

22 The Progressive Era

1890–1920

Women in Cleveland, Ohio, organize to turn out the vote in 1912. They lost this particular fight: the Nineteenth Amendment, accomplishing their goal nationally, was not ratified until 1920.



>> An American Story

BURNED ALIVE IN THE CITY

Quitting time, March 25, 1911. The fire started in the lofts as the workers were leaving their sewing machines at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City. In minutes the top stories of the Asch building were ablaze. Terrified seamstresses groped through the black smoke, only to find exits locked or clogged with bodies. All but one of the few working fire escapes collapsed.

When the fire trucks arrived, firefighters discovered that their ladders could not reach the top stories. “Spectators saw again and again pitiable companionships formed in the instant of death—girls who placed their arms around each other as they leaped,” read one news story. Their bodies hit the sidewalk with a sickening thud or were spiked on the iron guard rails. One hundred forty-six people died, most of them young immigrant women.

As many as 80,000 New Yorkers marched up Fifth Avenue in the rain. At the Metropolitan Opera House, union leader Rose Schneiderman told a rally: “This is not the first time that girls have been burned alive in the city.” Over the next four years the recommendations of a special state commission produced 56 state laws regulating fire safety, hours, machinery, and home-based work. They amounted to the most far-reaching labor code in the country.

The Triangle fire shocked the nation and underscored a growing crisis: modern industrial society had created profound strains, widespread misery, and deep class divisions. Corporations grew to unimagined size, bought and sold legislators, dictated the terms of their own profit. Men, women, and children worked around the clock in dangerous factories for barely living wages. In cities across America, tenement-bred disease took innocent lives, criminals threatened people and property, saloons tied the working poor to dishonest political bosses. Even among the middle class, mild but persistent inflation was shrinking their wallets. “It was a world of greed,” concluded one worker; “the human being didn’t mean anything.”

Human beings did mean something to followers of an influential drive for reform sweeping the country. Progressivism had emerged in the mid-1890s and lasted through World War I. The campaign sprang from many impulses, mixing a liberal concern



▲ In 1911 the fiery deaths of 146 people at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company shocked the nation. Firefighters arrived within minutes, but their ladders could not reach the top stories. Trapped by locked doors, those who failed to escape perished within or leaped to their deaths on the streets below. Following the horrifying episode, New York enacted the most ambitious labor code in the country.

for the poor and working class with conservative efforts to stabilize business and avoid class warfare. Above all, progressives wanted to soften the harsh impact of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration.

Progressivism began in the cities, where those forces converged. It was organized by an angry, idealistic middle class and percolated up from neighborhoods to city halls, state capitals, and, finally, Washington, D.C. Though usually pursued through politics, the goals of progressives were broadly social—to create a “good society” where people could live decently, harmoniously, and prosperously, along middle-class guidelines.

Unlike earlier reformers, progressives saw government as a protector,

not an oppressor. Only government possessed the resources for the broad-based reforms they sought. Progressivism spawned the modern activist state, with its capacity to regulate the economy and manage society. And because American society had become so interdependent, progressivism became the first nationwide reform campaign. No political party monopolized it. It flowered in the presidencies of Republican Theodore Roosevelt and Democrat Woodrow Wilson. In 1912 it even spawned its own party, the Progressive, or “Bull Moose,” Party. By then progressivism had filtered well beyond politics into every realm of American life. <<

What’s to Come

444 The Roots of Progressive Reform

446 The Search for the Good Society

450 Controlling the Masses

- 453 The Politics of Municipal and State Reform
- 455 Progressivism Goes to Washington
- 460 Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality

THE ROOTS OF PROGRESSIVE REFORM

Families turned from their homes; an army of unemployed on the roads; hunger, strikes, and bloody violence across the country—the wrenching depression of 1893 forced Americans to take stock of their new industrial order. They saw a society increasingly divided by class, race, and ethnicity. They also found common complaints that cut across those same lines. If streetcar companies raised fares while service deteriorated, if food processors doctored their canned goods with harmful additives, if politicians skimmed money from the public till, everyone suffered.

The result was not a coherent progressive movement but a set of loosely connected reforms: efficient government and honest politics; greater regulation of business and a more orderly economy; social justice for the urban poor and social welfare to protect children, women, workers, and consumers. Some progressives looked to purify society by outlawing alcohol and drugs, stamping out prostitution and slums, and restricting the flood of new immigrants. All tried to make business and government more responsive to the democratic will of the people.

Paternalistic by nature, progressives often imposed their solutions no matter what the poor or oppressed saw as their own best interests. Progressives acted partly out of nostalgia. They wanted to redeem such traditional American values as democracy, individual opportunity, and public service. And finally progressives sought to save the nation from a second civil war born of class conflict.

If their ends were traditional, their means were modern. They used the systems and methods of the new industrial order—the latest techniques of organization, management, and science—to fight its excesses.

Progressive Beliefs >> Progressives were moderate modernizers. They accepted the

American system as sound, in need of only adjustment. Many drew on Darwinian theories of evolution to buttress this gradual approach to change. With its notion of slowly changing species, evolution undermined the acceptance of fixed principles that guided social thought in the so-called Gilded Age, the period roughly from 1860 to 1900. Progressives saw an evolving landscape of shifting values. They denied the commonly held doctrine of inborn sinfulness and instead saw people as having a greater potential for good than evil.

Progressives still had to explain the existence of evil and wrongdoing. Most agreed that human beings were “largely, if not wholly, products of society or environment.” People went wrong, wrote one progressive, because of “what happens to them.” If what happened to “bad people” could be changed, the human potential for good could be released.

With an eye to results, progressives asked not “Is it true?” but “Does it work?” Philosopher Charles Peirce called this new way of thinking “**pragmatism.**” Wil-

pragmatism philosophical movement that stressed the visible, real-world results of ideas.

liam James, a Harvard psychologist, became its most famous popularizer. For James, pragmatism meant “looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts.”

The Pragmatic Approach >> Pragmatism led educators, social scientists, and lawyers to adopt new approaches to reform. John Dewey, the master educator



Opinion

Progressives claimed that their reforms protected “good people” from “bad interests.” Did they?

of the Progressive Era, believed that environment shaped the patterns of human thought. Instead of demanding mindless memorization of abstract and unconnected facts, Dewey tried to “make each one of our schools an embryonic community life.” At his School of Pedagogy, founded in 1896, he let students unbolt their desks from the floor, move about, and learn by doing in cooperation with others so that they could train for real life.

Psychologist John B. Watson believed that human behavior could be shaped at will. Give him control of an infant’s world from birth, Watson boasted, “and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any specialist I might select, doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant, chief, and yes, even beggar—man and thief.” **Behaviorism** swept the social sciences and, later, advertising, where Watson himself eventually landed.

behaviorism school of psychology, founded by John Watson, that measures human behavior, believes it can be shaped, and discounts emotion as subjective.

Lawyers and legal theorists applied their own blend of pragmatism and behaviorism. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., appointed to the Supreme Court in 1902, rejected the idea that the traditions of law were constant and universal. Law was a living organism to be interpreted according to experience and the needs of a changing society.

This environmental view of the law, known as “**sociological jurisprudence**,” found a skilled practitioner in Louis Brandeis. Shaken by the brutal suppression of the Homestead steel strike of 1892, Brandeis quit his corporate practice and proclaimed himself the “people’s lawyer.” The law must “guide by the light of reason,” he wrote, which meant bringing everyday life to bear in any court case. When laundry owner Curt Muller challenged an Oregon law limiting his laundresses to a 10-hour workday, Brandeis defended the statute before the Supreme Court in 1908. His famous brief contained 102 pages describing the damaging effects of long hours on workingwomen and only 15 pages of legal precedents. In *Muller v. Oregon*, the Supreme Court upheld Oregon’s right to limit the working hours of laborers and thus legitimized the “Brandeis Brief.”

sociological jurisprudence legal theory that emphasizes the importance not merely of precedent but of contemporary social context in interpreting the law.

The Progressive Method >> Seeing the nation torn by conflict, progressives tried to restore a sense of community through the ideal of a single public interest. Christian ethics were their guide, applied after using the latest scientific methods to gather and analyze data about a social problem. The modern corporation furnished an appealing model for organization. Like corporate executives, progressives relied on careful

management, coordinated systems, and specialized bureaucracies to carry out reforms.

Between 1902 and 1912 a new breed of journalists provided the necessary evidence and fired public indignation. They investigated wrongdoers, named them in print, and described their misdeeds in vivid detail. Most exposés began as articles in mass-circulation magazines such as *McClure’s*. The magazine stirred controversy (and boosted circulation) when publisher Samuel McClure sent reporter Lincoln Steffens to uncover the crooked ties between business and politics. *McClure’s* published “Tweed Days in St. Louis,” the first of a series of investigative articles, in October 1902. Soon a full-blown literature of exposure was covering every ill from unsafe food to child labor.

A disgusted Theodore Roosevelt thought the new reporters had gone too far and called them “muckrakers,” after the man who raked up filth in the seventeenth-century classic *Pilgrim’s Progress*. But by documenting dishonesty and blight, muckrakers not only aroused people but also educated them. No broad reform movement of American institutions would have taken place without them.

To move beyond exposure to solutions, progressives stressed volunteerism and collective action. They drew on the organizational impulse that seemed everywhere to be bringing people together in new interest groups. Between 1890 and 1920 nearly 400 organizations were founded, many to combat the ills of industrial society. Some, like the National Consumers League, grew out of efforts to promote general causes—in this case, protecting consumers and workers from exploitation. Others, such as the National Tuberculosis Association, aimed at a specific problem.

When voluntary action failed, progressives looked to government to protect the public welfare. They mistrusted legislators, who might be controlled by corporate interests or political machines and were in any case too numerous to monitor. So they strengthened the executive branch by increasing the power of individual mayors, governors, and presidents. Then they watched those executives carefully.

Progressives also drew on the expertise of the newly professionalized middle class. Doctors, engineers, psychiatrists, and city planners mounted campaigns to stamp out venereal disease and dysentery, to reform prisons and asylums, and to beautify cities. At local, state, and federal levels, new agencies and commissions staffed by experts began to investigate and regulate lobbyists, insurance and railroad companies, public health, even government itself.

