

Progressive Era

A. The Progressive Impulse

1. By 1901, there was a very unequal distribution of wealth & income, horrifying working conditions, & bad housing conditions in the U.S.
 - a. 1% of families held 7/8 of the nation's wealth, while 80% of Americans lived at the subsistence level
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. The cost of living increased by 35% in less than a decade, while many middle-class incomes had remained stable over the same time span
2. This social climate led to a reform movement known as *progressivism*, which was concerned with curing the problems of society
 - a. Most progressives were educated middle-class moderates who believed that problems could be legislated away
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Academics, organized religion, & popular journalism ignited public interest in reform
3. Socially conscious journalists dramatized the need for reform with sensational investigative reports that discussed a wide range of ills afflicting Americans in the early 1900s
 - a. One of the first such investigative journalist to cause widespread calls for reform was *Upton Sinclair* with his book *The Jungle* (1906)
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)
 - b. The success of *Sinclair's* book inspired remarkable growth in investigative journalism, later referred to as *Muckraking*
 - (1)
 - (2)

- c. While muckraking degenerated into sloppy research & wild, unsubstantiated charges over a few years, it had a lasting impact on the Progressive era

B. Reforming Industry & Society

1. In the early 1900s, the U.S. had the highest rate of industrial accidents in the world due to long hours, poor ventilation, hazardous fumes, & unsafe machinery, so progressives sought to improve conditions for workers
 - a. By 1912, child-labor laws were passed in 39 states, which limited the number of hours children could work, barred working at night, & dangerous occupations
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Progressives persuaded some states to pass laws limiting workdays to 10 hours, but in 1905, the Supreme Court ruled such laws unconstitutional
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - c. With about 1/3 of all workers living in poverty in 1910, many progressives suggested minimum wage rates that would help equal the normal standards of living for workers
2. The need for better fire safety was highlighted in what is known as the ***Triangle Shirtwaist Fire***
 - a. On March 25, 1911, a fire erupted in a rag bin & quickly ignited the entire 8th floor of the 10-story Triangle Shirtwaist Company in NYC
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Public outrage was so great that protective legislation to help workers was quickly passed & as a result, New York passed the nation's strictest fire-safety code
3. An important goal for progressives was to improve the lives of the poor
 - a. Housing in many cities proved to be very poor, so in 1901, New York became one of the first to confront the housing problems
 - (1)
 - (2)

- b. Progressives also looked to make the U.S. tax system more fair for poorer citizens with a *graduated income tax* that would tax rich people at a higher percentage than those that were poor
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - c. Many progressives supported *Americanization* programs for poor immigrants with efforts focused on teaching immigrants how to read, write, & speak English
 - 4. Progressives sought to “clean up” immoral behavior, such as drinking alcohol
 - a. They called for *prohibition* (ban on manufacture, sale, & transportation of alcoholic beverages) & closing of saloons
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Many progressives also demanded movies be censored, believing movies & movie houses were immoral & sources of temptation
 - 5. Many educated blacks came to resent *Booker T. Washington*’s suppression of protesting against racial discrimination & began to look to *W.E.B. Du Bois* as their new spokesperson
 - a. *Du Bois* objected to Washington’s emphasis on industrial education & his reluctance to criticize white injustice & believed a college education offered African Americans the best chance at progress
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. The *NAACP* seeks greater education for African Americans, court challenges to discrimination, & lobbying for laws that would help blacks
 - 6. Women were very active in numerous progressive reforms, which eventually convinced many that women had deserved the right to vote
 - a. In 1869, *Susan B. Anthony* & *Elizabeth Cady Stanton* helped found the *National American Women’s Suffrage Association (NAWSA)*
 - (1)

(2)

b. The *women's suffrage* movement faced strong opposition, but after World War I, public opinion turned in women's favor

(1)

(2)

c. Tennessee played a pivotal role in the struggle to gain women the right to vote, when **Gov. Albert Roberts** called a special session of the state legislature during the summer of 1920 to vote on ratification of the *19th Amendment*

(1)

(2)

d. Tennessee became "*The Perfect 36*", when it was the 36th state to ratify the amendment

C. Reforming Government

1. Progressives sought after reforms that would make government officials more responsive to the will of the people & take power away from *political machines*

a. The Constitution originally allowed state legislatures to choose senators, which shielded them from direct public pressure

(1)

