

CHAPTER 20

THE PROGRESSIVES



SUFFRAGE PAGEANT, 1913 On March 3, 1913—the day before Woodrow Wilson's Inauguration as President—more than 5,000 supporters of woman suffrage staged a parade in Washington that entirely overshadowed Wilson's own arrival in Washington. Crowds estimated at over half a million watched the parade, not all of them admirers of the woman suffrage movement, and some of the onlookers attacked the marchers. The police did nothing to stop them. This photograph depicts a suffragist, Florence Noyes, costumed as Liberty, posing in front of the U.S. Treasury Building, part of a pageant accompanying the parade. Suffrage was one of the most important and impassioned reform movements of the progressive era. (*Library of Congress*)



WELL BEFORE THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, many Americans had become convinced that the rapid changes in their society—industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and other jarring transformations—had created intolerable problems. Out of that concern there emerged a broad effort to impose order and justice on a society that seemed to be approaching chaos. By the early years of the twentieth century, this outlook had acquired a name: progressivism.

The progressive impulse took many forms—so many, in fact, that even today scholars do not agree on what progressivism meant. But despite, or perhaps because of, its great diversity, progressivism created a remarkable period of political and social innovation. From the late nineteenth century until at least the end of World War I, reformers were the most dynamic and influential force in American politics and culture. They brought into public debate such issues as the role of women in society, the ways to deal with racial difference, the question of how to govern cities, the fairest way to organize the economy, the role of political parties and political machines, the impact of immigration and cultural diversity, and the degree to which the state should impose moral norms on communities and individuals.

Progressivism began as a movement within communities, cities, and states—many different local efforts to improve the working of society. Slowly but steadily, these efforts began to become national efforts. Broad movements emerged around passionate issues: woman suffrage, racial equality, the rights of labor. And the federal government itself, beginning in the early twentieth century, became a crucible of progressive reform. Reformers attempted to make Washington more responsive to their demands. Some worked successfully for the direct popular election of United States senators—to replace what they considered the corrupt process by which state legislatures chose members of the Senate. But ultimately it was the presidency, not the Congress, that became the most important vehicle of national reform—first under the dynamic leadership of Theodore Roosevelt and then under the disciplined, moralistic leadership of Woodrow Wilson. By the time America entered World War I in 1917, the federal government—which had exercised very limited powers prior to the twentieth century—had greatly expanded its role in American life.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- 1873 ▶ Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) founded
- 1889 ▶ Jane Addams opens Hull House in Chicago
- 1892 ▶ General Federation of Women's Clubs founded
- 1893 ▶ Johns Hopkins Medical School established
- ▶ Anti-Saloon League founded
- 1895 ▶ National Association of Manufacturers founded
- 1898 ▶ Theodore Roosevelt elected governor of New York
- 1900 ▶ Galveston, Texas, establishes commission government
- ▶ Robert La Follette elected governor of Wisconsin
- ▶ Roosevelt elected vice president
- 1901 ▶ American Medical Association reorganized
- ▶ McKinley assassinated; Roosevelt becomes president
- ▶ Hay-Pauncefote Treaty ratified
- 1902 ▶ Oregon adopts initiative and referendum
- ▶ Mississippi adopts direct primary
- ▶ Northern Securities antitrust case filed
- ▶ Roosevelt intervenes in anthracite coal strike
- 1903 ▶ Women's Trade Union League founded
- ▶ Department of Commerce and Labor created
- 1905 ▶ Roosevelt elected president
- 1906 ▶ Hepburn Railroad Regulation Act passed
- ▶ Meat Inspection Act passed
- 1907 ▶ Financial panic and recession
- 1908 ▶ William Howard Taft elected president
- 1909 ▶ NAACP formed
- ▶ Payne-Aldrich Tariff passed
- ▶ Pinchot-Ballinger dispute begins
- 1910 ▶ Roosevelt's Osawatomie speech outlines "New Nationalism"
- 1911 ▶ Fire kills 146 workers at Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City
- ▶ Taft administration files antitrust suit against U.S. Steel
- 1912 ▶ United States Chamber of Commerce founded
- ▶ Taft receives Republican nomination, Roosevelt and followers walk out
- ▶ Roosevelt forms Progressive Party
- ▶ Woodrow Wilson elected president
- 1913 ▶ Seventeenth Amendment, establishing direct popular election of U.S. senators, ratified
- ▶ Federal Reserve Act passed
- 1914 ▶ Federal Trade Commission Act passed
- ▶ Clayton Antitrust Act passed
- 1916 ▶ Wilson appoints Louis Brandeis to Supreme Court
- 1919 ▶ Eighteenth Amendment (prohibition) ratified
- 1920 ▶ Nineteenth Amendment (woman suffrage) ratified

THE PROGRESSIVE IMPULSE

Progressivism was, first, an optimistic vision. Progressives believed, as their name implies, in the idea of progress.

Belief in Progress

They believed that society was capable of improvement and that continued growth and advancement were the nation's destiny.

But progressives believed, too, that growth and progress could not continue to occur recklessly, as they had in the late nineteenth century. The “natural laws” of the marketplace, and the doctrines of *laissez faire* and Social Darwinism that celebrated those laws, were not sufficient. Direct, purposeful human intervention in social and economic affairs was essential to ordering and bettering society.

Varieties of Progressivism

Progressives did not always agree on the form their intervention should take, and the result was a variety of reform impulses that sometimes seemed to have little in common. One powerful impulse was the spirit of “antimonopoly,” the fear of concentrated power and the urge to limit and

“Antimonopoly”

disperse authority and wealth. This vaguely populist impulse appealed not only to many workers and farmers but to some middle-class Americans as well. And it helped empower government to regulate or break up trusts at both the state and national level.

Another progressive impulse was a belief in the importance of social cohesion: the belief that individuals are part of a great web of social relationships, that each person's welfare is dependent on the welfare of society as a whole. That assumption produced a concern about the “victims” of industrialization.

Still another impulse was a deep faith in knowledge—in the possibilities of applying to society the principles of natural and social sciences. Many reformers believed that

Faith in Knowledge

knowledge was more important as a vehicle for making society more equitable and humane. Most progressives believed, too, that a modernized government could—and must—play an important role in the process of improving and stabilizing society. Modern life was too complex to be left in the hands of party bosses, untrained amateurs, and antiquated institutions.

The Muckrakers

Among the first people to articulate the new spirit of reform were crusading journalists who began to direct public attention toward social, economic, and political injustices. They became known as the “muckrakers,” after Theodore Roosevelt accused one of them of raking up muck through his writings. They were committed to exposing scandal, corruption, and injustice to public view.

At first, their major targets were the trusts and particularly the railroads, which the muckrakers considered powerful and deeply corrupt. Exposés of the great corporate organizations began to appear as early as the 1860s, when Charles Francis Adams Jr. and others uncovered corruption among the railroad barons. One of the most notable of them was the journalist Ida Tarbell's enormous study of the Standard Oil trust (published first in magazines and then as a two-volume book in 1904). By the turn of the century, many muckrakers were turning their attention to government and particularly to the urban political machines. The most influential, perhaps, was Lincoln Steffens, a reporter for *McClure's* magazine and the author of a famous book based on his articles, *The Shame of the Cities*. His portraits of “machine government” and “boss rule”; his exposure of “boodlers” in cities as diverse as St. Louis, Minneapolis, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York; his tone of studied moral outrage—all helped arouse sentiment for urban political reform. The alternative to leaving government in the hands of corrupt party leaders, the muckrakers argued, was for the people themselves to take a greater interest in public life.

