of progressive capitalism" and called for "the abolition of this monstrous [capitalist] system" rather than for its reform.

The split in the Republican Party and support from the South, the West, and AFL unions gave Wilson a clear victory (though not a majority of voters). Debs won a surprising 6 percent of the vote (more than any Socialist presidential candidate). Perhaps most startling is that three-quarters of the electorate backed one of the three candidates who had championed the interests of the people over monopoly capitalism, in one of the most resounding endorsements of reform in U.S. history (Map 5.3).

As president, Wilson responded to some, but not all, of the items on the reform agenda. He dragged his feet on the call for woman suffrage and

showed almost no sympathy for the problems of immigrants. Wilson—the first southerner elected president since before the Civil War—probably received more black votes than any previous Democratic presidential candidate. African Americans had abandoned Taft, in part because he had appointed or retained only thirty-one black officeholders. But Wilson's record on African American rights proved even more dismal; he ended up making only nine black appointments, eight of them Republican carryovers. Worse still, he extended and defended segregation in the federal civil service. Black federal workers had to use inferior and segregated washrooms and to work behind screens that separated them from white workers. And like his predecessors, Wilson repeatedly ignored both the lynching of hundreds of African Americans by white southerners and the disfranchisement and Jim Crow laws that reversed the modest political and economic gains black Americans had made during Reconstruction.

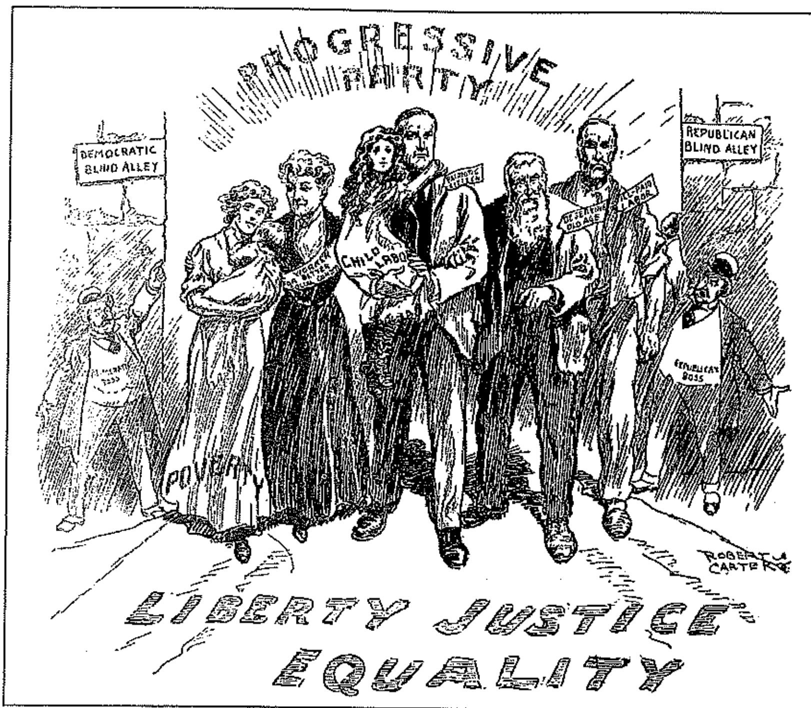


Candidate	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	Percent of Popular Vote
Woodrow Wilson (Democrat)	435	6,296,547	41.9
Theodore Roosevelt (Progressive)	88	4,118,571	27.4
William H. Taft (Republican)	8	3,486,720	23.2
Eugene V. Debs (Socialist)	0	900,672	6.0
Other minor parties	—	—	1.5

MAP 5.3 The Election of 1912
Few elections in American history produced such a strong endorsement of reform as that of 1912. Three-quarters of the popular vote went to candidates (Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Eugene V. Debs) who championed the "people" against monopoly capitalism. William Howard Taft, the one conservative candidate, won the electoral votes only of Utah and Vermont.

Organized labor, which had also backed Wilson, fared much better. Wilson rewarded the labor movement by backing the Clayton Antitrust Act. It replaced the Sherman Act (1890), which had not offered a strong definition of monopolies and trusts and had been used more effectively against labor (especially in the Pullman strike) than against big business. Samuel Gompers called the Clayton Act labor's Magna Carta, or guarantee of basic rights, because not only did it precisely define such prohibited practices as "interlocking directorates" and "discriminatory pricing," but it also specifically stipulated that labor unions and farmers' organizations should not be considered conspiracies in restraint of trade. Wilson also championed a model federal workers' compensation statute, an eight-hour law for railroad workers, and a federal child-labor law. The result of years of pressure from working people and reformers, these bills established, for the first time, the federal government's interest in regulating the conditions of labor.