✓ REVIEW

What ills did progressives see in society, what solutions did they propose, and what ideas shaped those solutions?

THE SEARCH FOR THE GOOD SOCIETY

If progressivism ended in politics, it began with social reform: the need to reach out, to do something to bring the “good society” a step closer. Ellen Richards had just such ends in mind in 1890 when she opened the New England Kitchen in downtown Boston. Richards, a chemist and home economist, designed the kitchen to sell cheap, wholesome food to the working poor. For a few pennies, customers could choose from a nutritious menu, every dish of which had been tested in Richards’s laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The New England Kitchen promoted social as well as nutritional reform. Women freed from the drudgery of cooking could seek gainful employment. And as a “household experiment station” and center for dietary information, the kitchen tried to educate the poor and Americanize immigrants by showing them how the middle class prepared meals.

In the end the New England Kitchen served more as an inexpensive eatery for middle-class workingwomen and students than as a resource for the poor or an agency of Americanization. Still, Ellen Richards’s experiment reflected a pattern typical of progressive social reform: the mix of professionalism with uplift; socially conscious women entering the public arena; the hope of creating a better world aligned with middle-class values.

Poverty in a New Light >> During the 1890s crime reporter and photographer Jacob Riis introduced middle-class audiences to urban poverty. Writing in vivid detail in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), he brought readers into the teeming tenement. Accompanying his text were shocking photos of poverty-stricken Americans—Riis’s “other half.” He used them to tell a moralistic story, as the earlier English novelist Charles Dickens had used his melodramatic tales to attack the abuses of industrialism. People began to see poverty in a new, more sympathetic light—the fault less of the individual than of social conditions.

A haunting naturalism in fiction and painting followed Riis’s gritty photographic essays. In *McTeague* (1899) and *Sister Carrie* (1900), novelists Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser spun dark tales of city dwellers struggling to keep body and soul intact. The “Ashcan school” painted urban life in all its grimy realism. Photographer Alfred Stieglitz and painters



▲ Jacob Riis, the Danish-born crime reporter and photographer, stalked the streets of New York, meticulously recording the squalor in which many slum-dwellers lived. Here, one photograph exposes a cramped tenement room “not thirteen feet either way,” housing “twelve men and women” for a night’s lodging at “5 cents a spot.” The first edition of *How the Other Half Lives* used only engravings made from photographs; later editions added the detail and poignancy of the actual photos.

John Sloan and George Bellows chose slums, tenements, and dirty streets as subjects. Poverty began to look less ominous and more heartrending.

A new profession—social work—proceeded from this new view of poverty. Social work developed out of the old settlement house movement (page 403). Like the physicians from whom they drew inspiration, social workers studied hard data to diagnose the problems of their “clients” and worked with them to solve their problems. A social worker’s “differential casework” attempted to treat individuals case by case, each according to the way environment shaped the client.

Expanding the “Woman’s Sphere” >> Progressive social reform attracted a great many women seeking what Jane Addams called “the larger life” of public affairs. In the late nineteenth century, women found that protecting their traditional sphere of home and family forced them to move beyond it. Bringing up children, making meals, keeping house, and caring for the sick now involved community decisions about schools, the food supply, public health, and countless other matters.

Many middle- and upper-middle-class women received their first taste of public life from women’s organizations, including mothers’ clubs, temperance societies, and church groups. By the turn of the century some 500 women’s clubs boasted over 160,000 members.

Through the General Federation of Women's Clubs, they funded libraries and hospitals and supported schools, settlement houses, compulsory education, and child labor laws. Eventually they reached outside the home and family to endorse such controversial causes as woman suffrage and unionization. To that list the National Association of Colored Women added the special concerns of African Americans, none more urgent than the fight against lynching.

The dawn of the century saw the rise of a new generation of women. Longer lived, better educated, and less often married than their mothers, they were also willing to pursue professional careers for fulfillment. Usually they turned to professions that involved the traditional female role of nurturer—nursing, library work, teaching, and settlement house work.

Custom and prejudice still restricted women. The faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for example, refused to allow Ellen Richards to pursue a doctorate. Instead, they hired her to run the gender-segregated “Woman’s Laboratory” for training public school teachers. At the turn of the century only about 1,500 female lawyers practiced in the United States, and in 1910 women made up barely 6 percent of licensed physicians.

Despite the often bitter opposition of families, some feminists tried to destroy the boundaries of the woman’s sphere. In *Women and Economics* (1898), Charlotte Perkins Gilman condemned the conventions of womanhood—femininity, marriage, maternity, domesticity—as enslaving and obsolete. She argued for a radically restructured society with large apartment houses, communal arrangements for child rearing and housekeeping, and cooperative kitchens to free women from economic dependence on men.

Margaret Sanger sought to free women from chronic pregnancy. Sanger, a visiting nurse on the Lower East Side of New York, had seen too many poor women overburdened with children, pregnant year after year and sometimes dying through self-induced abortions. The consequences were crippling. “Women cannot be on equal footing with men until they have complete control over their reproductive functions,” she argued. She became a crusader for what she called “birth control.” By distributing information on contraception, she hoped to free women from unwanted pregnancies and illegal “back-alley” abortions that claimed lives. In 1916 Sanger founded the first family planning and birth control clinic in the country. Nine days later, she was arrested and afterward convicted of distributing contraceptive information, then considered a crime.

Single or married, militant or moderate, professional or lay, white or black, more and more middle-class urban women thus became “social housekeepers.” From their own homes they turned to the homes of their neighbors and from there to all of society.



▲ Middle-class women found a productive vehicle for social and political action in the General Federation of Women's Clubs. The clubs also gave many women the opportunity to organize and lead and served as a launchpad for female reformers such as Jane Addams, Julia Ward Howe, and Julia Lathrop. “When I want anything in Boston remedied,” said reformer Edward Everett Hale, “I go down to the New England Women’s Club.” Here a group of women proudly displays the banner of the Washington, D.C., branch.

Social Welfare >> In the “bigger family of the city,” as one woman reformer called it, settlement house workers found that they alone could not care for the welfare of the poor. If industrial America, with its sooty factories and overcrowded slums, was to be transformed into the good society, individual acts of charity would have to be supplemented by government. Laws had to be passed and agencies created to promote social welfare, including improved housing, workplaces, parks, and playgrounds, the abolition of child labor, and the enactment of eight-hour-day laws for workingwomen.

By 1910 the more than 400 settlement houses across the nation had organized into a loose affiliation ready to help fashion government policy. With greater experience than men in the field, women led the way. Julia Lathrop, a Vassar College graduate, spent 20 years at Jane Addams’s Hull House before becoming the first head of the new federal Children’s Bureau in 1912. By then two-thirds of the states had adopted some child

witness

Jane Addams Finds a Child Sick of Candy

"Our very first Christmas at Hull-House, when we as yet knew nothing of child labor, a number of little girls refused the candy which was offered them as part of the Christmas good cheer, saying simply that they 'worked in a candy factory and could not bear the sight of it.' We discovered that for six weeks they had worked from seven in the morning until nine at night, and they were exhausted as well as satiated."

— Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910)



labor legislation, although loopholes exempted countless youngsters from coverage. Under Lathrop's leadership, Congress passed the Keating-Owen Act (1916), forbidding goods manufactured by children to cross state lines.¹

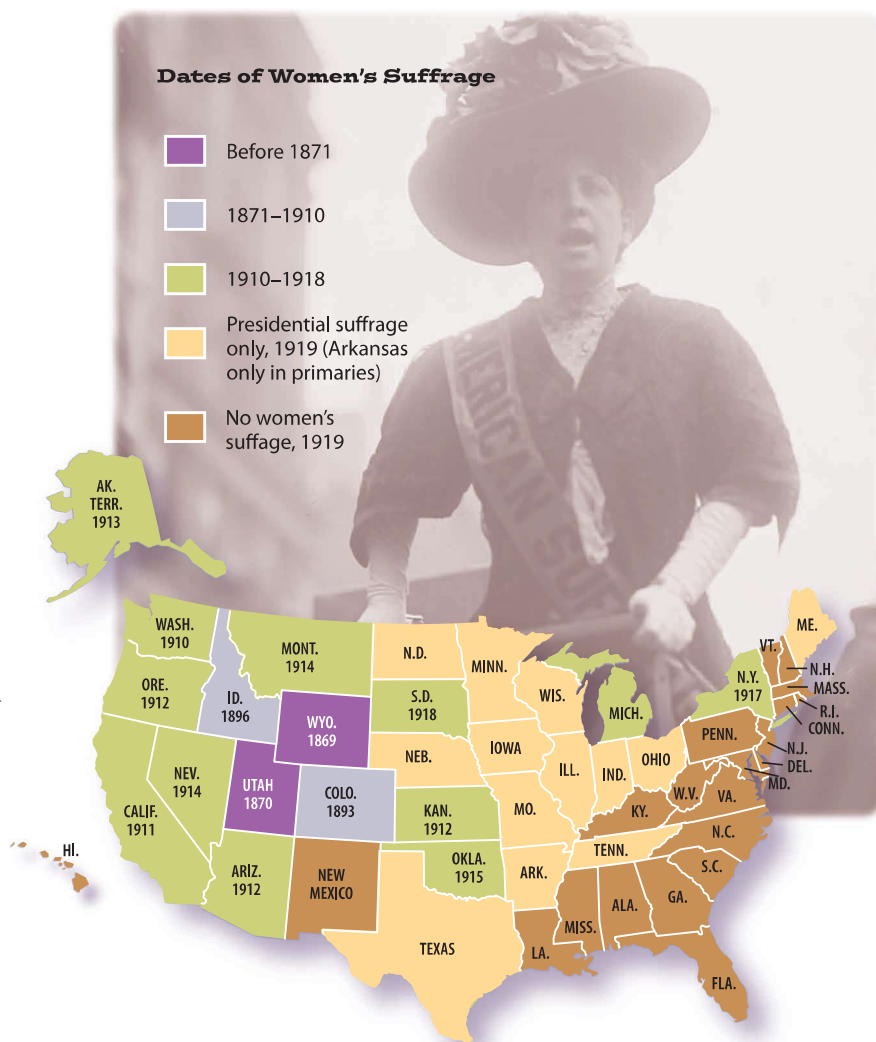
Florence Kelley, who had also worked at Hull House, spearheaded a similar campaign in Illinois to protect women workers by limiting their workday to eight hours. As general secretary of the National Consumers' League, she also organized boycotts of companies that treated employees inhumanely. Eventually, most states enacted laws restricting the number of hours women could work.