Ida Tarbell and
Lincoln Steffens

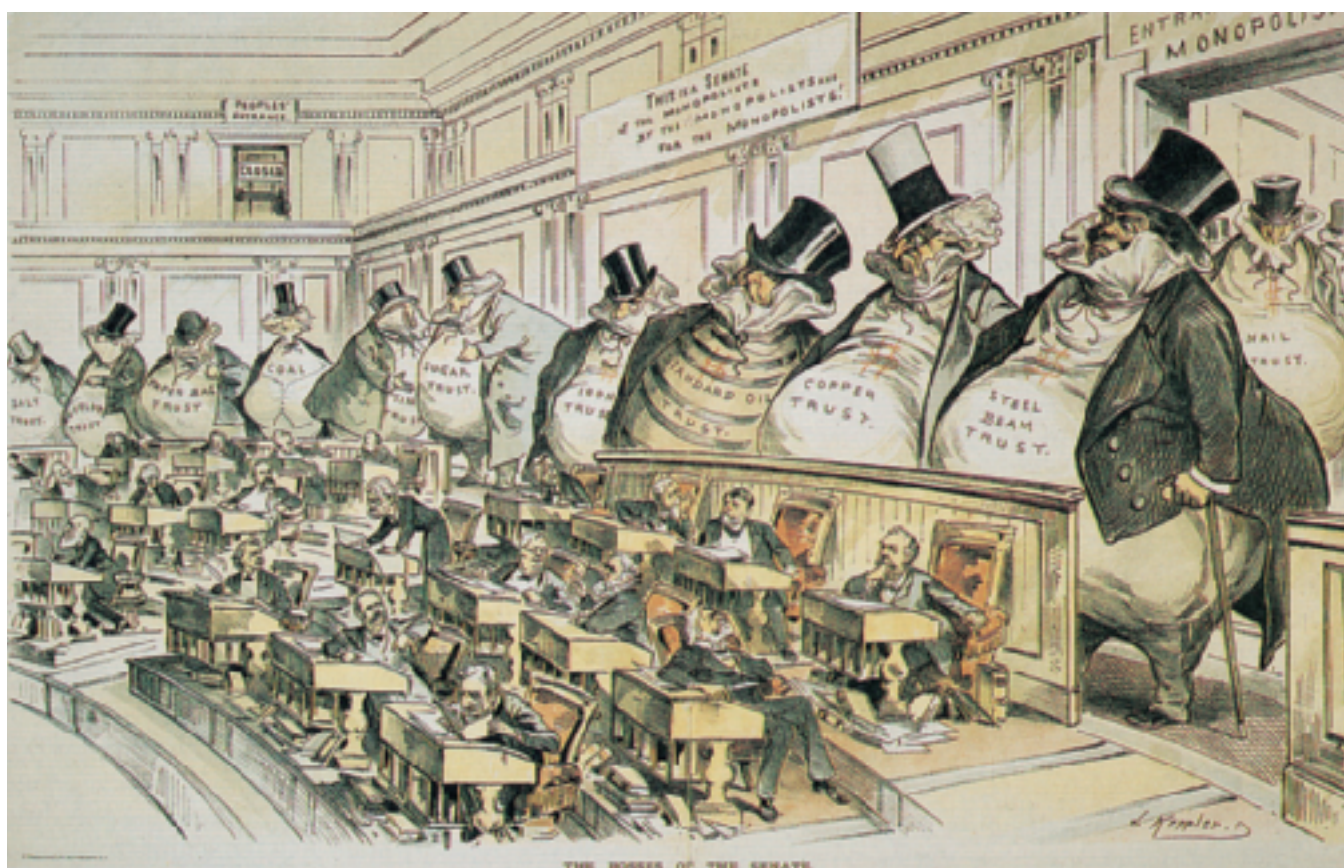
The muckrakers reached the peak of their influence in the first decade of the twentieth century. By presenting social problems to the public with indignation and moral fervor, they helped inspire other Americans to take action.

The Social Gospel

The growing outrage at social and economic injustice helped produce many reformers committed to the pursuit of social justice. That impulse helped create the rise of what became known as the “Social Gospel.” By the early twentieth century, it had become a powerful movement within American Protestantism (and, to a lesser extent, within American Catholicism and Judaism). It was chiefly concerned with redeeming the nation's cities.

The Salvation Army, which began in England but soon spread to the United States, was one example of the fusion of religion with reform. A Christian social welfare organization with a vaguely military structure, by 1900 it had recruited 3,000 “officers” and 20,000 “privates” and was offering both material aid and spiritual service to the urban poor. In addition, many ministers, priests, and rabbis left traditional parish work to serve in the troubled cities. Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1898), the story of a young minister who abandoned a comfortable post to work among the needy, sold more than 15 million copies and established itself as the most successful novel of the era.

Walter Rauschenbusch, a Protestant theologian from Rochester, New York, published a series of influential



“THE BOSSES OF THE SENATE” (1889), BY JOSEPH KEPPLER Keppler was a popular political cartoonist of the late nineteenth century who shared the growing concern about the power of the trusts—portrayed here as bloated, almost reptilian figures standing menacingly over the members of the U.S. Senate, to whose chamber the “people’s entrance” is “closed.” (*The Granger Collection*)

discourses on the possibilities for human salvation through Christian reform. To him, the message of Darwinism was not the survival of the fittest. He believed, rather, that all individuals should work to ensure a humanitarian evolution of the social fabric.

Father John Ryan

Some American Catholics seized on the 1893 publication of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (New Things) as justification for their own crusade for social justice. Catholic liberals such as Father John A. Ryan took to heart the pope’s warning that “a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself.” For decades, he worked to expand the scope of Catholic social welfare organizations.

The Social Gospel was never the dominant element in the movement for urban reform. But the engagement of religion with reform helped bring to progressivism a powerful moral commitment to redeem the lives of even the least favored citizens.

The Settlement House Movement

An element of much progressive thought was the belief in the influence of the environment on individual devel-

opment. Social Darwinists such as William Graham Sumner had argued that people’s fortunes reflected their inherent “fitness” for survival. Progressive theorists disagreed. Ignorance, poverty, even criminality, they argued, were not the result of inherent genetic failings or of the workings of providence; they were, rather, the effects of an unhealthy environment. To elevate the distressed, therefore, required an improvement of the conditions in which they lived.

Nothing produced more distress, many urban reformers believed, than crowded immigrant neighborhoods, which publicists such as Jacob Riis were exposing through vivid photographs and lurid descriptions. One response to the problems of such communities, borrowed from England, was the settlement house. The most famous, and one of the first, was Hull House,

Jane Addams and
Hull House

which opened in 1889 in Chicago as a result of the efforts of the social worker Jane Addams. It became a model for more than 400 similar institutions throughout the nation. Staffed by members of the educated middle class, settlement houses sought to help immigrant families adapt to the language and customs of their new country. Settlement houses avoided the condescension and moral disapproval of earlier philanthropic efforts. But they generally embraced

PROGRESSIVE REFORM

Few issues in the history of twentieth-century America have inspired more disagreement, even confusion, than the nature of progressivism. Until about 1950, most historians were in general accord about the nature of the progressive “movement.” It was, they generally agreed, just what it purported to be: a movement by the “people” to curb the power of the “special interests.”

In the early 1950s, however, a new interpretation emerged to challenge the traditional view. It offered a new explanation of who the progressives were and what they were trying to do. George Mowry, in *The California Progressives* (1951), described the reform movement in the state not as a protest by the mass of the people, but as an effort by a small and privileged group of business and professional men to limit the overbearing power of large new corporations and labor unions. Richard Hofstadter expanded on this idea in *The Age of Reform* (1955), in which he described progressives throughout the country as people suffering from “status anxiety”—old, formerly influential, upper-middle-class families seeking to restore their fading prestige by challenging the powerful new institutions that had begun to displace them. Like the Populists, Hofstadter suggested, the progressives were suffering from psychological, not economic, discontent.

The Mowry-Hofstadter thesis was never without critics. In its wake, a bewildering array of new interpreta-

tions emerged. Perhaps the harshest challenge to earlier views came from Gabriel Kolko, whose influential 1963 study *The Triumph of Conservatism* dismissed the supposedly “democratic” features of progressivism as meaningless rhetoric. But he also rejected the Mowry-Hofstadter idea that it represented the efforts of a displaced elite. Progressivism, he argued, was an effort to regulate business. But it was not the “people” or “displaced elites” who were responsible for this regulation. It was corporate leaders themselves, who saw in government supervision a way to protect themselves from competition. Regulation, Kolko claimed, was “invariably controlled by the leaders of the regulated industry and directed towards ends they deemed acceptable or desirable.” Martin Sklar’s *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism* (1988) is a more sophisticated version of a similar argument.

A more moderate challenge to the “psychological” interpretation of progressivism came from historians embracing a new “organizational” view of history. Particularly influential was a 1967 study by Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920*. Wiebe presented progressivism as a response to dislocations in American life. There had been rapid changes in the nature of the economy, but there had been no corresponding changes in social and political institutions. Economic power had moved to large, national organizations, while social and politi-



(Library of Congress)

cal life remained centered primarily in local communities. The result was widespread disorder and unrest, culminating in the turbulent 1890s. Progressivism, Wiebe argued, was the effort of a “new middle class”—a class tied to the emerging national economy—to stabilize and enhance their position in society by creating national institutions suitable for the new national economy.

Despite the influences of these interpretations, some historians continued to argue that the reform phenomenon was indeed a movement of the people against the special interests,

a belief that middle-class Americans had a responsibility to impart their own values to immigrants and to teach them how to create middle-class lifestyles.