In one of his first acts as president in 1913, Wilson appointed the Commission on Industrial Relations, authorized by Congress in response to labor radicalism and violence. The commission's chairman, Frank P. Walsh, a Kansas City reformer who was sympathetic to labor, had used a series of public hearings to expose what he called "industrial feudalism." The commission's 1915 report asserted that poor working conditions, autocratic business management, and the concentration of wealth underlay labor violence.



The 'Open Road'

This 1916 cartoon celebrating the insurgent Progressive Party drew its title from a quote by Woodrow Wilson, stating that Americans who were discontented with traditional party politics proposed to "find an open road for themselves." Robert Carter, *American Review of Reviews* (1912) — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

It called for an inheritance tax to finance education, social services, and public works; a child-labor law; equal pay for women and men; and protection of the right to join a union and bargain collectively.

Although the Wilson administration ignored most of these recommendations, it did offer some important concessions to labor. The Seamen's Act of 1915 eliminated the oppressive financial arrangements and semimilitary discipline inflicted on merchant sailors. In 1916 came the Keating-Owen bill, which was the first federal child-labor law, and the Adamson Act, which granted railroad workers the eight-hour workday—the first time private workers' hours came under federal regulations. The courts eventually undercut some of labor's legislative victories: they severely weakened the labor provisions of the Clayton Act and declared the child-labor law unconstitutional. Still, Wilson's accommodation of labor was a dramatic step and responded to both the growing power of the AFL and the mass insurgencies represented by the Socialist party, the IWW, and other radical unionists.

Wilson also expanded the government's economic role. He set up the Federal Reserve System (1913), which reestablished a central banking system, and the Federal Trade Commission (1914), which was charged with preventing corporate attempts to inhibit competition. These efforts continued a trend begun a decade earlier under Roosevelt, of concentrating federal power in the executive branch and creating a large administrative bureaucracy to mediate conflicting social and economic pressures. In that sense, Wilson's New Freedom turned out to look a lot like Roosevelt's New Nationalism. As before, however, businessmen were often able to capture control of the regulatory process. Under the Federal Reserve Act of 1913, bankers dominated the regulation of the nation's currency and credit systems, controlling the boards of the regional Federal Reserve banks and shaping the policies of the Federal Reserve Board.

Conclusion: Toward the Modern State

Progressivism responded to the economic, social, and political dislocations that accompanied industrial capitalism's dramatic growth during the Gilded Age: rapid technological change; intense and episodic conflict

between capital and labor; the influx of enormous numbers of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America; and the growing national and international reach of American capitalism. Each of these problems posed a special challenge to older American ideals of individual independence and equality.

Progressivism looked to an active government to blunt the worst of capitalism's economic and social problems. Working people, in coalition with socialists, radicals, and feminists, joined in progressive reform struggles, helping to win passage of prolabor legislation, especially the federal Clayton Act. These reforms helped lay the foundation for our modern notion of government and were among progressivism's most lasting contributions to American political life.

But by the time war broke out in Europe in 1914, the central role that many progressives desired for government had been only partially realized: federal, state, and local laws minimally regulated the economy and industrial relations while extending limited protections to consumers and women and children. Assembling the cross-class coalition that made progressive reforms possible had involved significant compromises. Only a relatively small number of working people—those who were organized into skilled-craft unions and those working in industries covered by limited factory reforms—fully benefited from the passage of progressive legislation. Many others—unskilled and manual laborers, domestic servants, agricultural wageworkers, and sharecroppers—remained outside progressivism's protective sphere.

African Americans experienced the Progressive era quite literally as a tightening noose: the federal government repeatedly ignored the wanton lynching of hundreds of African Americans in the South. At the same time, the modest political and economic gains these Americans had made during Reconstruction were rolled back in a flood of Progressive era disfranchisement laws and the purging of African Americans from federal jobs by the Wilson administration. Women had been central to the movements that made up progressivism and had succeeded in expanding their public role in American life. Yet their most important demand—for the right to vote—remained stalled as the United States entered World War I.