¹The Supreme Court struck down the law in 1918 as an improper regulation of local labor; nonetheless, it focused greater attention on the abuses of child labor.

MAP 22.1: WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

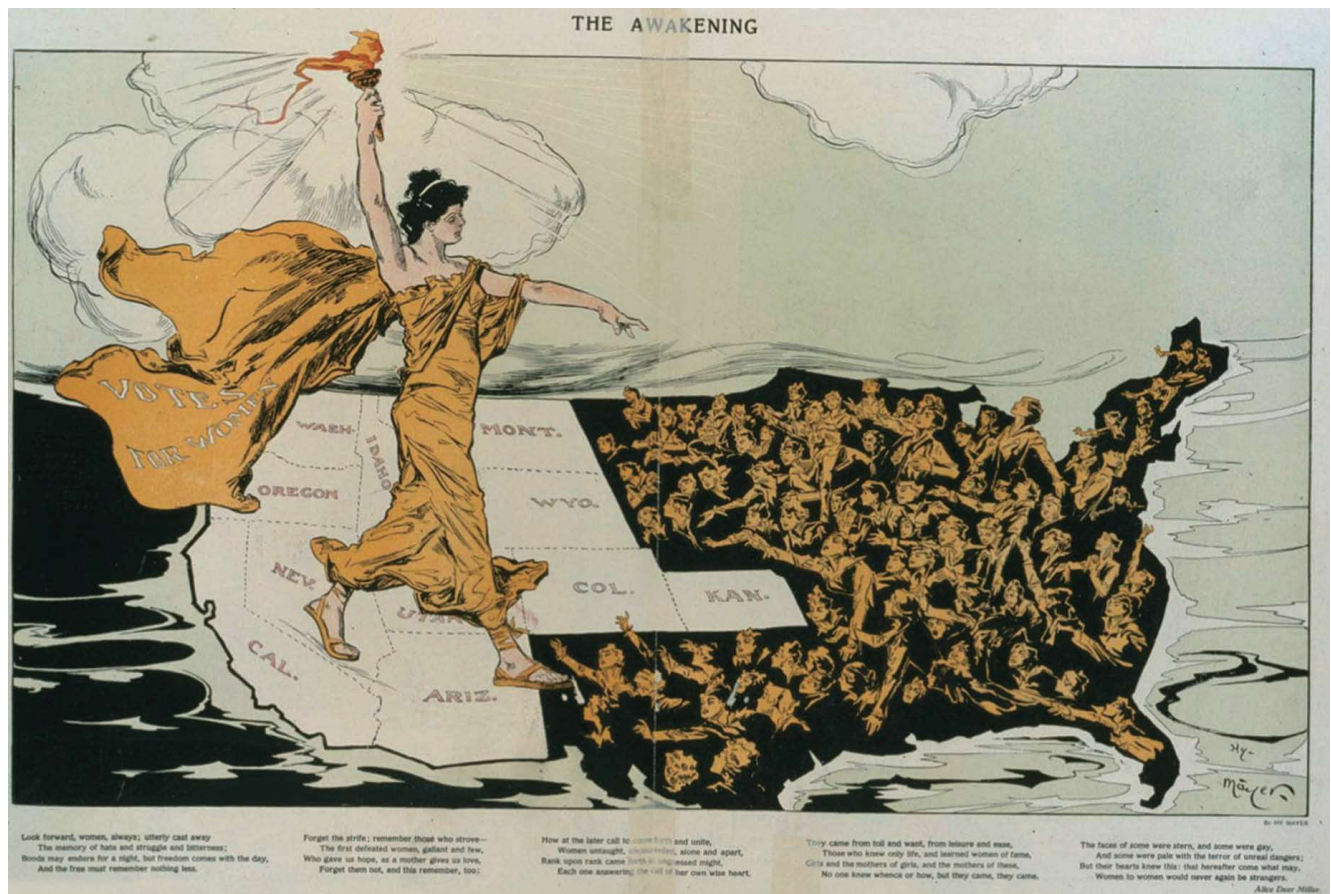
Western states were the first to grant women the right to vote. Sparsely populated and more egalitarian than the rest of the nation, the West was used to women participating fully in settlement and work. Other sections of the country, notably the Midwest, granted women partial suffrage, which included voting for school boards and taxes. Suffragists encountered the most intractable resistance in the South, where rigid codes of social conduct elevated women symbolically but shackled them practically.

Which state was the first to allow for women's suffrage?



Woman Suffrage >> Ever since the conference for women's rights held at Seneca Falls in 1848, women reformers had pressed for the right to vote on the grounds of simple justice and equal opportunity. They adopted the slogan "woman suffrage" to emphasize the solidarity of women. Progressives embraced woman suffrage by stressing what they saw as the practical results of protecting the home and increasing the voting power of native-born whites. The "purer sensibilities" of women—an ideal held by conservatives and progressives alike—also would help cleanse the political process of selfishness and corruption.

The suffrage movement benefited, too, from new leadership. In 1900 Carrie Chapman Catt became president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, founded by Susan B.



^ “The Awakening,” a 1915 cartoon, offers a graphic and emotion-laden map of woman suffrage. Here, a torch-bearing woman in classical dress carries the franchise to the eastern states, where desperate women eagerly reach out.

Anthony in 1890. Politically astute and a skilled organizer, Catt mapped a grassroots strategy of education and persuasion from state to state. She called it “the winning plan.” As Map 22.1 shows, victories came first in the West, where women and men had already forged a more equal partnership to overcome the hardships of frontier life. By 1914, 10 western states (and Kansas) had granted women the vote in state elections, as Illinois had in presidential elections.

The slow pace of progress drove some suffragists to militancy. The shift in tactics had its origins abroad. In England the campaign for woman suffrage had peaked after 1900, when Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters turned to violence to make their point that women should be given the right to vote. They and their followers chained themselves to the visitors’ gallery in the House of Commons and slashed paintings in museums. They smashed the windows of department stores, broke up political meetings, even burned the houses of members of Parliament.

British authorities arrested the suffragists and threw them in jail, Emmeline Pankhurst included. When the women went on hunger strikes in prison, wardens tied them down, held their mouths open with

wooden clamps, and fed them by force through tubes placed down their throats and noses. Rather than permit the protesters to die as martyrs, Parliament passed the Cat and Mouse Act, a statute of doubtful legality that allowed officials to release starving prisoners, then rearrest them once they returned to health.

Among the British suffragists was a small American with large, determined eyes. In 1907, barely out of her teens, Alice Paul had gone to England to join the suffrage crusade. When asked why she had enlisted, she recalled her Quaker upbringing. “One of their principles . . . is equality of the sexes,” she explained. Paul marched arm in arm with British suffragists through the streets of London and more than once was imprisoned and refused to eat.

Three years later, in 1913, Paul organized 5,000 women to parade in protest at President Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration. Wilson himself was skeptical of women voting and favored a state-by-state approach to the issue. Half a million people watched as a near-riot ensued. Paul and other suffragists were hauled to jail, stripped naked, and thrown into cells with prostitutes.

In 1914 Paul broke with the more moderate National American Woman Suffrage Association and formed the

Congressional Union, dedicated to enacting national woman suffrage through a constitutional amendment. She soon allied her organization with western women voters in the militant National Woman's Party in 1917. On October 20, 1917, Paul was arrested for protesting in favor of a constitutional amendment at the gates of the White House. She received a seven-month sentence. Guards dragged her off to a cell block in the Washington jail, where she and others refused to eat. Prison officials declared her insane, but a public outcry over her treatment soon led to her release.

Such repression only widened public support for woman suffrage in the United States and elsewhere. So did the contributions of women to the First World War at home and abroad (see Chapter 23). In the wake of the war, Great Britain granted women (over age 30) the right to vote in 1918, Germany and Austria in 1919, and the United States in 1920 through the Nineteenth Amendment. Overnight the number of eligible voters in the country doubled.

✓ REVIEW

Why were women so deeply involved in the “search for the good society,” and what were some of their chief accomplishments?

CONTROLLING THE MASSES

“Observe immigrants,” wrote one American in 1912. “You are struck by the fact that from ten to twenty percent are hirsute, low-browed, big-faced persons of obviously low mentality.” The writer was neither an uneducated fanatic nor a stern opponent of change. He was Professor Edward A. Ross, a progressive who prided himself on his scientific study of sociology.

Faced with the chaos of urban life, more than a few progressives feared they were losing control of their country. Saloons and dance halls lured youngsters and impoverished laborers; prostitutes walked the streets; vulgar amusements pandered to the uneducated. And worse—strange Old World cultures clashed with “all-American” customs, and races jostled uneasily. The city challenged middle-class reformers to convert this riot of diversity into a more uniform society. To maintain control they sometimes moved beyond education and regulation and sought restrictive laws to control the new masses.

Stemming the Immigrant Tide >> A rising tide of new immigrants with darker complexions and non-Protestant religions from southern and eastern

Europe especially chilled native-born Americans, including progressive reformers anxious over the changing ethnic makeup of the country. In northern cities, progressives often succeeded in reducing the voting power of these new immigrants by increasing residency requirements.

The now-discredited science of “eugenics” lent respectability to the idea that the newcomers were biologically inferior. Eugenicists believed that heredity determined everything and advocated selective breeding for human improvement. By 1914 magazine articles discussed eugenics more than slums, tenements, and living standards combined. In *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), amateur zoologist Madison Grant helped to popularize the notion that the “lesser breeds” threatened to “mongrelize” America. So powerful was the pull of eugenics that it captured the support of some progressives, including birth control advocate Margaret Sanger, who saw contraception as a way of reducing birthrates among those deemed physically and mentally “unfit.” It also helped to promote the passage of forced sterilization laws in 30 states.