(2)

b. At this time, a few powerful party leaders controlled the selection of convention delegates & controlled the selection of election candidates, but Wisconsin Gov. **Robert La Follette** pressured the state legislature to require that each party hold a *direct primary*

(1)

(2)

c. Also, several local governments adopted a commission form of government that was successful at curbing the power of *bosses* & their political machines

2. Progressives also sought ways of reforming the voting process

- a. At the time, each political party printed its own ballot in a distinctive color, which made it easy to influence how people voted
 - (1)
 - (2)
- b. The *initiative*, the *referendum*, & the *recall* were brought about in hopes of reducing the control big businesses & *party bosses* had over politicians
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - (3)

D. Theodore Roosevelt's Square Deal

- 1. Angered at Theodore Roosevelt's progressivism as New York's governor, Republican party *bosses* had him "kicked upstairs" to the less prominent office as vice president, hoping to contain him
 - a. When President McKinley was assassinated in 1901, Roosevelt became president at 42-years-old & began his progressive agenda
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. In spring 1902, 150,000 coal miners struck for higher wages & recognition of their United Mine Workers union (known as the *Coal Strike of 1902*)
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - c. This was the first time the federal government had intervened in a strike to protect the interests of the workers & the public
- 2. Roosevelt sought to regulate large corporations during both of his terms, believing that companies should be forced to behave responsibly
 - a. In 1902, Roosevelt directed the U.S. attorney general to sue the *Northern Securities Company*, which had monopolized railroad shipping from Chicago to the Northwest
 - (1)
 - (2)

- (3)
 - b. By the early 1900s, there was clear evidence that some drug companies, food processors, & meatpackers were selling dangerous products
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - c. Roosevelt increased the power of the *Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC)* to overseeing the railroads through the *Elkins Act (1903)* that stopped rate discrimination by railroad companies & the *Hepburn Act (1906)* that gave the ICC the power to set railroad rates
- 3. Roosevelt recognized that natural resources were limited & became devoted to conservation
 - a. Roosevelt added nearly 150 million acres to national forest reserves & preserved coal & water sites for national development
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. The *National Park Service* was created in 1916 to help supervise these parks & monuments
- E. Split of the Republican Party & Wilson's New Freedom
 - 1. At the 1908 Republican convention, President Roosevelt threw his support behind William Howard Taft, who he believed had the same reform tendencies
 - a. Taft chalked up several progressive accomplishments while in office, but Taft lost the support of progressive Republicans starting in April 1909 with the passage of a bill on tariffs
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. Taft also dropped Roosevelt's distinction between good trusts & bad trusts with his Justice Department that brought lawsuits against twice as many corporations as Roosevelt had done
 - (1)
 - (2)

- c. The final straw for Roosevelt & other progressive Republicans was when Taft fired Gifford Pinchot for publicly criticizing Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger
 - (1)
 - (2)
- 2. Angered at Taft's firing of Ballinger & opposed to his anti-trust suit against U.S. Steel, Theodore Roosevelt campaigned on behalf of progressive Republicans who opposed Taft during the 1910 congressional elections, & in 1912, Roosevelt decided to run again for the presidency in 1912
 - a. While Roosevelt won almost every Republican state primary, Taft's allies sabotaged his nomination, making sure Taft won the nomination
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. With the Republican vote essentially split between Roosevelt & Taft, Wilson became president even though he had less than 42% of the popular vote
- 3. Wilson's main progressive aim was to attack the "triple wall of privilege": the tariffs, the banks, & the trusts
 - a. Wilson successfully lowered tariffs with the passage of the *Underwood Tariff Act (1913)* that reduced tariffs to their lowest levels in more than 50 years
 - (1)
 - (2)
 - b. At the time, no central fund existed from which banks could borrow to prevent collapse during financial panics & banks commonly failed when too many people withdrew their deposits at the same time, so Wilson helped draft the *Federal Reserve Act (1913)* to reform the U.S. banking system
 - (1)
 - (2)

c. Wilson wanted to limit the power of monopolies, which he viewed as a threat to small businesses through the passing of the *Clayton Antitrust Act (1914)* & *the Federal Trade Commission Act (1914)*
(1)

(2)

d. Wilson also supported legislation to aid working people like laws providing low-interest loans to farmers, reducing railroad workers workdays without a cut in pay, & creating the first federal workers compensation law