Central to the settlement houses were the efforts of college women. The settlement houses provided these women with an environment and a role that society considered “appropriate” for unmarried women: urban “homes” where settlement workers helped their immigrant neighbors to become better members of society. The settlement houses also helped spawn another important institution of reform, one in which women were also to play a vital role: the profession of social work. Workers

at Hull House, for example, maintained a close relationship with the University of Chicago’s pioneering work in the field of sociology. A growing number of programs for the professional training of social workers began to appear in the nation’s leading universities, partly in response to the activities of the settlements.

The Allure of Expertise

As the emergence of the social work profession suggests, progressives involved in humanitarian efforts placed a high value on knowledge and expertise. Even

although some identified the “people” somewhat differently than earlier such interpretations. J. Joseph Huthmacher argued in 1962 that much of the force behind progressivism came from members of the working class, especially immigrants, who pressed for such reforms as workmen’s compensation and wage and hour laws. John Bunker strengthened this argument in *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform* (1973), claiming that political machines and urban “bosses” were important sources of reform energy and helped create twentieth-century liberalism. David P. Thelen, in a 1972 study of progressivism in Wisconsin, *The New Citizenship*, pointed to a real clash between the “public interest” and “corporate privilege” in Wisconsin. The depression of the 1890s had mobilized a broad coalition of citizens of highly diverse backgrounds behind efforts to make both business and government responsible to the popular will. It marked the emergence of a new “consumer” consciousness that crossed boundaries of class and community, religion and ethnicity.

Other historians writing in the 1970s and 1980s attempted to link reform to some of the broad processes of political change that had created the public battles of the era. Richard L. McCormick’s *From Realignment to Reform* (1981), for example, studied political change in New York State and argued that the crucial change in this era was the decline of the political parties as the vital players in public life and the rise of interest groups working for particular social and economic goals.



(*Brown Brothers*)

At the same time, many historians were focusing on the role of women (and the vast network of voluntary associations they created) in shaping and promoting progressive reform and were seeing in these efforts concerns rooted in gender. Some progressive battles, such as historians as Kathryn Sklar, Linda Gordon, Ruth Rosen, Elaine Tyler May, and others argued, were part of an effort by women to protect their interests within the domestic sphere in the face of jarring challenges from the new industrial world. This protective urge drew women reformers to such issues as temperance, divorce, and prostitution. Many women mobilized behind protective legislation for women and children workers. Other women worked to expand their own roles in the public world. Progressivism cannot be understood, historians of women contend, without understanding the role of women and the importance of issues involving the family and the private world within it.

More recently, a number of historians have sought to revive a broader view of progressivism rather than breaking it down into its component parts. Daniel Rodgers’s *Atlantic Crossings* (1998), a remarkable study of how European reforms influenced American progressives, suggests that the movement was not just an American phenomenon but had roots in a global process of change as well. Alan Dawley’s *Struggles for Justice* (1993) characterized progressivism as the effort of liberal elites to manage the new pressures of the industrial era—and the problems of capitalism in particular—in ways that would modernize the state and undermine pressures from socialists. And Michael McGerr, in *A Fierce Discontent* (2003), portrayed progressivism as an essentially moral project through which reformers sought to remake not just government and politics, but also the ways Americans lived, thought, and interacted with each other.

Given the range of disagreement over the nature of the progressive movement, it is hardly surprising that some historians have despaired of finding any coherent definition for the term at all. Peter Filene, for one, suggested in 1970 that the concept of progressivism as a “movement” had outlived its usefulness. But Daniel Rodgers, in an important 1982 article, “In Search of Progressivism,” disagreed. The very diversity of progressivism, he argued, accounted both for its enormous impact on its time and for its capacity to reveal to us today the “noise and tumult” of an age of rapid social change.

nonscientific problems, they believed, could be analyzed and solved scientifically. Many reformers came to believe that only enlightened experts and well-designed bureaucracies could create the stability and order America needed.

Some even spoke of the creation of a new civilization, in which the expertise of scientists and engineers could be brought to bear on the problems of the economy and society. The social scientist Thorstein Veblen, for example, proposed a new economic system in which power would reside in the hands of highly trained engineers. Only they, he argued, could fully understand the

“machine process” by which modern society must be governed.

The Professions

The late nineteenth century saw a dramatic expansion in the number of Americans engaged in administrative and professional tasks. Industries needed managers, technicians, and accountants as well as workers. Cities required commercial, medical, legal, and educational services. New technology required scientists and engineers, who, in turn, required institutions and instructors to



TENEMENT FAMILY, 1899 Jacob Riis, an indefatigable chronicler of the lives of tenant-dwelling immigrants, became one of the most influential photographers, and reformers, of his day. His book *How the Other Half Lives* became one of the classics of his era. In this photograph, he shows a girl in a grimy doorway cradling an infant—the kind of scene characteristic of his work. (Bettmann/Corbis)

train them. By the turn of the century, those performing these services had come to constitute a distinct social group—what some historians have called a new middle class.

The new middle class placed a high value on education and individual accomplishment. By the early twentieth century, its millions of members were building organizations and establishing standards to secure their position in society. The idea of professionalism had been a frail one in America even as late as 1880. When every patent-medicine salesman could claim to be a doctor, when every frustrated politician could set up shop as a lawyer, when anyone who could read and write could pose as a teacher, a professional label by itself carried little weight. There were, of course, skilled and responsible doctors, lawyers, teachers, and others; but they had no way of controlling or distinguishing themselves clearly from the amateurs, charlatans, and incompetents who presumed to practice their trades. As the demand for professional services increased, so did the pressures for reform.

Among the first to respond was the medical profession. In 1901, doctors who considered themselves trained professionals reorganized the American Medical Association into a national professional society. By

American Medical
Association

TENEMENT CIGARMAKERS Among the social problems Jacob Riis attempted to illuminate were those of working conditions in immigrant communities. In this photograph from *How the Other Half Lives*, a cigarmaker works in his already crowded home surrounded by his children. Such home workers—many, perhaps most, of whom were women—were normally paid by the “piece,” that is, by the amount of work they performed rather than the number of hours; the result was very long hours of labor (often with the help of the young children in the home) and very low pay. (Museum of the City of New York)





THE INFANT WELFARE SOCIETY, CHICAGO The Infant Welfare Society was one of many “helping” organizations in Chicago and other large cities—many of them closely tied to the settlement houses—that strove to help immigrants adapt to American life and create safe and healthy living conditions. Here, a volunteer helps an immigrant mother learn to bathe her baby sometime around 1910. (*Chicago Historical Society, ICHI-20216*)

1920, nearly two-thirds of all American doctors were members. The AMA quickly called for strict, scientific standards for admission to the practice of medicine, with doctors themselves serving as protectors of the standards. State governments responded by passing new laws requiring the licensing of all physicians. By 1900, medical education at a few medical schools—notably Johns Hopkins in Baltimore (founded in 1893)—compared favorably with that in the leading institutions of Europe. Doctors such as William H. Welch at Hopkins revolutionized the teaching of medicine by moving students out of the classrooms and into laboratories and clinics.

There was similar movement in other professions. By 1916, lawyers in all forty-eight states had established professional bar associations. The nation’s law schools accordingly expanded greatly. Businessmen supported the creation of schools of business administration and created their own national organizations: the National Association of Manufacturers in 1895 and the United States Chamber of Commerce in 1912. Even farmers, long the symbol of the romantic spirit of individualism, responded to the new order by forming, through the National Farm Bureau Federation, a network of agricultural organizations designed to spread scientific farming methods.

While removing the untrained and incompetent, the admission requirements also protected those already in the professions from excessive competition and lent pres-

tige and status to the professional level. Some professionals used their entrance requirements to exclude blacks, women, immigrants, and other “undesirables” from their ranks. Others used them simply to keep the numbers down, to ensure that demand would remain high.

Women and the Professions

Both by custom and by active barriers of law and prejudice, American women found themselves excluded from most of the emerging professions. But a substantial number of middle-class women—particularly those emerging from the new women’s colleges and from the coeducational state universities—entered professional careers nevertheless.

A few women managed to establish themselves as physicians, lawyers, engineers, scientists, and corporate managers. Several leading medical schools admitted women, and in 1900 about 5 percent of all American physicians were female (a proportion that remained unchanged until the 1960s). Most, however, turned by necessity

to those “helping” professions that society considered vaguely domestic and thus suitable for women: settlement houses, social work, and most important, teaching. Indeed, in the late nineteenth century, more than two-thirds of all grammar school teachers were women, and perhaps 90 percent of all professional women were teachers. For educated black women, in particular, the existence of segregated schools in the South created a substantial market for African-American teachers.