Most progressives believed in the shaping power of environment and so favored either assimilating immigrants into American society or restricting their entry into the country. Jane Addams, for one, stressed the “gifts” immigrants brought: folk rituals, dances, music, and handicrafts. With characteristic paternalism, she and other reformers hoped to “Americanize” the foreign-born (the term had been newly coined) by teaching them middle-class ways. Education was one key. Progressive educator Peter Roberts, for example, developed a lesson plan for the Young Men's Christian Association that taught immigrants how to dress, tip, buy groceries, and vote.

Less tolerant citizens (often native-born and white) sought to restrict immigration as a way of reasserting control and achieving social harmony. Usually not progressives themselves, they employed progressive methods of organization, investigation, education, and legislation. Active since the 1890s, the Immigration Restriction League pressed Congress in 1907 to require a literacy test for admission into the United States. Presidents Taft and Wilson vetoed it, but Congress overrode Wilson's second veto in 1917 as war fever raised fears of foreigners to a new peak.

The Curse of Demon Rum >>> Tied closely to concern over immigrants, many of whom came from drinking cultures, was an attack on saloons. Part of a broader crusade to clean up cities, the antisaloon campaign drew strength from the century-old drive to lessen the consumption of alcohol. Women made up a disproportionate number of alcohol reformers. In some ways the temperance movement reflected their growing campaign to storm male domains, in this

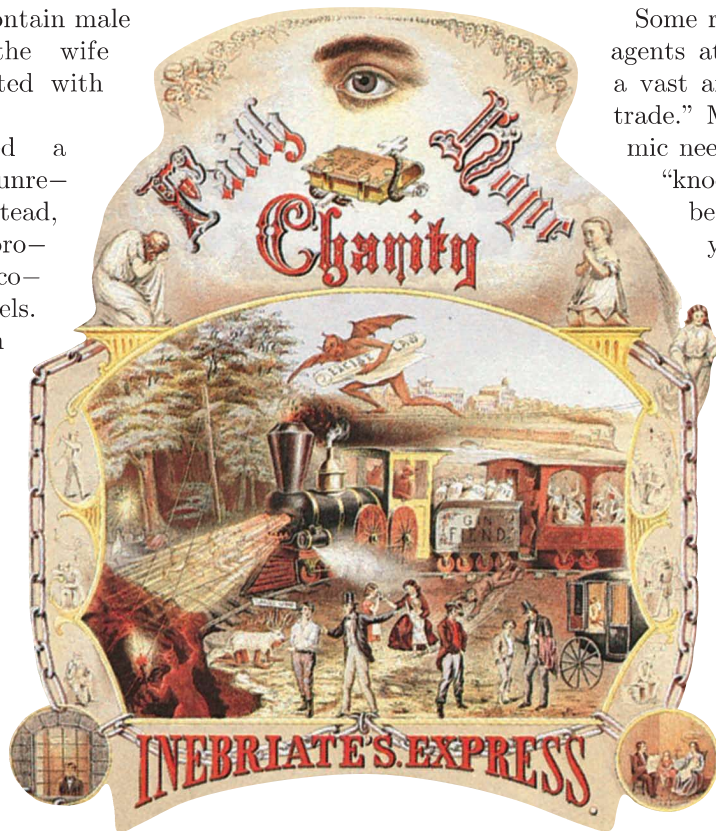
case the saloon, and to contain male violence, particularly the wife and child abuse associated with drinking.

Reformers considered a national ban on drinking unrealistic and intrusive. Instead, they concentrated on prohibiting the sale of alcohol at local and state levels. Led by the Anti-Saloon League (1893), a massive publicity campaign bombarded citizens with pamphlets and advertisements. Doctors cited scientific evidence linking alcohol to cirrhosis, heart disease, and insanity. Social workers connected drink to the deterioration of the family; employers, to accidents on the job and lost efficiency; and political reformers to corrupt political machines that were often housed in saloons.

By 1917 three out of four Americans lived in dry counties. Nearly two-thirds of the states had adopted laws outlawing the manufacture and sale of alcohol. Not all progressives were prohibitionists, but by curtailing the liquor business those who were breathed a sigh of relief at having taken some of the profit out of human pain and corruption.

Prostitution >> No urban vice worried reformers more than prostitution. In their eyes it was a “social evil” that threatened young city women. The Chicago Vice Commission of 1910 estimated that 5,000 full-time and 10,000 occasional prostitutes plied their trade in the city. Other cities, small and large, reported similar findings.

An unlikely group of reformers united to fight the vice: feminists who wanted husbands to be as chaste as their wives, social hygienists worried about the spread of venereal disease, immigration restrictionists who regarded the growth of prostitution as yet another sign of corrupt newcomers. Progressives condemned prostitution but saw the problem in economic and environmental terms. “Poverty causes prostitution,” concluded the Illinois Vice Commission in 1916.



▲ The “Inebriate’s Express,” loaded with drunken riders, is heading straight for hell. This detail from a chromolithograph, published around 1900, was typical of Victorian-era responses to the problems posed by alcohol. To the all-seeing eye of the omnipotent God, faith, hope, charity, and the Bible are sufficient to cure the problems of drinking.

Some reformers saw more—active agents at work. Rumors spread of a vast and profitable “white slave trade.” Men armed with hypodermic needles and drinks filled with “knockout drops” were said to be drugging and kidnapping young women. Although the average female was hardly in danger of villainous abduction, every city had locked pens where women were held captive and forced into prostitution. By conservative estimates they constituted some 10 percent of all prostitutes.

As real abuses blended with sensationalism, Congress passed the Mann Act (1910), prohibiting the interstate transport of women for immoral purposes. By 1918 reformers succeeded in banning previously tolerated

“red-light” districts in most cities. As with the liquor trade, progressives went after those who made money from misery.

red-light district area in cities reserved for prostitutes. The term, first employed in the United States, resulted from the use of red lights to show that prostitutes were open for business.

“For Whites Only” >> Most progressives paid little attention to the suffering of African Americans. The 1890s had been a low point for black citizens, most of whom still lived in the rural South. Across the region, the lynching of African Americans increased, as did restrictions on black voting and the use of segregated facilities. Signs decreeing “For Whites Only” appeared on drinking fountains and restrooms and in other public places.

A few progressives condemned racial discrimination, but most ignored it—or used it to political advantage. Throughout the South, white progressives and old-guard politicians used the rhetoric of reform to support white supremacy. Such “reformers” won office by promising to disenfranchise African Americans to break the power of corrupt political machines that marshaled the black vote in the South, much as northern machines did with immigrant voters.



Historian's TOOLBOX

Mementos of Murder

Jesse William Stanley

Could this be "Joe"?

Men face the camera without making any effort to mask their faces

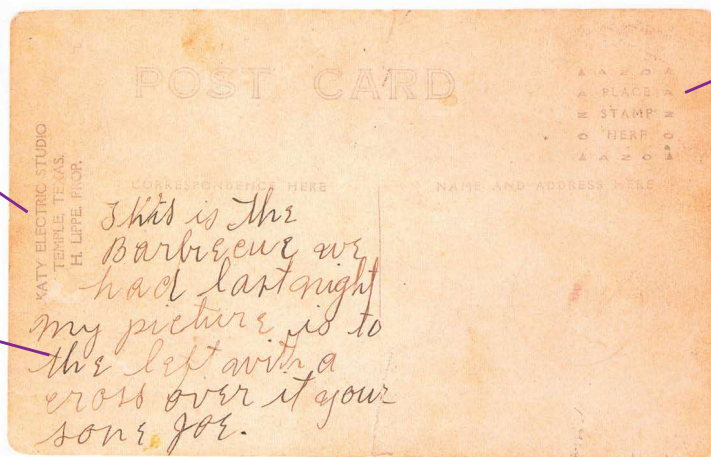
Young boys present



Katy Electric Studio Temple
Texas H. Lippe Prop.

"This is the Barbecue
we had last night[.] My
picture is to the left with
a cross over it[.] your
son, Joe."

No stamp
or postmark
indicating that the
card was sent. Did
"Joe" keep it?



Not all historians need be professionals. Even amateurs can help us see the past in a new light. James Allen described himself as a "picker," rummaging through other people's junk for things he might sell. Postcards hadn't much interested him until he came on one that bore the photograph of a lynching. "It wasn't the corpse that bewildered me but the canine-thin faces of the pack," he recalled. Collected and later published by Allen, such postcards memorializing lynchings were

one segment of a larger industry that flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For a penny in postage the cards might be of hotels or city streets or even just photos of individuals taken by photographers, which could be sent to friends and relatives as souvenirs. But the cards Allen came across over the years were of a different order: grisly mementos of a ritualized murder. The one above—of the lynching and burning of an African American named Jesse William

Stanley in 1915—appears not to have been mailed.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Why might people have their photographs taken for postcards at a lynching and then send the cards to parents and other relatives? What does that tell us about the racial environment in which such events occurred?

Source: James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (2000).

In the face of such discrimination African Americans fought back. After the turn of the century some black critics rejected the accommodation of Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise." Washington's cautious approach counseled African Americans to accept segregation and work their way up the economic ladder by learning a vocational trade such as carpentry or mechanics (pages 429–430). W. E. B. Du Bois, a professor at Atlanta University, leveled the most stinging attack in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). He saw no benefit for African Americans in sacrificing intellectual growth for narrow vocational training. Nor was he willing to abide the humiliating stigma that came from the discriminatory caste system of the South. A better future would come only if black citizens struggled politically to achieve suffrage and equal rights.

Instead of exhorting African Americans to pull themselves up slowly from the bottom, Du Bois called on the "talented tenth," a cultured black vanguard, to blaze a trail of protest against segregation, disenfranchisement, and discrimination. In 1905 he founded the Niagara movement for political and economic equality. Four years later, in 1909, a coalition of blacks and white reformers transformed the Niagara movement into the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) after an ugly race riot rocked Springfield, the capital of Illinois, in 1908.

As with other progressive organizations, its membership was largely limited to the middle class. It worked to extend the principles of tolerance and equal opportunity in a color-blind fashion by mounting legal challenges to segregation and bigotry and pressing for protective legislation. By 1919 the NAACP had some 90,000 members in 300 branches across the country. Accommodation was giving way to new combative organizations and new forms of protest.

✓ REVIEW

Which "masses" did progressives want to control, why did they want to control them, and what instruments did they employ?