Despite these very real limitations, progressivism represented a watershed that marked the beginning of a new relationship between working people and the government. The era's limited

Eight-Hour Victory
Maurice Becker in the radical monthly *The Masses* celebrated the passage of the Adamson Act in 1916, which specified an eight-hour workday (with additional pay for overtime labor) for employees of railroads engaged in interstate commerce.
Maurice Becker, *The Masses*, November 1916 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

reforms inaugurated a period of governmental involvement in economic and social affairs that would intensify in coming decades. As a result, working people would look increasingly to government to ameliorate the worst excesses of industrial capitalism. Progressivism set the terms of this new relationship, as working people's experiences in their struggle for a better life were now linked inextricably to national political, economic, and social developments.

The Years in Review

1889

- Jane Addams establishes Hull House.

1890

- Two major factions join to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

1901

- The Socialist Party is founded by the merger of several socialist groups; party membership will peak in 1912 at 118,000 members.
- Leon Czolgosz assassinates William McKinley; Theodore Roosevelt becomes president.

1902

- One hundred forty thousand anthracite coal miners strike for an eight-hour day; Roosevelt convinces the mine owners to accept arbitration.

1903

- The Women's Trade Union League is founded by a coalition of working-class and elite women.
- Teddy bears, modeled on Roosevelt's hunting exploits, become popular toys.

1904

- The Republican candidate, Theodore Roosevelt, wins the presidential election, defeating Democrat Alton B. Parker and Socialist Eugene V. Debs.

1905

- The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is founded to abolish the wage system.

1906

- The Hepburn Act enables the previously weak Interstate Commerce Commission to regulate railroad rates.
- Congress passes the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act following the publication of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*.

- Roosevelt issues an executive order calling for "simplified spelling," a typical "scientific" reform of the Progressive era.

1907

- A financial panic, which results from irresponsible speculation and industrial overproduction, brings a minor depression after the general prosperity of the early 1900s.
- The U.S. Justice Department wins an antitrust case against Standard Oil.

1908

- In *Muller v. Oregon,* the U.S. Supreme Court upholds an Oregon law limiting women's work to ten hours a day in certain kinds of businesses.
- The Republican candidate, William Howard Taft, defeats Democrat William Jennings Bryan and Socialist Eugene V. Debs in the presidential election.

1909

- In the Uprising of the Twenty Thousand, garment strikes lead to reduced working hours, improved conditions, and a system for future arbitration.
- The IWW leads a successful strike of immigrant steel workers in McKees, Pennsylvania, and free speech campaigns in western cities.
- President Taft signs the Payne-Aldrich protective tariff, which lowered some tariffs but did not significantly reform protective tariffs.

1910

- Thousands of garment workers strike in New York and Chicago, leading to major union victories in the clothing industry.
- The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is formally established.
- Socialist Party candidates win hundred of seats in local elections.

1911

- The Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire leaves 146 workers dead because of faulty fire escapes and intentionally blocked exit routes; public outcry leads to factory safety and health reforms.
- A coal mine explosion outside of Birmingham, Alabama, kills 128 convict miners.

1912

- Democrat Woodrow Wilson wins the presidential election, defeating Theodore Roosevelt (candidate of new Progressive Party), Republican William Howard Taft, and Socialist Eugene V. Debs.

- The IWW organizes the successful Lawrence, Massachusetts ("Bread and Roses"), textile strike.
- The IWW meets with defeat in a silk workers' strike in Paterson, New Jersey.
- Thirty-eight states pass child-labor laws, and twenty-eight states set maximum hours for women workers.
- The Department of Labor creates a Children's Bureau to monitor child labor.

1913

- The Sixteenth Amendment (income tax) is adopted.
- The Seventeenth Amendment (direct election of U.S. senators) is adopted.

1914

- Women in eleven states—most in the West—and the territory of Alaska have the right to vote in state, local, and school board elections.
- The Federal Reserve Act is passed—the first comprehensive reorganization of the banking system since the Civil War.
- World War I breaks out in Europe.
- The Clayton Antitrust Act, labor's "Magna Carta," is passed; it exempts unions from antitrust laws and limits the use of injunctions against labor.
- Troops attack a strikers' tent camp in Colorado, killing sixteen people, including twelve children, in what will become known as the Ludlow Massacre.

1915

- The report of the Commission on Industrial Relations asserts that poor working conditions, autocratic business management, and the concentration of wealth led to labor violence.

1916

- Congress passes the first federal child-labor law, the Keating-Owen bill.
- Congress passes the Adamson Act, which grants railroad workers the eight-hour day.

1919

- The Eighteenth Amendment (Prohibition) is adopted.

1920

- The Nineteenth Amendment (woman suffrage) is adopted.

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