Female-Dominated Professions

Women also dominated other professional activities. Nursing had become primarily a women’s field during and after the Civil War. By the early twentieth century, it was adopting professional standards. And many women entered academia—often receiving advanced degrees at such predominantly male institutions as the University of Chicago, MIT, or Columbia, and finding professional opportunities in the new and expanding women’s colleges.

WOMEN AND REFORM

The prominence of women in reform movements is one of the most striking features of progressivism. In most states in the early twentieth century, women could not vote. They almost never held public office.

Key Role of Women in Reform Causes

They had footholds in only a few (and usually primarily

female) professions and lived in a culture in which most people, male and female, believed that women were not suited for the public world. What, then, explains the prominent role so many women played in the reform activities of the period?

The “New Woman”

The phenomenon of the “new woman,” widely remarked upon at the time, was a product of social and economic changes that affected the private world as much as the public one. By the end of the nineteenth century, almost all income-producing activity had moved out of the home and into the factory or the office. At the same time, children were beginning school at earlier ages and spending more time there. For wives and mothers who did not work for wages, the home was less of an all-consuming place. Technological innovations such as running water, electricity, and eventually household appliances made housework less onerous (even if higher standards of cleanliness counterbalanced many of these gains).

Declining family size also changed the lives of many women. Middle-class white women in the late nineteenth century had fewer children than their mothers and grandmothers had borne. They also lived longer. Many women thus now spent fewer years with young children in the home and lived more years after their children were grown.

Some educated women shunned marriage entirely, believing that only by remaining single could they play the roles they envisioned in the public world. Single women were among the most prominent female reformers of the time: Jane Addams and Lillian Wald in the settlement house movement, Frances Willard in the temperance movement, Anna Howard Shaw in the suffrage movement, and many others. Some of these women lived alone. Others lived with other women, often in long-term relationships—some of them secretly romantic—that were

known at the time as “Boston marriages.” The divorce rate also rose rapidly in the late nineteenth century, from one divorce for every twenty-one marriages in 1880 to one in nine by 1916; women initiated the majority of them.

The Clubwomen

Among the most visible signs of the increasing public roles of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the women’s clubs, which proliferated rapidly beginning in the 1880s and 1890s and became the vanguard of many important reforms.

The women’s clubs began largely as cultural organizations to provide middle- and upper-class women with an outlet for their intellectual energies. In 1892, when women formed the General Federation of Women’s Clubs to coordinate

the activities of local organizations, there were more than 100,000 members in nearly 500 clubs. Eight years later, there were 160,000 members; and by 1917, over 1 million.

By the early twentieth century, the clubs were becoming less concerned with cultural activities and more concerned with contributing to social betterment. Because many club members were from wealthy families, some organizations had substantial funds at their disposal to make their influence felt. And ironically, because women could not vote, the clubs had a nonpartisan image that made them difficult for politicians to dismiss.

Black women occasionally joined clubs dominated by whites. But most such clubs excluded blacks, and so African Americans formed clubs of their own. Some of them affiliated with the General Federation, but most became part of the independent National Association of Colored Women. Some black clubs also took positions on issues of particular concern to African Americans, such as lynching and aspects of segregation.

The women’s club movement seldom raised overt challenges to prevailing assumptions about the proper role of women in society. Few clubwomen were willing to accept the arguments of such committed feminists as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who in her 1898 book *Women and Economics* argued that the traditional definition of gender roles was exploitative and obsolete. Instead, club movement allowed women to define a space for themselves in the public world without openly challenging the existing, male-dominated order.

Much of what the clubs did was uncontroversial: planting trees; supporting schools, libraries, and settlement houses; building hospitals and parks. But clubwomen were also an important force in winning passage of state (and ultimately federal) laws that regulated the conditions of woman and child labor, established government inspection of workplaces, regulated the food and drug industries, reformed policies toward the Indian tribes, applied new standards to urban housing, and perhaps most notably outlawed the manufacture and sale of alcohol. They were instrumental in pressuring state legislatures in most states to provide “mother’s pensions” to widowed or abandoned mothers with small children—a system that ultimately became absorbed into the Social Security system. In 1912, they pressured Congress into establishing the Children’s Bureau in the Labor Department, an agency directed to develop policies to protect children.

In many of these efforts, the clubwomen formed alliances with other women’s groups, such as the Women’s Trade Union League, founded in 1903 by female union members and upper-class reformers and committed to persuading women to join unions. In addition to working on behalf of protective legislation for

Socioeconomic Origins
of the New Woman

A Public Space
for Women

“Boston Marriages”

GFWC

Women’s Trade Union
League



THE COLORED WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF WASHINGTON The women's club movement spread widely through American life and produced a number of organizations through which African-American women gathered to improve social and political conditions. The Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C., members of which appear in this 1894 photograph, was founded in 1892 by Sara Iredell Fleetwood, a registered nurse who married Christian Iredell, one of the first African-American soldiers to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroism in the Civil War. The league she founded was committed to "racial uplift," and it consisted mostly of teachers, who created nurseries for the infants of women who worked and evening schools for adults. They are shown here gathered on the steps of Frederick Douglass's home on Capitol Hill. Sara Fleetwood is in the second row on the far right. (*Manuscript Division, Library of Congress*)

women, WTUL members held public meetings on behalf of female workers, raised money to support strikes, marched on picket lines, and bailed striking women out of jail.

Woman Suffrage

Perhaps the largest single reform movement of the progressive era, indeed one of the largest in American history, was the fight for woman suffrage.

It is sometimes difficult for today's Americans to understand why the suffrage issue could have become the source of such enormous controversy. But at the time, suffrage seemed to many of its critics a very radical demand, in part because of the rationale some of its early supporters used to advance it. Throughout the late nineteenth century, many suffrage advocates presented their views in terms of "natural rights," arguing that

Radical Challenge
of Women's Suffrage

women deserved the same rights as men—including, first and foremost, the right to vote. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, wrote in 1892 of woman as "the arbiter of her own destiny . . . if we are to consider her as a citizen, as a member of a great nation, she must have the same rights as all other members." This was an argument that boldly challenged the views of the many men and women who believed that society required a distinctive female "sphere" in which women would serve first and foremost as wives and mothers. And so a powerful antisuffrage movement emerged, dominated by men but with the active support of many women. Opponents railed against the threat suffrage posed to the "natural order" of civilization. Antisuffragists, many of them women, associated suffrage with divorce (not without some reason, since many suffrage advocates also supported making it easier for women to obtain a divorce). They linked suffrage with promiscuity, looseness, and neglect of children.

women deserved the same rights as men—including, first and foremost, the right to vote. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, wrote in 1892 of woman as "the arbiter of her own destiny . . . if we are to consider her as a citizen, as a member of a great nation, she must have the same rights as all other members." This was an argument that boldly challenged the views of the many men and women who believed that society required a distinctive female "sphere" in which women would serve first and foremost as wives and mothers. And so a powerful antisuffrage movement emerged, dominated by men but with the active support of many women. Opponents railed against the threat suffrage posed to the "natural order" of civilization. Antisuffragists, many of them women, associated suffrage with divorce (not without some reason, since many suffrage advocates also supported making it easier for women to obtain a divorce). They linked suffrage with promiscuity, looseness, and neglect of children.

SHIRTWAIST WORKERS ON STRIKE The Women's Trade Union League was notable for bringing educated, middle-class women together with workers in efforts to improve factory and labor conditions. These picketing women are workers in the "Ladies Tailors" garment factory in New York. (*Library of Congress*)



In the first years of the twentieth century, the suffrage movement began to overcome this opposition and win some substantial victories, in part because suffragists were becoming better organized and more politically sophisticated than their opponents. Under the leadership of Anna Howard Shaw, a Boston social worker, and Carrie Chapman Catt, a journalist from Iowa, membership in the National American Woman Suffrage Association grew from about 13,000 in 1893 to over 2 million in 1917. The movement gained strength because many of its most prominent leaders began to justify suffrage in “safer,” less threatening ways. Suffrage, some supporters began to argue, would not challenge the “separate sphere” in which women resided. It was, they claimed, precisely because women occupied a distinct sphere—because as mothers and wives and homemakers they had special experiences and special sensitivities to bring to public life—that woman suffrage could make such an important contribution to politics.

In particular, many suffragists argued that enfranchising women would help the temperance movement, by giving its largest group of supporters a political voice. Some suffrage advocates claimed that once women had the vote, war would become a thing of the past, since women would—by their calming, maternal influence—help curb the belligerence of men. That was one reason why World War I gave a final, decisive push to the movement for suffrage.