THE POLITICS OF MUNICIPAL AND STATE REFORM

Reform the system. In the end, so many urban problems came back to overhauling government. Jane Addams learned as much outside the doors of her beloved Hull House in Chicago. For months during the early 1890s, garbage had piled up in the streets. The

filth and stench drove Addams and her fellow workers to city hall in protest—700 times in one summer—but to no avail. In Chicago, as elsewhere, a corrupt band of city bosses made garbage collection a plum to be awarded to the company that paid the most for it.

In desperation Addams submitted a bid for garbage removal in the ward. When it was thrown out on a technicality, she won an appointment as garbage inspector. For almost a year she dogged collection carts, but boss politics kept things dirty. So Addams ran candidates in 1896 and 1898 against the local ward boss. They lost, but Addams kept up the fight for honest government and social reform—at city hall, in the Illinois legislature, and finally in Washington. Politics turned out to be the only way to clean things up.

The Reformation of the Cities >> In the smokestack cities of the Midwest, where the frustrations of industrial and agricultural America fed each other, the urban battleground furnished the middle class with the first test of political reform. A series of colorful and independent mayors demonstrated that cities could be run cleanly and humanely without changing the structure of government. Other cities across the country experimented with new forms of governing.

In Detroit, shoe magnate Hazen Pingree turned the mayor's office into an agency of reform when elected in 1889. By the end of his fourth term, Detroit had new parks and public baths, fairer taxes, ownership of the local light plant, and a work-relief program for victims of the depression of 1893. In 1901 Cleveland mayor Tom Johnson launched a similar reform campaign. Before he was through, municipal franchises had been limited to a fraction of their previous 99-year terms, and the city ran the utility company. By 1915 nearly two out of every three cities had copied some form of this "gas and water socialism" to control the runaway prices of utility companies.

Tragedy sometimes dramatized the need to alter the very structure of government. On a hot September night in 1900 a tidal wave from the Gulf of Mexico smashed the port city of Galveston, Texas. The city sank into confusion. Business leaders stepped in with a new charter that replaced the mayor and city council with a powerful commission. Each of five commissioners controlled a municipal department, and together they ran the city. Nearly 400 cities had adopted the plan by 1920. Expert commissioners enhanced efficiency and helped to check party rule in municipal government.

In still other cities, elected officials appointed an outside expert or "city manager" to run things, the first in Staunton, Virginia, in 1908. Within a decade 45 cities had them. At lower levels, experts took charge of services: engineers oversaw utilities; accountants, finances; doctors and nurses, public health; specially trained firefighters and police, the safety of citizens.

Progressivism in the States >>

“Whenever we try to do anything, we run up against the charter,” complained one reform-minded mayor. Charters granted by state governments defined the powers of cities. The rural interests that generally dominated state legislatures rarely gave cities adequate authority to levy taxes, set voting requirements, draw up budgets, or legislate reforms. State legislatures, too, found themselves under the influence of business interests, party machines, and county courthouse rings. Reformers therefore tried to place their candidates where they could do some good: in the governors’ mansions.

State progressivism, like urban reform, enjoyed its earliest success in the Midwest, under the leadership of Robert La Follette of Wisconsin. La Follette first won election to Congress in 1885 by toeing the Republican line of high tariffs and the gold standard. When a Republican boss offered him a bribe in a railroad case, La Follette pledged to break “the power of this corrupt influence.” In 1900 he won the governorship of Wisconsin as an uncommonly independent Republican.

Over the next six years “Battle Bob” La Follette made Wisconsin, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, “the laboratory of democracy.” La Follette’s “**Wisconsin idea**” produced the most comprehensive set of state reforms in American history. There were new laws regulating railroads, controlling corruption, and expanding the civil service.

His direct primary weakened the hold of party bosses by transferring nominations from the party to the voters. La Follette’s Wisconsin created the first state income tax, the first state commission to oversee factory safety and sanitation, and the first Legislative Reference Bureau—at the University of Wisconsin. University-trained experts poured into state government.

Other states copied the Wisconsin idea or hatched their own. All but three had direct primary laws by 1916. To cut the power of party organizations and make office holders directly responsible to the public, progressives worked for three additional reforms: initiative (voter introduction of legislation), referendum (voter enactment or repeal of laws), and recall (voter-initiated removal of elected officials). In 1913 the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution permitted the direct election of senators. Previously they had been chosen by state legislatures, where political machines and corporate lobbyists controlled the selections.

In the West, with its scanty population and strong women, progressivism thrived. Western states were the

nation’s first to grant women the right to vote. To protect their health, the Oregon legislature also limited the number of hours women could work in a reform typical of progressive paternalism. The middle class of heavily urban California supported progressive Hiram Johnson’s drive to oust political machines from cities and the statehouse. Colorado Governor John Shafroth fought the local political machine and pressed a balky legislature to regulate railroad rates, insure commercial bank deposits, and create a public service commission. Like other progressives, he also supported the direct primary.

Almost every state established regulatory commissions with the power to hold public hearings, examine company books, and question officials. Some could set maximum prices and rates. Yet it was not always easy to define, let alone serve, the “public good.” All too often commissioners found themselves refereeing battles within industries rather than between what progressives called “the bad interests” and “the good people.” Regulators also had to rely on the advice of experts drawn from the business community itself. Many commissions thus became captured by the industries they regulated.

Social welfare received special attention from the states. The lack of workers’ compensation for injury, illness, or death on the job had long drawn fire from reformers and labor leaders. American courts still operated on the common-law assumption that employees accepted the risks of work. Workers or their families could collect damages only if they proved employer negligence. Most accident victims received nothing. In 1902 Maryland finally adopted the first workers’ compensation act. By 1916 most states required insurance for factory accidents, and over half had employer liability laws. Thirteen states also provided pensions for widows with dependent children.

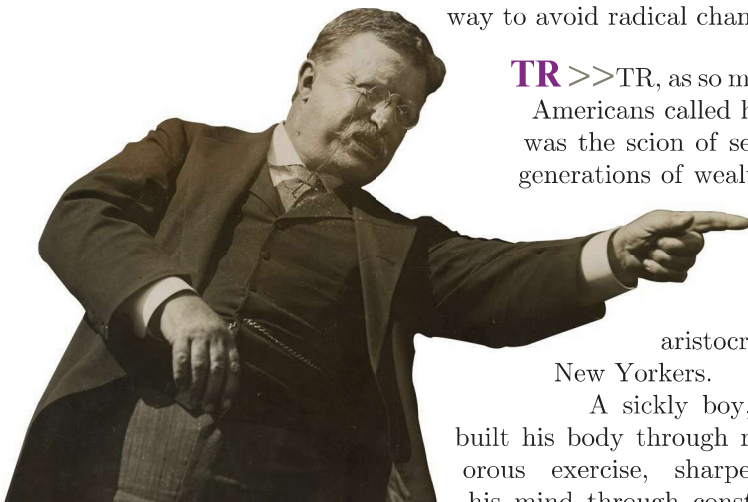
Often such working-class reforms found advocates among women’s associations, especially those concerned with mothers, children, and workingwomen. The Federation of Women’s Clubs opened a crusade for mothers’ pensions (a forerunner of Aid to Mothers with Dependent Children). When in 1912 the National Consumers’ League and other women’s groups succeeded in establishing the Children’s Bureau, it was the first federal welfare agency and the only female-run national bureau in the world. At a time when women lacked the vote, they nonetheless sowed the seeds of the welfare state.

✓ REVIEW

What reforms did cities and states enact, and how did those reforms address the problems they faced?

PROGRESSIVISM GOES TO WASHINGTON

On September 6, 1901, at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, Leon Czolgosz stood nervously in line. He was waiting to meet President William McKinley. Unemployed and bent on murder, Czolgosz shuffled toward McKinley. As the president reached out, Czolgosz fired two bullets into his chest. McKinley slumped into a chair. Eight days later the president was dead. The mantle of power passed to Theodore Roosevelt. At 42 he was the youngest president ever to hold the office. Roosevelt's succession was a political accident. Party leaders had seen the weak office of vice president as a way of removing him from power, but the tragedy in Buffalo foiled their plans. Surely progressivism would have come to Washington without him, and while there, he was never its most daring advocate. In many ways he was quite conservative. He saw reform as a way to avoid radical change.



TR >> TR, as so many Americans called him, was the scion of seven generations of wealthy,

aristocratic New Yorkers.

A sickly boy, he built his body through rigorous exercise, sharpened his mind through constant

study, and pursued a life so strenuous that few could keep up. He learned to ride and shoot, roped cattle in the Dakota Badlands, mastered judo, and later in life climbed the Matterhorn, hunted African game, and explored the Amazon.

In 1880, driven by an urge to lead and serve, Roosevelt won election to the New York State Assembly. In rapid succession he became a civil service commissioner in Washington, New York City police commissioner, assistant secretary of the navy, and the Rough Rider hero of the Spanish-American War. At the age of 40 he won election as reform governor of New York and two years later as vice president.

As president Roosevelt brought to the Executive Mansion (he renamed it the "White House") a passion for order, a commitment to the public, and a sense of presidential possibilities. Most presidents believed that the Constitution set limits on their power. Roosevelt thought that the president could do anything not expressly forbidden in the document. Recognizing the value of publicity, he gave reporters the first press room in the White House and a chief executive worthy of near-constant coverage. He was the first president to ride in an automobile, fly in an airplane, and dive in a submarine—and everyone knew it.

To dramatize racial injustice Roosevelt invited black educator Booker T. Washington to lunch at the White House in 1901. White southern journalists called such race mingling treason, but for Roosevelt the gesture served both principle and politics. His lunch with Washington was part of a "black and tan" strategy to build a biracial coalition among southern Republicans. He denounced lynching and appointed black southerners to important federal offices in Mississippi and South Carolina.

Sensing the limits of political feasibility, Roosevelt went no further. Perhaps his own racial narrowness stopped him, too. In 1906, when Atlanta exploded in a race riot that left 12 people dead, he said nothing. Later that year he discharged "without honor" three entire



<< Bullnecked and barrel-chested, Theodore Roosevelt was "pure act," said one admirer. Critics, less enthused with his perpetual motion, charged him with having the attention span of a golden retriever.

companies of African American troops because some of the soldiers were unjustly charged with having “shot up” Brownsville, Texas. All lost their pensions, including six winners of the Medal of Honor. The act stained Roosevelt’s record. Congress acknowledged the wrong in 1972 by granting the soldiers honorable discharges.