Suffrage also attracted support for other, less optimistic reasons. Many middle-class people found persuasive the argument that if blacks, immigrants, and other “base”

groups had access to the franchise, then it was a matter not only of justice but of common sense to allow educated, “well-born” women to vote.

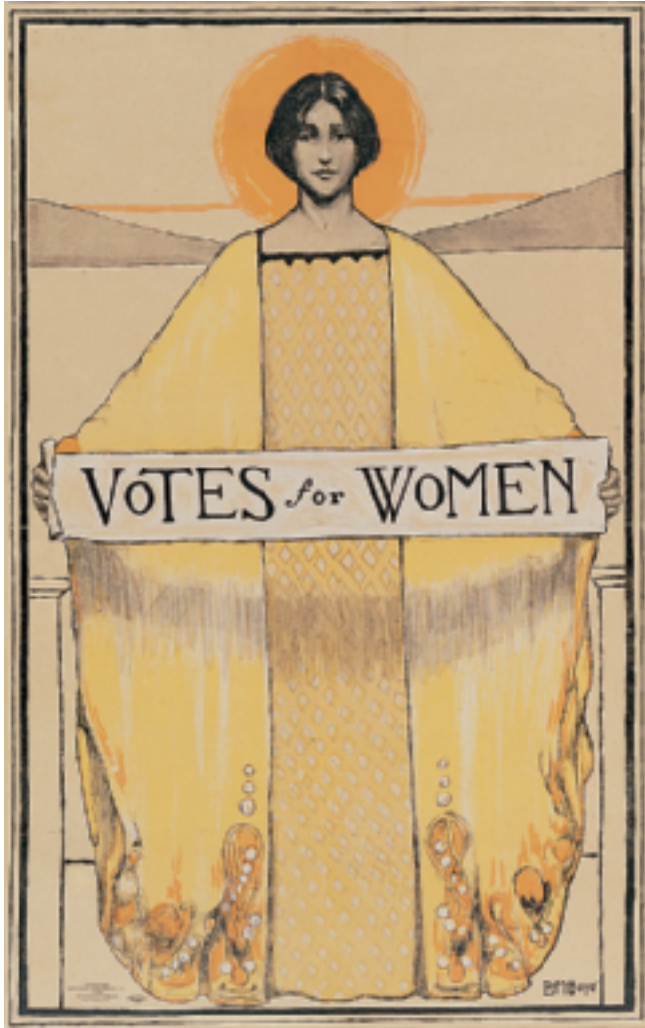
Conservative Arguments for Suffrage

The principal triumphs of the suffrage movement began in 1910, when Washington became the first state in fourteen years to extend suffrage to women. California followed a year later, and four other western states in 1912. In 1913, Illinois became the first state east of the Mississippi to embrace woman suffrage. And in 1917 and 1918, New York and Michigan—two of the most populous states in the Union—gave women the vote. By 1919, thirty-nine states had granted women the right to vote in at least some elections; fifteen had allowed them full participation. In 1920, finally, suffragists won ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which guaranteed political rights to women throughout the nation.

Nineteenth Amendment

To some feminists, however, the victory seemed less than complete. Alice Paul, head of the militant National Woman's Party (founded in 1916), never accepted the relatively conservative “separate sphere” justification for suffrage. She argued that the Nineteenth Amendment alone would not be sufficient to protect women's rights. Women needed more: a constitutional amendment that would provide clear, legal protection for their rights and would prohibit all discrimination on the basis of sex. But Alice Paul's argument found limited favor even among many of the most important leaders of the recently triumphant suffrage crusade.

Equal Rights Amendment



“VOTES FOR WOMEN,” BY B. M. BOYE This striking poster was the prize-winning entry in a 1911 contest sponsored by the College Equal Suffrage League of Northern California. (Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)

THE ASSAULT ON THE PARTIES

Sooner or later, most progressive goals required the involvement of government. Only government, reformers agreed, could effectively counter the many powerful private interests that threatened the nation. But American government at the dawn of the new century was, progressives believed, poorly adapted to perform their ambitious tasks. At every level political institutions were outmoded, inefficient, and corrupt. Before progressives could reform society effectively, they would have to reform government itself. Many reformers believed the first step must be an assault on the dominant role the political parties played in the life of the state.

Early Attacks

Attacks on party dominance had been frequent in the late nineteenth century. Greenbackism and Populism, for

example, had been efforts to break the hammerlock with which the Republicans and Democrats controlled public life. The Independent Republicans (or mugwumps) had attempted to challenge the grip of partisanship.

The early assaults enjoyed some success. In the 1880s and 1890s, for example, most states adopted the secret ballot. Prior to that, the political parties themselves had printed ballots (or “tickets”), with the names of the party’s candidates, and no others. They distributed the tickets to their supporters, who then simply went to the polls to deposit them in the ballot box. The old system had made it possible for bosses to monitor the voting behavior of their constituents; it had also made it difficult for voters to “split” their tickets—to vote for candidates of different parties for different offices. The new secret ballot—printed by the government and distributed at the polls to be filled out and deposited in secret—helped chip away at the power of the parties over the voters.

Municipal Reform

Many progressives, such as Lincoln Steffens, believed the impact of party rule was most damaging in the cities. Municipal government therefore became the first target of those working for political reform.

The muckrakers struck a responsive chord among a powerful group of urban, middle-class progressives. For several decades after the Civil War, “respectable” citizens of the nation’s large cities had avoided participation in municipal government. Viewing politics as a debased and demeaning activity, they shrank from contact with the “vulgar” elements who were coming to dominate public life. By the end of the century, however, a new generation of activists—some of them members of old aristocratic families, others a part of the new middle class—were taking a growing interest in government.

Middle-Class Progressives

They faced a formidable array of opponents. In addition to challenging the powerful city bosses and their entrenched political organizations, they were attacking a large group of special interests: saloon owners, brothel keepers, and, perhaps most significantly, those businessmen who had established lucrative relationships with the urban political machines and who viewed reform as a threat to their profits. Finally, there was the great constituency of urban working people, many of them recent immigrants, to whom the machines were a source of needed jobs and services. Gradually, however, the reformers gained in political strength.

New Forms of Governance

One of the first major successes came in Galveston, Texas, where the old city government proved completely unable to deal with the effects of a destructive tidal wave in 1900. Capitalizing on public dismay, reformers, many of them local businessmen, won approval of a new city charter.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Enormous energy, enthusiasm, and organization drove the reform efforts in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of it a result of social crises and political movements in the United States. But the “age of reform,” as some scholars have called it, was not an American phenomenon alone. It was part of a wave of social experimentation that was occurring through much of the industrial world. “Progressivism” in other countries influenced the social movements in the United States. And American reform, in turn, had significant influence on other countries as well.

Several industrializing nations adopted the term “progressivism” for their efforts—not only the United States, but also England, Germany, and France. But the term that most broadly defined the new reform energies was “social democracy.” Social democrats in many countries shared a belief in the betterment of society through the accumulation of knowledge—rather than through reliance on inherited ideology or faith. They favored improving the social condition of all people through reforms of the economy and government programs of social protection. And they believed that these changes could come through peaceful political change, rather than through radicalism or revolution. Political parties emerged in several countries committed to these goals: the Labour Party in Britain, Social Democratic parties in various European nations, and the short-lived Progressive Party in the United States. Intellectuals, academics, and government officials across the world shared the knowledge they were accumulating and observed one another’s social programs.

American reformers at the turn of the century spent much time visiting Germany, France, Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands, observing the reforms



(Archives Charmet/Bridgeman Art Library)

in progress there, and Europeans visited the United States in turn. Reformers from both America and Europe were also fascinated by the advanced social experiments in Australia and, especially, New Zealand—which the American reformer Henry Demarest Lloyd once called “the political brain of the modern world.” But New Zealand’s dramatic experiments in factory regulation, woman suffrage, old-age pensions, progressive taxation, and labor arbitration gradually found counterparts in many other nations as well. William Allen White, a progressive journalist from Kansas, said of this time: “We were parts of one another, in the United States and Europe. Something was welding us into one social and economic whole with local political variations . . . [all] fighting a common cause.”

Social democracy—or, as it was sometimes called in the United States and elsewhere, social justice or the

Social Gospel—was responsible for many public programs. Germany began a system of social insurance for its citizens in the 1880s while undertaking a massive study of society that produced over 140 volumes of “social investigation” of almost every aspect of the nation’s life. French reformers pressed in the 1890s for factory regulation, assistance to the elderly, and progressive taxation. Britain pioneered the settlement houses in working-class areas of London—a movement that soon spread to the United States as well—and, like the United States, witnessed growing challenges to the power of monopolies at both the local and national level.

In many countries, social democrats felt pressure from the rising worldwide labor movement and from the rise of socialist parties in many industrial countries as well. Strikes, sometimes violent, were common in France, Germany, Britain, and the United States in the late nineteenth century. The more militant workers became, the more unions seemed to grow. Social democrats did not always welcome the rise of militant labor movements, but they took them seriously and used them to support their own efforts at reform.

The politics of social democracy represented a great shift in the character of public life all over the industrial world. Instead of battles over the privileges of aristocrats or the power of monarchs, reformers now focused on the social problems of ordinary people and attempted to improve their lot. “The politics of the future are social politics,” the British reformer Joseph Chamberlain said in the 1880s, referring to efforts to deal with the problems of ordinary citizens. That belief was fueling progressive efforts across the world in the years that Americans have come to call the “progressive era.”

Commission Plan

The mayor and council were replaced by an elected, nonpartisan commission. In 1907, Des Moines, Iowa, adopted its own version of the commission plan, and other cities soon followed.

Another approach to municipal reform was the city-manager plan, by which elected officials hired an outside expert—often a professionally trained business manager or engineer—to take charge of the government.

City-Manager Plan



TOM JOHNSON As sentiment for municipal reform grew in intensity in the late nineteenth century, it became possible for progressive mayors committed to ending “boss rule” to win election over machine candidates in some of America’s largest cities. One of the most prominent was Tom Johnson, the reform mayor of Cleveland. Johnson made a fortune in the steel and streetcar business, and then entered politics, partly as a result of reading Henry George’s *Poverty and Progress*. He became mayor in 1901 and in his four terms waged strenuous battles against party bosses and corporate interests. He won many fights, but he lost what he considered his most important one: the struggle for municipal ownership of public utilities. (*Western Reserve Historical Society*)

The city manager would presumably remain untainted by the corrupting influence of politics. By the end of the progressive era, almost 400 cities were operating under commissions, and another 45 employed city managers.

In most urban areas, the enemies of party had to settle for less absolute victories. Some cities made the election of mayors nonpartisan (so that the parties could not choose the candidates) or moved them to years when no presidential or congressional races were in progress (to reduce the influence of the large turnouts that party organizations produced). Reformers tried to make city councilors run at large, to limit the influence of ward leaders and district bosses. They tried to strengthen the power of the mayor at the expense of the city council, on the assumption that reformers were more likely to succeed in getting a sympathetic mayor elected than they were to win control of the entire council.

Some of the most successful reformers emerged from conventional political structures that progressives came to control. Tom Johnson, the celebrated reform mayor of Cleveland, waged a long war against the powerful streetcar interests in his city, fighting to lower streetcar fares to 3 cents, and ultimately to impose municipal ownership on certain basic utilities. After Johnson’s defeat and death, his talented aide Newton D. Baker won election as mayor and helped maintain Cleveland’s reputation as the best-governed city in America. Hazen Pingree of Detroit, Samuel

“Golden Rule” Jones of Toledo, and other mayors effectively challenged local party bosses to bring the spirit of reform into city government.

Statehouse Progressivism

The assault on boss rule in the cities did not, however, always produce results. Consequently, many progressives turned to state government as an agent for reform. They looked with particular scorn on state legislatures, whose ill-paid, relatively undistinguished members, they believed, were generally incompetent, often corrupt, and totally controlled by party bosses. Reformers began looking for ways to circumvent the boss-controlled legislatures by increasing the power of the electorate.

Two of the most important changes were innovations first proposed by Populists in the 1890s: the initiative and the referendum. The initiative allowed reformers to circumvent state legislatures by submitting new legislation directly to the voters in general elections. The referendum provided a method by which actions of the legislature could be returned to the electorate for approval. By 1918, more than twenty states had enacted one or both of these reforms.

Similarly, the direct primary and the recall were efforts to limit the power of party and improve the quality of elected officials. The primary election was an attempt to take the selection of candidates away from

Initiative and
Referendum

Direct Primary
and Recall

Tom Johnson

the bosses and give it to the people. In the South, it was also an effort to limit black voting—since primary voting, many white southerners believed, would be easier to control than general elections. The recall gave voters the right to remove a public official from office at a special election, which could be called after a sufficient number of citizens had signed a petition. By 1915, every state in the nation had instituted primary elections for at least some offices. The recall encountered more strenuous opposition, but a few states (such as California) adopted it as well.

Other reform measures attempted to clean up the legislatures themselves. Between 1903 and 1908, twelve states passed laws restricting lobbying by business interests in state legislatures. In those same years, twenty-two states banned campaign contributions by corporations, and twenty-four states forbade public officials to accept free passes from railroads. Many states also struggled successfully to create systems of workmen's compensation for workers injured on the job. And starting in 1911, reformers successfully created pensions for widows with dependent children.

Reform efforts proved most effective in states that elevated vigorous and committed politicians to positions of leadership. In New York, Governor Charles Evans Hughes exploited progressive sentiment to create a commission to regulate public utilities. In California, Governor Hiram Johnson limited the political power of the Southern Pacific Railroad. In New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson, the



ROBERT LA FOLLETTE CAMPAIGNING IN WISCONSIN After three terms as governor of Wisconsin, La Follette began a long career in the United States Senate in 1906, during which he worked uncompromisingly for advanced progressive reforms—so uncompromisingly, in fact, that he was often almost completely isolated. He titled a chapter of his autobiography “Alone in the Senate.” La Follette had a greater impact on his own state, whose politics he and his sons dominated for nearly forty years and where he was able to win passage of many reforms that the federal government resisted. (*Library of Congress*)

Princeton University president elected governor in 1910, used executive leadership to win reforms designed to end New Jersey's widely denounced position as the “mother of trusts.”

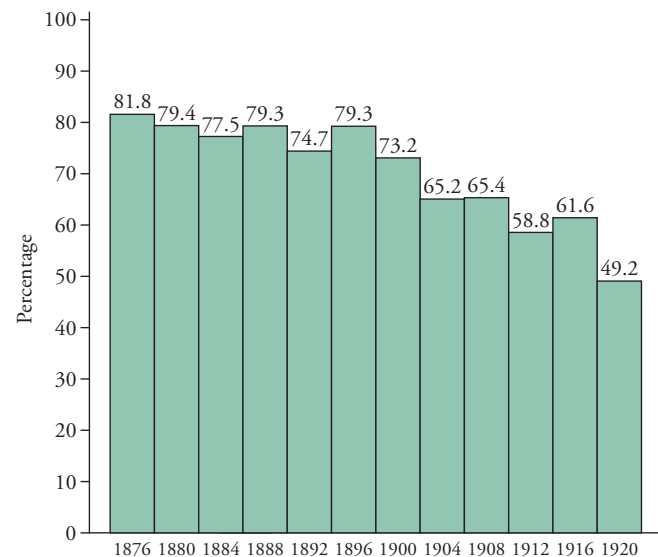
But the most celebrated state-level reformer was Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin. Elected governor in 1900, he helped turn his state into what reformers across the nation described as a “laboratory of progressivism.” Under his

Robert La Follette

leadership the Wisconsin progressives won approval of direct primaries, initiatives, and referendums. They regulated railroads and utilities. They passed laws to regulate the workplace and provide compensation for laborers injured on the job. They instituted graduated taxes on inherited fortunes, and they nearly doubled state levies on railroads and other corporate interests. La Follette used his personal magnetism to widen public awareness of progressive goals. Reform was the responsibility not simply of politicians, he argued, but of newspapers, citizens' groups, educational institutions, and business and professional organizations.

Parties and Interest Groups

The reformers did not, of course, eliminate parties from American political life. But they did contribute to a



VOTER PARTICIPATION IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, 1876–1920

One of the striking developments of early-twentieth-century politics was the significant decline in popular participation in politics. This chart shows the steady downward progression of voter turnout in presidential elections from 1876 to 1920. Turnout remained high by modern standards (except for the aberrant election of 1920, in which turnout dropped sharply because women had recently received the vote but had not yet begun to participate in elections in large numbers). But from an average rate of participation of about 79 percent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, turnout dropped to an average of about 65 percent between 1900 and 1916.

◆ *What were some of the reasons for this decline?*

decline in party influence. Evidence of their impact came from, among other things, the decline in voter turnout. In the late nineteenth century, up to 81 percent of eligible voters routinely turned out for national elections because of the strength of party loyalty. In the early twentieth century, while turnout remained high by today's standards, the figure declined markedly as parties grew weaker. In the presidential election of 1900, 73 percent of the electorate voted. By 1912, that figure had declined to about 59 percent. Never again did voter turnout reach as high as 70 percent.