A Square Deal >> Roosevelt could not long follow the cautious course McKinley had charted. He had more energetic plans in mind for the country. He accepted growth—whether of business, labor, or agriculture—as natural. In his pluralistic system, big labor would counterbalance big capital, big farm organizations would offset big food processors, and so on. Standing astride them all, mediating when needed, was a big government that could ensure fairness. Later, as he campaigned for a second term in 1904, Roosevelt named his program the “Square Deal.”

In a startling display of presidential initiative, Roosevelt in 1902 intervened in a strike that idled 140,000 miners and paralyzed the anthracite (hard) coal industry. As winter approached, public resentment with the operators mounted when they refused even to recognize the miners’ union, let alone negotiate. Roosevelt summoned both sides to the White House. John A. Mitchell, the young president of the United Mine Workers, agreed to arbitration, but mine owners balked. Roosevelt leaked word to Wall Street that the army would take over the mines if management did not yield.

Seldom had a recent president acted so decisively, and never on behalf of strikers. In late October 1902 the owners settled by granting miners a 10 percent wage hike and a nine-hour day in return for increases in coal prices and no recognition of the union. Roosevelt was equally prepared to intervene on the side of management, as he did when he sent federal troops to end strikes in Arizona in 1903 and Colorado in 1904. His aim was to establish a vigorous presidency ready to deal squarely with both sides.

Roosevelt especially needed to face the issue of economic concentration. Financial power had become consolidated in giant trusts

“watered” stock stock issued in excess of the assets of a company. The term derived from the practice of some ranchers who made their cattle drink large amounts of water before weighing them for sale.

following a wave of mergers at the end of the century. Government investigations revealed rampant corporate abuses: rebates, collusion, **“watered” stock**, payoffs to government officials. The conservative courts showed

little willingness to break up the giants or blunt their power. In *United States v. E. C. Knight* (1895), the Supreme Court had crippled the Sherman Antitrust Act by ruling that the law applied only to commerce that crossed state lines and not to manufacturing even when products were sold in another state. The decision

left the American Sugar Refining Company in control of 98 percent of the nation’s sugar factories.

In his first State of the Union message, Roosevelt told Congress that he did not oppose trusts. As he saw it, large corporations were not only inevitable but also more productive than smaller operations. He wanted to regulate them to make them fairer and more efficient. Only then would the economic order be humanized, its victims protected, and class violence avoided. Like individuals, trusts had to be held to strict standards of morality. Conduct, not size, was the yardstick TR used to measure “good” and “bad” trusts.

With a progressive’s faith in the power of publicity and a regulator’s need for the facts, Roosevelt moved immediately to strengthen the federal power of investigation. He called for the creation of a Department of Labor and Commerce with a Bureau of Corporations that could force companies to hand over their records. Congressional conservatives shuddered at the prospect of putting corporate books on display. Finally, after Roosevelt charged that John D. Rockefeller was orchestrating the opposition, Congress enacted the legislation and provided the Justice Department with additional staff to prosecute antitrust cases.

In 1902, to demonstrate the power of government, Roosevelt had his attorney general file an antitrust suit against the Northern Securities Company. The mammoth holding company virtually monopolized railroads in the Northwest, setting its high freight rates and ignoring local protests. Here was a symbol of the “bad” trust. A trust-conscious nation cheered as the Supreme Court ordered the company to dissolve in 1904. Ultimately the Roosevelt administration brought suit against 44 giants.

Despite his reputation for trust-busting, Roosevelt always preferred continuous regulation. The problems of the railroads, for example, were newly underscored by a recent round of mergers and acquisitions that contributed to higher freight rates. In 1903 Roosevelt

pressed Congress to pass the Elkins Act, which gave the ineffective **Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC)** power to end rebates. Even the railroads cheered because the act saved them from the costly practice of granting special reductions to large shippers.

By the election of 1904 the president’s initiatives had won him broad popular support. He trounced his two rivals, Democrat Alton B. Parker, a jurist from New York, and Eugene V. Debs of the Socialist Party. No longer was he a “political accident,” Roosevelt boasted.

Conservatives in his own party opposed Roosevelt’s meddling in the private sector. But progressives demanded still more regulation of the railroads. In 1906 the president finally reached a compromise typical of his restrained approach to reform. The Hepburn

interstate commerce trade in goods that crosses state lines.

the Elkins Act, which gave the ineffective **Interstate Commerce Commission**

Railway Act allowed the ICC to set maximum rates and to regulate sleeping-car companies, ferries, bridges, and terminals. Progressives did not gain the provision for disclosure of company value or service costs they sought, but the Hepburn Act drew Roosevelt nearer to his goal of continuous regulation of business.

Bad Food and Pristine Wilds >> Extending the umbrella of federal protection to consumers, Roosevelt belatedly threw his weight behind two campaigns for healthy foods and drugs. Several pure food and drug bills had already died at the hands of lobbyists, despite a presidential endorsement. The appearance of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* in 1906 spurred Congress to act. The novel contained a brief but dramatic description of the slaughter of cattle infected with tuberculosis, of meat covered with rat dung, and of men falling into cooking vats. Readers paid scant attention to the workers, the true target of Sinclair's sympathy, but their stomachs turned at what they might be eating for breakfast. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 sailed through Congress, and the Meat Inspection Act soon followed.

Roosevelt came late to the consumer cause, but on conservation he led the nation. An outdoors enthusiast, he galvanized public concern over the reckless use of natural resources. His chief forester, Gifford Pinchot, persuaded him that planned management under federal guidance was needed to protect the natural domain. Cutting trees must be synchronized with tree plantings, oil pumped from the ground under controlled conditions, and so on.

In the western states water was the problem. Economic growth, even survival, depended on it. As uneven local and state water policies sparked controversy, violence, and waste, many progressives campaigned for a federal program to replace the chaotic web of rules. The Reclamation Act of 1902 set aside proceeds from the sale of public lands for irrigation projects. Its passage signaled a progressive step toward the conservationist goal of rational resource development.

Conservation often came into conflict with the more radical vision of preservationists. As early as 1864



^ Long a target of reformers, patent medicines made wild curative claims, ranging from restoring hair and cleaning the blood to ridding an invalid of worms, as with this "Tonic Vermifuge" advertised in 1889. The Pure Food and Drug Act finally placed patent medicines under federal regulation.



^ Beef Industry of the 1900s, Chicago.



^ The Sierra Club, founded by naturalist John Muir (center, with beard), believed in the importance of preserving wilderness in its natural state. “In God’s wildness,” Muir wrote in 1890, “lies the hope of the world—the great fresh unlighted, unredeemed wilderness.” In front of this giant redwood tree, Theodore Roosevelt stands to the left of Muir, who persuaded the president to double the number of national parks.

naturalist George Perkins Marsh sounded an alarm. In *Man and Nature; or Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*, Marsh warned that human action enhanced by technology could damage the planet. Already, he wrote, the agricultural and industrial revolutions had begun to erode land, deforest timberland, dry up watersheds, and endanger plants and animals.

Another naturalist, the wilderness philosopher John Muir, took Marsh a step further. As a boy, the Scottish-born Muir had emigrated to the United States with his family. Trained as an engineer, he nearly lost his sight when a sharp file punctured his right eye. His sight miraculously returned, and he vowed to be “true to myself” by following his passion: the study of the wild world. Study turned to activism in 1892 when Muir cofounded the Sierra Club. He hoped to maintain

such natural wonders as the Hetch Hetchy valley in his beloved Yosemite National Park in a state of “forever wild” to benefit future generations. Many conservationists saw these valleys only as sites for dams and reservoirs to manage and control water. “When we try to pick out anything by itself,” Muir wrote, “we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.”

Controversy flared after 1900, when San Francisco announced plans to create a city reservoir by flooding the Hetch Hetchy valley. For 13 years Muir waged a publicity campaign against the reservoir. Pinchot enthusiastically backed San Francisco’s claim. Roosevelt, torn by his friendship with Muir, did so less loudly. Not until 1913 did President Woodrow Wilson finally decide the issue in favor of San Francisco. Conservation had won over preservation.

Over the protests of cattle and timber interests, Roosevelt added nearly 200 million acres to government forest reserves, placed coal and mineral lands, oil reserves, and water–power sites in the public domain, and enlarged the national park system. When Congress balked, Roosevelt appropriated another 17 million acres of forest before the legislators could pass a bill limiting him. Roosevelt also set in motion national congresses and commissions on conservation and mobilized governors across the country. Like a good progressive, he sent hundreds of experts to work applying science, education, and technology to environmental problems.

The Troubled Taft >> On March 4, 1909, as snow swirled outside the White House, William Howard Taft readied himself for his inauguration. Over breakfast with Roosevelt, he basked in the glow of recent Republican victories. As Roosevelt’s handpicked successor, Taft had beaten Democrat William Jennings Bryan in the “Great Commoner’s” third and last bid for the presidency. Republicans had retained control of Congress as well as a host of northern legislatures. Reform was at high tide, and Taft was eager to continue the Roosevelt program.

“Will,” as Roosevelt liked to call him, was a distinguished jurist and public servant, the first American governor–general of the Philippines, and Roosevelt’s secretary of war. Taft had great administrative skill and personal charm but disliked political maneuvering. He preferred conciliation to confrontation.