At the same time that parties were declining, other power centers were beginning to replace them: what have become known as "interest groups." Beginning late in the nineteenth century and accelerating rapidly in the twentieth, new organizations emerged outside the party system: professional organizations, trade associations representing businesses and industries, labor organizations, farm lobbies, and many others. Social workers, the settlement house movement, women's clubs, and others learned to operate as interest groups to advance their demands.

SOURCES OF PROGRESSIVE REFORM

Middle-class reformers, most of them from the East, dominated the public image and much of the substance of progressivism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But they were not alone in seeking to improve social conditions. Working-class Americans, African Americans, westerners, and even party bosses also played crucial roles in advancing some of the important reforms of the era.

Labor, the Machine, and Reform

Although the American Federation of Labor, and its leader Samuel Gompers, remained largely aloof from many of the reform efforts of the time (reflecting Gompers's firm belief that workers should not rely on government to improve their lot), some unions nevertheless played important roles in reform battles. Between 1911 and 1913, thanks to political pressure from labor groups such as the newly formed Union Labor Party, California passed a child labor law, a workmen's compensation law, and a limitation on working hours for women. Union pressures contributed to the passage of similar laws in many other states as well.

One result of the assault on the parties was a change in the party organizations themselves, which attempted to adapt to the new realities so as to preserve their influence. They sometimes allowed their machines to become vehicles of social reform. One example was New York's Tammany Hall, the nation's oldest and most notorious city

machine. Its astute leader, Charles Francis Murphy, began in the early years of the century to fuse the techniques of boss rule with some of the concerns of social reformers. Tammany began to use its political power on behalf of legislation to improve working conditions, protect child laborers, and eliminate the worst abuses of the industrial economy.

In 1911, a terrible fire swept through the factory of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York; 146 workers, most of them women, died. Many of them had been trapped inside the burning building because management had locked the emergency exits to prevent malingering. For the next three years, a state commission studied not only the background of the fire but also the general condition of the industrial workplace. It was responding to intense public pressure from women's groups and New York City labor unions—and to less public pressure from Tammany Hall. By 1914, the commission had issued a series of reports calling for major reforms in the conditions of modern labor. The report itself was a classic progressive document, based on the testimony of experts, filled with statistics and technical data.

Yet, when its recommendations reached the New York legislature, its most effective supporters were not middle-class progressives but two Tammany Democrats from working-class backgrounds: Senator Robert F. Wagner and Assemblyman Alfred E. Smith. With the support of Murphy and the backing of other Tammany legislators, they steered through a series of pioneering labor laws that imposed strict regulations on factory owners and established effective mechanisms for enforcement.

Western Progressives

The American West produced some of the most notable progressive leaders of the time: Hiram Johnson of California, George Norris of Nebraska, William Borah of Idaho, and others—almost all of whom spent at least some of their political careers in the United States Senate. For western states, the most important target of reform energies was not state or local governments, which had relatively little power, but the federal government, which exercised a kind of authority in the West that it had never possessed in the East. That was in part because some of the most important issues to the future of the West required action above the state level. Disputes over water, for example, almost always involved rivers and streams that crossed state lines. The question of who had the rights to the waters of the Colorado River created a political battle that no state government could resolve; the federal government had to arbitrate.

More significant, perhaps, the federal government exercised enormous power over the lands and resources of the western states and provided substantial subsidies to the

Decline of Party Influence

Triangle Shirtwaist Fire



VICTIMS OF THE TRIANGLE FIRE In this bleak photograph, victims of the fire in the factory of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company are laid out on the sidewalk near the building, as police and passersby look up at the scene of the blaze. The tragedy of the Triangle Fire galvanized New York legislators into passing laws to protect women workers. (*Brown Brothers*)

region in the form of land grants and support for railroad and water projects. Huge areas of the West remained (and still remain) public lands, controlled by Washington—a far greater proportion than in any states east of the Mississippi; and much of the growth of the West was (and continues to be) a result of federally funded dams and water projects.

African Americans and Reform

One social question that received relatively little attention from white progressives was race. But among African Americans themselves, the progressive era produced some significant challenges to existing racial norms.

African Americans faced greater obstacles than any other group in challenging their own oppressed status and seeking reform. Thus it was not surprising, perhaps, that so many embraced the message of Booker T.

Washington in the late nineteenth century, to “put down your bucket where you are,” to work for immediate self-improvement rather than long-range social change. Not all African Americans, however, were content with this approach. And by the turn of the century a powerful challenge was emerging—to the philosophy of Washington and, more important, to the entire structure of race relations. The chief spokesman for this new approach was W. E. B. Du Bois.

Du Bois, unlike Washington, had never known slavery. Born in Massachusetts, educated at Fisk University in Atlanta and at Harvard, he grew to maturity with a more expansive view than Washington of the goals of his race and the responsibilities of white society to eliminate prejudice and injustice. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), he launched an open attack on the philosophy

W. E. B. Du Bois

of Washington, accusing him of encouraging white efforts to impose segregation and of limiting the aspirations of his race. “Is it possible and probable,” he asked, “that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meager chance for developing their exceptional men? If history and reason give any distinct answer to these questions, it is an emphatic No.”

Rather than content themselves with education at the trade and agricultural schools, Du Bois advocated, talented blacks should accept nothing less than a full university education. They should aspire to the professions. They should, above all, fight for their civil rights, not simply wait for them to be granted as a reward for patient striving. In 1905, Du Bois and a group of his supporters met at Niagara Falls—on the Canadian side of the border because no hotel on the American side of the Falls would have them—and launched what became known as the Niagara Movement. Four years later, after a race riot in Springfield, Illinois, they joined with white progressives sympathetic to their cause to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Whites held most of the offices at first, but Du Bois, its director of publicity and research, was the guiding spirit. In the ensuing years, the new organization led the drive for equal rights, using as its principal weapon lawsuits in the federal courts.

NAACP Founded

Within less than a decade, the NAACP had begun to win some important victories. In *Guinn v. United States* (1915), the Supreme Court supported its position that the grandfather clause in an Oklahoma law was unconstitutional. (The Statute denied the vote to any citizen whose ancestors had not been enfranchised in 1860.) In *Buchanan v. Worley* (1917), the Court struck down a Louisville, Kentucky, law requiring residential segregation. The NAACP established itself, particularly after Booker T. Washington’s death in 1915, as one of the nation’s leading black organizations, a position it would maintain for many years.

Among the many issues that engaged the NAACP and other African-American organizations was the phenomenon of lynching in the South. Du Bois was an outspoken critic of lynching and an advocate of a federal law making it illegal (since state courts in the South routinely refused to prosecute lynchers). But the most determined opponents of lynching were southern women. They included white women such as Jessie Daniel Ames. The most effective crusader was a black woman, Ida Wells Barnett, who worked both on her own (at great personal risk) and with such organizations as the National Association of Colored Women and the Women’s Convention of the National Baptist Church to try to discredit lynching and challenge segregation.



THE YOUNG W. E. B. DU BOIS This formal photograph of W. E. B. Du Bois was taken in 1899, when he was thirty-one years old and a professor at Atlanta University. He had just published *The Philadelphia Negro*, a classic sociological study of an urban community, which startled many readers with its description of the complex class system among African Americans in the city. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

CRUSADE FOR SOCIAL ORDER AND REFORM

Reformers directed many of their energies at the political process. But they also crusaded on behalf of what they considered moral issues. There were campaigns to eliminate alcohol from national life, to curb prostitution, to limit divorce, and to restrict immigration. Proponents of each of those reforms believed that success would help regenerate society as a whole.

The Temperance Crusade

Many progressives considered the elimination of alcohol from American life a necessary step in restoring order to society. Scarce wages vanished as workers spent hours in



CRUSADING FOR TEMPERANCE This unflattering painting by Ben Shahn portrays late-nineteenth-century women demonstrating grimly in front of a saloon. It suggests the degree to which temperance and prohibition had fallen out of favor with liberals and progressives by the 1930s, when Shahn was working. In earlier years, however, temperance attracted the support of some of the most advanced American reformers. (©Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY/Museum of the City of New York)

the saloons. Drunkenness spawned violence, and occasionally murder, within urban families. Working-class wives and mothers hoped through temperance to reform male behavior and thus improve women's lives. Employers, too, regarded alcohol as an impediment to industrial efficiency; workers often missed time on the job because of drunkenness or came to the factory intoxicated. Critics of economic privilege denounced the liquor industry as one of the nation's most sinister trusts. And political reformers, who (correctly) looked on the saloon as one of the central institutions of the urban machine, saw an attack on drinking as part of an attack on the bosses. Out of such sentiments emerged the temperance movement.