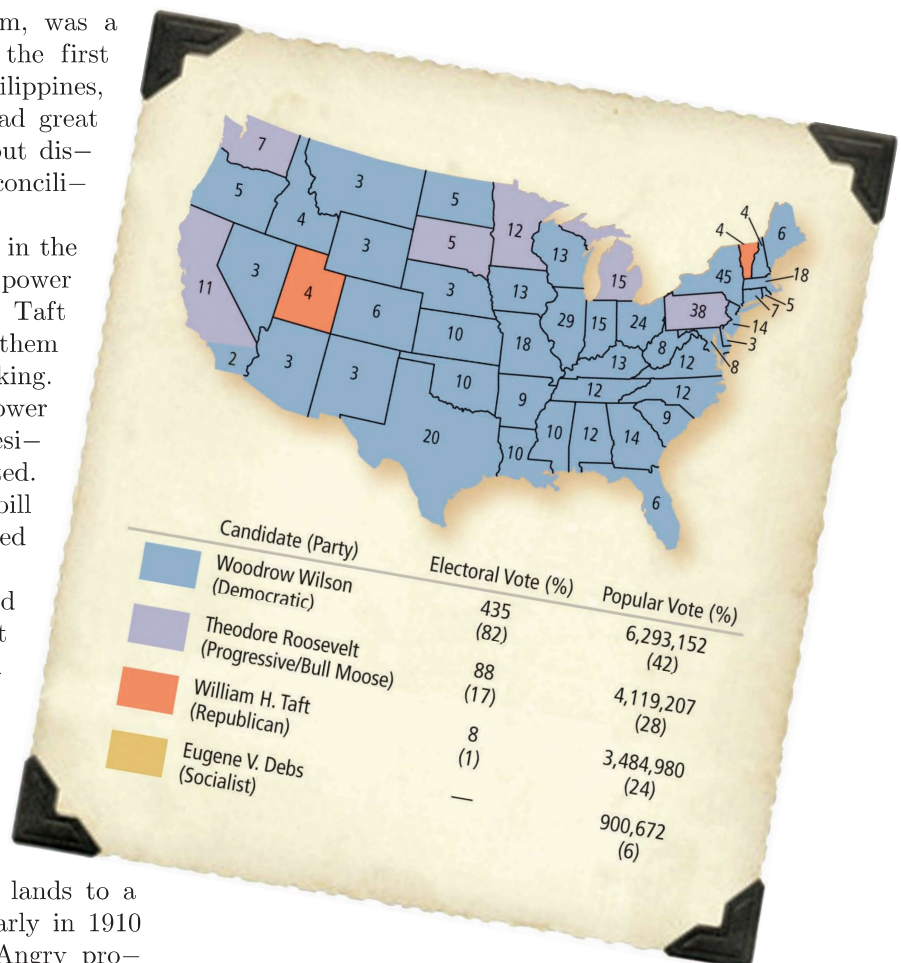
Trouble began early when progressives in the House moved to curb the near–dictatorial power of conservative Speaker Joseph Cannon. Taft waffled, first supporting then abandoning them to preserve the tariff reductions he was seeking. When progressives later broke Cannon’s power without Taft’s help, they scorned the president. And Taft’s compromise was wasted. Senate protectionists peppered the tariff bill with so many amendments that rates jumped nearly to their old levels.

Late in 1909 the rift between Taft and progressives reached the breaking point in a dispute over conservation. Taft had appointed Richard Ballinger secretary of the interior over the objections of Roosevelt’s old friend and mentor, Chief Forester Pinchot. When Ballinger opened a million acres of public lands for sale, Pinchot charged that shady dealings led Ballinger to transfer Alaskan public coal lands to a syndicate that included J. P. Morgan. Early in 1910 Taft fired Pinchot for insubordination. Angry progressives saw the Ballinger–Pinchot controversy as another betrayal by Taft. They began to look longingly

across the Atlantic, where TR was stalking big game in Africa.

Despite his failures Taft was no conservative pawn. For the next two years he pushed Congress to enact a progressive program regulating safety standards for mines and railroads, creating a federal children’s bureau, and setting an eight–hour workday for federal employees. Taft’s support of a graduated income tax—sometimes heated, sometimes lukewarm—was finally decisive. Early in 1913 it became the Sixteenth Amendment. Historians view it as one of the most important reforms of the century, for it eventually generated the revenue for many new social programs.

The Election of 1912 >> In June 1910 Roosevelt came home, laden with hunting trophies and exuberant as ever. He found Taft unhappy and progressive Republicans threatening to defect. Party loyalty kept Roosevelt quiet through most of 1911, but in October, Taft pricked him personally on the sensitive matter of busting trusts. Like TR, Taft accepted trusts as natural, but demanded, more impartially, that all trusts—“good” and “bad” ones—be prevented from



MAP 22.2: THE ELECTION OF 1912

restraining trade. In four years as president, Taft had brought nearly twice the antitrust suits Roosevelt had in seven years.

In October 1911 the Justice Department charged U.S. Steel with having violated the Sherman Antitrust Act by acquiring the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company. Roosevelt regarded the action as a personal rebuke, since he himself had allowed U.S. Steel to proceed with the acquisition. Taft, complained TR, “was playing small, mean, and foolish politics.”

Already, in a speech at Osawatomie, Kansas, in 1910, Roosevelt had sharpened his differences with Taft by outlining a program of sweeping national reform. His “New Nationalism” recognized the value of consolidation in the economy—whether big business or big labor—but insisted on protecting the interests of individuals through big government. The New Nationalism went further, stressing planning and efficiency under a powerful executive as “steward of the public welfare.” It promised taxes on incomes and inheritances and greater regulation of industry. And it embraced social justice, specifically workers’ compensation for accidents, minimum wages and maximum hours, child labor laws, and “equal suffrage”—a nod to women and loyal black Republicans. Roosevelt, a cautious reformer as president, grew daring as he campaigned for the White House.

“My hat is in the ring!” Roosevelt announced in February 1912. The enormously popular Roosevelt won most of the primaries; but by the time Republicans met in Chicago in June 1912, Taft had used presidential patronage and promises to secure the nomination. A frustrated Roosevelt bolted and took progressive Republicans with him. Two months later, amid choruses of “Onward Christian Soldiers,” delegates to the newly formed Progressive Party nominated Roosevelt for the presidency. “I’m feeling like a bull moose!” he bellowed. Progressives suddenly had a symbol for their new party.

The Democrats met in Baltimore, jubilant over the prospect of a divided Republican Party. Delegates chose as their candidate Woodrow Wilson, the progressive governor of New Jersey. Wilson wisely concentrated his fire on Roosevelt. He countered the New Nationalism with his “New Freedom,” which rejected the economic consolidation that Roosevelt embraced. Bigness was a sin, crowding out competition, promoting inefficiency, and reducing opportunity. Only by strictly limiting the size of businesses could the free market be preserved. And only by keeping government small could individual freedom be preserved. “Liberty,” Wilson cautioned, “has never come from government,” only from the “limitation of governmental power.”

Increasingly, voters found Taft beside the point. In an age of reform, even the Socialists looked good. Better led, financed, and organized than ever, the Socialist

Party had increased its membership to nearly 135,000 by 1912. The party also had an appealing candidate in Eugene V. Debs, a homegrown Indiana radical. He had won 400,000 votes for president in 1904. Now, in 1912, he summoned voters to make “the working class the ruling class.”

On Election Day voters gave progressivism a resounding endorsement. Wilson won 6.3 million votes; Roosevelt, 4.1 million; Taft, just 3.6 million. Debs received almost a million votes. Together the two progressive candidates amassed a three-to-one margin. But the Republican split had broken the party’s hold on national politics. For the first time since 1896, a Democrat would sit in the White House—and with his party in control of Congress.

✓ REVIEW

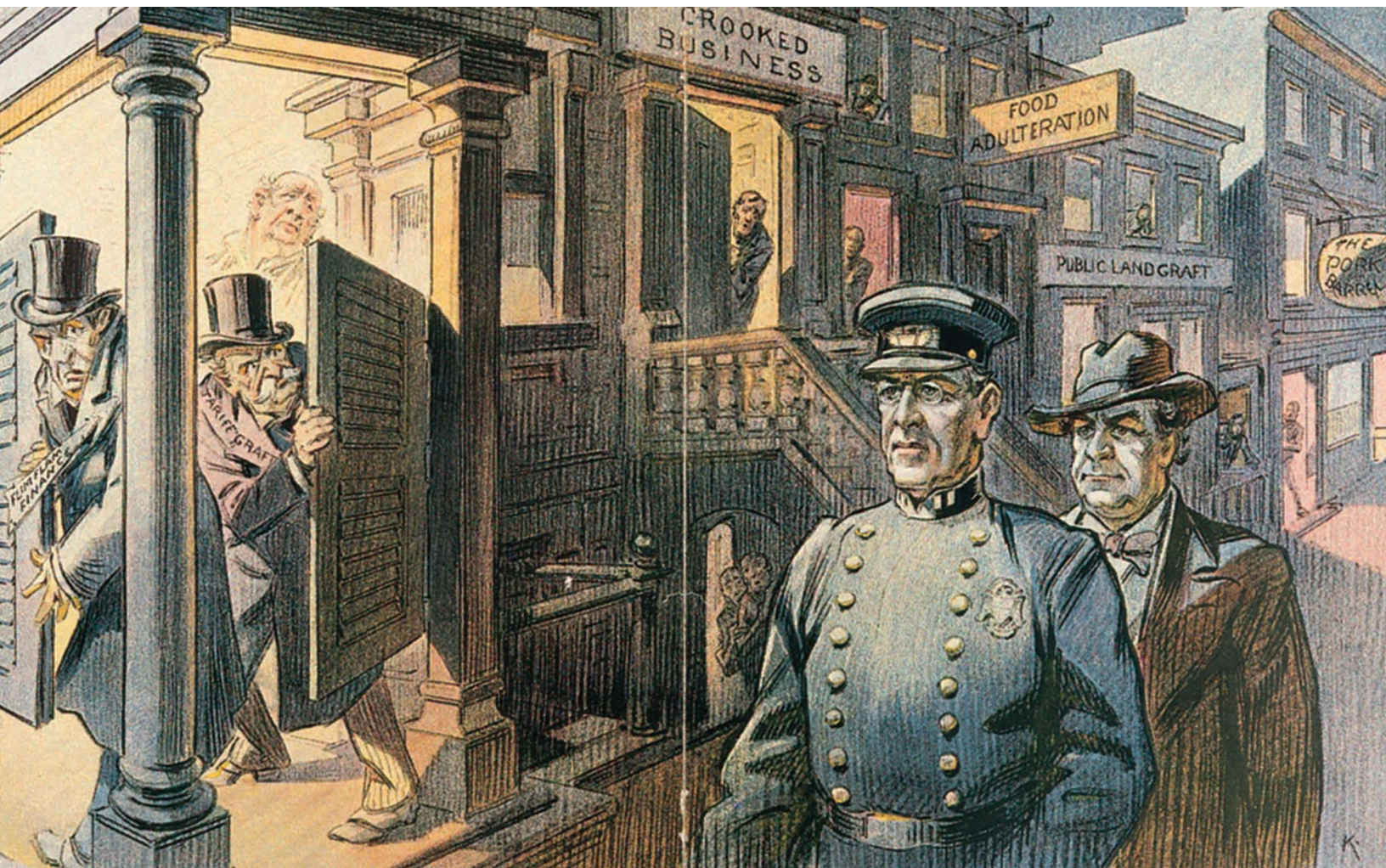
How did President Roosevelt’s reform agenda reflect his promise of a “Square Deal” for Americans?

WOODROW WILSON AND THE POLITICS OF MORALITY

Soon after the election Woodrow Wilson made a proud if startling confession to the chairman of the Democratic National Committee: “God ordained that I should be the next President of the United States.” To the White House Wilson brought a sense of destiny and a passion for reform. All his life he believed he was meant to accomplish great things, and he did. Under him, progressivism peaked.

Early Career >> From the moment of his birth in 1856 Woodrow Wilson felt he could not escape destiny. It was all around him. In his family’s Presbyterian faith, in the sermons of his minister father, in dinnertime talk ran the unbending belief in a world predetermined by God and ruled by saved souls, an “elect.” Wilson ached to be one of them and behaved as though he were.

Like most southerners, he loved the Democratic Party, hated the tariff, and accepted racial separation. (Under his presidency, segregation returned to Washington for the first time since Reconstruction.) An early career in law bored him, so he turned to history and political science and became a professor. His studies persuaded him that a modern president must act as a “prime minister,” directing and uniting his party, molding legislation and public opinion, exerting



^ Woodrow Wilson came to the White House with promises to reform government. In this 1913 cartoon titled “A New Captain in the District,” the newly elected president strides through corrupt Washington, ready to police such abuses as easy land grants and pork barreling, the much-criticized congressional practice of voting for projects that benefit home districts and constituents.

continuous leadership. In 1910, after a stormy tenure as head of Princeton University, Wilson was helped by Democratic Party bosses to win the governorship of New Jersey. In 1912 they helped him again, this time to the presidency of the country.

The Reforms of the New Freedom >> As governor Wilson led New Jersey on the path of progressive reform. As president he was a model of progressive leadership. More than Roosevelt he shaped policy and legislation. He went to Congress to let members know he intended to work personally with them. He kept party discipline tight and mobilized public opinion when Congress refused to act.

Lowering the high tariff was Wilson’s first order of business. Progressives had long attacked the tariff as another example of the power of trusts. By protecting American manufacturers, Wilson argued, such barriers weakened the competition he cherished. When the Senate threatened to raise rates, the new president appealed directly to the public. “Industrious” and “insidious” lobbyists were blocking reform, he cried to reporters.

The Underwood–Simmons Tariff of 1913 marked the first downward revision in 19 years and the biggest since before the Civil War. To compensate for lost revenue, Congress enacted a graduated income tax under the newly adopted Sixteenth Amendment. It applied solely to corporations and the tiny fraction of Americans who earned more than \$4,000 a year. It nonetheless began a momentous shift in government revenue from its nineteenth-century base—public lands, alcohol taxes, and customs duties—to its twentieth-century base: personal and corporate incomes.

Wilson turned next to the perennial problems of money and banking. Early in 1913 a congressional committee revealed that a few powerful banks controlled the nation’s credit system. They could choke Wilson’s free market by raising interest rates or tightening the supply of money. As a banking reform bill moved through Congress in 1913, opinion was divided among conservatives, who wanted centralized and private control, rural Democrats, who wanted regional banks under local bankers, and Populists and progressives—including Bryan and La Follette—who wanted government control.

Wilson split their differences in the Federal Reserve Act of 1913. The new Federal Reserve System contained 12 regional banks scattered across the country. But it also created a central Federal Reserve Board in Washington, appointed by the president, to supervise the system. The board could regulate credit and the money supply by setting the interest rate it charged member banks, by buying or selling government bonds, and by issuing paper currency called Federal Reserve notes.

When Wilson finally took on the trusts, he inched toward the New Nationalism of Theodore Roosevelt. The Federal Trade Commission Act of 1914 created a bipartisan executive agency to oversee business activity. The end—to enforce orderly competition—was distinctly Wilsonian, but the means—an executive commission to regulate commerce—were pure Roosevelt.

Roosevelt would have stopped there, but Wilson made good on his campaign pledge to attack trusts. The Clayton Antitrust Act (1914) barred some of the worst corporate practices: price discrimination, holding companies, and interlocking directorates (directors of one corporate board sitting on others). Despite Wilson's bias against size, the advantages of large-scale production and distribution were inescapable. In practice his administration chose to regulate rather than break up bigness. The Justice Department filed fewer antitrust suits than it had under the Taft administration.

Labor and Social Reform >>For all of Wilson's impressive accomplishments, voters seemed uninspired by the New Freedom. Off-year election losses in 1914 pushed Wilson toward the social reforms of the New Nationalism he had once criticized as paternalistic and unconstitutional. He signaled the change early in 1916 when he nominated his close adviser Louis D. Brandeis to the Supreme Court. The progressive Brandeis had fought for the social reforms lacking from Wilson's agenda. His appointment also broke the tradition of anti-Semitism that had previously kept Jews such as Brandeis off the Court.

In other ways, Wilson showed a new willingness to intervene more actively in the economy. He pressed for laws improving the working conditions of merchant seamen and setting an eight-hour day for workers on interstate railroads. He supported the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act (page 448). Farmers benefited from legislation providing them with low-interest loans.

And just before the election of 1916 Wilson intervened to avert a nationwide strike of rail workers.

Woodrow Wilson's administration capped a decade and a half of heady reform. Seeing chaos in the modern industrial city, progressive reformers worked to reduce the damage of poverty and the hazards of industrial work, control rising immigration, and spread a middle-class ideal of morality. In city halls and state legislatures, they tried to break the power of corporate interests and entrenched political machines. In Washington, they enlarged government and broadened its mission from caretaker to promoter of public welfare.

✓ REVIEW

Compare and contrast Theodore Roosevelt's approach to reform with that of Woodrow Wilson.

The United States was not alone in these efforts. The machine age triggered a wave of progressive reform across the industrialized world. Movements for social justice and social welfare sprang up first in Great Britain, where the Industrial Revolution began. There, reformers publicized the plight of women and children in factories and mines as early as the 1820s. The resulting Factory Act of 1833 outlawed child labor in textile mills for those under the age of nine. The Mines Act of 1842 made it illegal to employ all women as well as children younger than ten in work underground. In 1884 Toynbee Hall, the world's first social settlement house, opened in London's East End to minister to the needs of the poor. It became the model for Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago.

In political reforms the world sometimes lagged behind the United States, particularly on the issue of woman suffrage. Except in Scandinavia, most European women did not receive the vote until after World War I. Despite the democratic revolutions that swept across Latin America in the nineteenth century, national women's suffrage was opposed by the Catholic Church and did not come to Ecuador until 1929 and El Salvador until 1939. Asia was slower still, often because colonial rulers denied or limited suffrage or because patriarchal Asian societies looked on women as subordinate to men. Only in 1950, for example, after India achieved independence, did women receive the right to vote.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Progressivism embraced a broad-based set of reforms and became the first truly national reform movement in American history.

- Progressive reform sprang from many impulses:
 - ▶ Desires to curb the advancing power of big business and to end political corruption.
 - ▶ Efforts to bring order and efficiency to economic and political life.
 - ▶ Attempts by new interest groups to make business and government more responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens.
 - ▶ Moralistic urges to rid society of industries such as the liquor trade and prostitution, to bridge the gap between immigrants and native-born Americans, and to soften the consequences of industrialization through social justice and social welfare.
- Led by members of the urban middle class, progressives were moderate modernizers, embracing such traditional American values as democracy, Judeo-Christian ethics, individualism, and the spirit of public service while employing new techniques of management and planning, coordinated systems, and bureaucracies of experts.
- Progressive women extended their traditional sphere of home and family to become “social housekeepers” and crusaders for women’s rights, especially the right to vote.
- Progressivism animated politics, first at the local and state levels, then in the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.
- In the end, the weaknesses of progressivism—its fuzzy conception of the public interest, its exclusion of minorities, and the ease with which its regulatory mechanisms were “captured” by those being regulated—were matched by its accomplishments in establishing the modern, activist state.

Additional Reading

The long debate over progressivism is traced in Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (1983). Benchmarks include George Mowry, *The California Progressives* (1951); and Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (1955), both of which see progressives as a small elite seeking to recapture its fading status. Gabriel Kolko’s controversial *Triumph of Conservatism* (1963) asserts that business “captured” reform to control competition and stave off stricter federal regulation. Michael McGerr’s *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement* (2003) sees progressivism as a daring middle-class movement to transform society. David Traxel sees both reforming progressives and the First World War as spawning a *Crusader Nation* (2006). Finally, Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation* (2009), places progressivism in the context of an enduring search for regeneration in the decades after the Civil War.

The social history of progressivism is the focus of Steven J. Diner’s *A Very Different Age* (1998). Eric Rauchway’s *Murdering McKinley: The Making of Theodore Roosevelt’s America* (2003) presents a fresh account of the era; while James Chace recounts its turning point in 1912: *Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft, and Debs and the Election That Changed the Country* (2004).

John M. Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt* (1954), remains the most incisive rendering of TR; and Lewis L. Gould, *The Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt* (1991), is the best single-volume study of the White House years. In *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* (2009), Douglas Brinkley puts TR in the thick of the conservation movement and examines his environmental legacy. Unsurpassed in detail and depth is Arthur Link, *Woodrow Wilson*, 5 vols. (1947–1965). Robert Crunden, *Ministers of Reform* (1982), emphasizes the cultural aspects of progressivism; and Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor* (1992), offers a feminist perspective on Margaret Sanger. Melvyn Urofsky’s *Louis D. Brandeis* (2009) is admiring and authoritative. In *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* (2004), David Von Drehle offers the fullest account yet of that calamity.