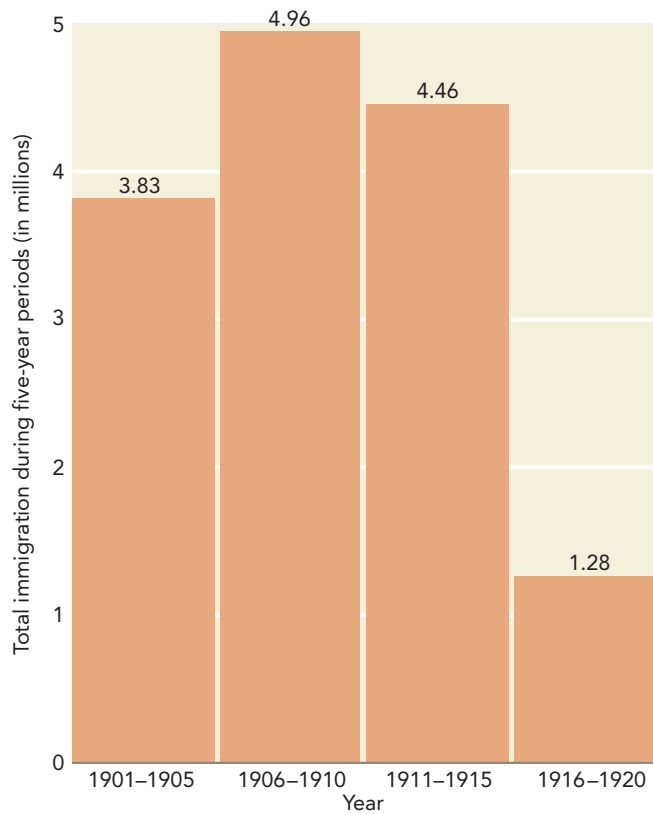
Temperance had been a major reform movement before the Civil War, mobilizing large numbers of people in a crusade with strong evangelical overtones. In 1873, the movement developed new strength. Temperance advocates formed the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), led after 1879 by Frances Willard. By 1911, it had 245,000 members and had become the single largest women's organization in American history to that point. In 1893, the Anti-Saloon League joined the temperance movement and, along with the WCTU, began to press for a specific legislative solution: the legal abolition of saloons. Gradually, that demand grew to include the complete prohibition of the sale and manufacture of alcoholic beverages.

Despite substantial opposition from immigrant and working-class voters, pressure for prohibition grew steadily through the first decades of the new century. By 1916, nineteen states had passed prohibition laws. But since the consumption of alcohol was actually increasing in many unregulated areas, temperance advocates were beginning to advocate a national prohibition law. America's entry into World War I, and the moral fervor it unleashed, provided the last push to the advocates of prohibition. In 1917, with the support of rural fundamentalists who opposed alcohol on moral and religious grounds, progressive advocates of prohibition steered through Congress a constitutional amendment embodying their demands. Two years later, after ratification by every state in the nation except Connecticut and Rhode Island (bastions of Catholic immigrants), the Eighteenth Amendment became law, to take effect in January 1920.

Eighteenth
Amendment

Immigration Restriction

Virtually all reformers agreed that the growing immigrant population had created social problems, but there was wide disagreement on how to best respond. Some progressives believed that the proper approach was to help the new residents adapt to American society. Others argued that efforts at assimilation had failed and



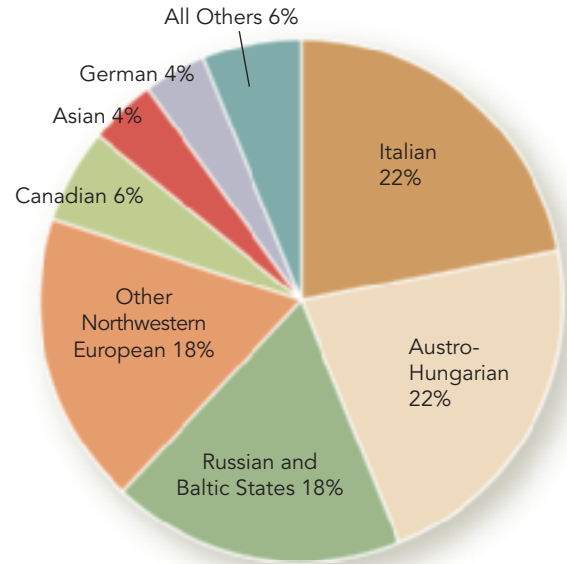
TOTAL IMMIGRATION, 1900–1920 Immigration into the United States reached the highest level in the nation's history to that point in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, there was no five-year period when as many as 3 million immigrants arrived in America. In the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, more than 3 million newcomers arrived in every five-year period—and in one of them, as this chart reveals, the number reached almost 5 million. ♦ *Why did the flow of immigrants drop so sharply in the period 1916–1920?*

that the only solution was to limit the flow of new arrivals.

In the first decades of the century, pressure grew to close the nation's gates. New scholarly theories, appealing to the progressive respect for expertise, argued that the introduction of immigrants into American society was polluting the nation's racial stock. Among the theories created to support this argument was eugenics, the science of altering the reproductive processes of plants and animals to produce new hybrids or breeds. In the early twentieth century, there was an effort, funded by the Carnegie Foundation, to turn eugenics into a method

Eugenics and Nativism

of altering human reproduction as well. But the eugenics movement when applied to humans was not an effort to "breed" new people, an effort for which no scientific tools existed. It was, rather, an effort to grade races and ethnic groups according to their genetic qualities. Eugenists advocated the forced sterilization of the mentally retarded, criminals, and others. But they also spread the belief that human inequalities were hereditary and that



SOURCES OF IMMIGRATION, 1900–1920 At least as striking as the increase in immigration in the early twentieth century was the change in its sources. In the nineteenth century, the vast majority of immigrants to the United States had come from northern and western Europe (especially Britain, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia). Now, as this chart shows, the major sources were southern and eastern Europe, with over 60 percent coming from Italy, Russia, and the eastern European regions of the Austro-Hungarian empire. ♦ *What impact did these changing sources have on attitudes toward immigration in the United States?*

immigration was contributing to the multiplication of the unfit. Skillful publicists such as Madison Grant, whose *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) established him as the nation's most effective nativist, warned of the dangers of racial "mongrelization" and of the importance of protecting the purity of Anglo-Saxon and other Nordic stock from pollution by eastern Europeans, Latin Americans, and Asians.

A special federal commission of "experts," chaired by Senator William P. Dillingham of Vermont, issued a study filled with statistics and scholarly testimony. It argued that the newer immigrant groups—largely southern and eastern Europeans—had proven themselves less assimilable than earlier immigrants. Immigration, the report implied, should be restricted by nationality. Many people who rejected these racial arguments nevertheless supported limiting immigration as a way to solve such urban problems as overcrowding, unemployment, strained social services, and social unrest.

The combination of these concerns gradually won for the nativists the support of some of the nation's leading progressives, among them former president Theodore Roosevelt. Powerful opponents—employers who saw immigration as a source of cheap labor, immigrants themselves, and their political representatives—managed to block the restriction movement for a time. But by the beginning of World War I (which itself effectively blocked immigration temporarily), the nativist tide was gaining strength.

CHALLENGING THE CAPITALIST ORDER

If there was one issue that overshadowed, and helped to shape, all others in the minds of reformers, it was the character of the dramatically growing modern industrial economy. Most of the problems that concerned progressives could be traced back, directly or indirectly, to the growing power and influence—and also, reformers believed, corruption—of corporate America. So it is not surprising that prominent among progressive concerns was reshaping or reforming the behavior of the capitalist world.

The Dream of Socialism

At no time in the history of the United States to that point, and seldom after, did radical critiques of the capitalist system attract more support than in the period between 1900 and 1914. Although never a force to rival or even

seriously threaten the two major parties, the Socialist Party of America grew during these years into a force of considerable strength. In the election of 1900, it had attracted the support of fewer than 100,000 voters; in 1912, its durable leader and perennial presidential candidate,

Eugene Debs

Eugene V. Debs, received nearly 1 million ballots. Strongest in urban immigrant communities, particularly among Germans and Jews, it also attracted the loyalties of a substantial number of Protestant farmers in the South and Midwest. Socialists won election to over 1,000 state and local offices. And they had the support at times of such intellectuals as Lincoln Steffens, the crusader against municipal corruption, and Walter Lippmann, the brilliant young journalist and social critic. Florence Kelley, Frances Willard, and other women reformers were attracted to socialism, too, in part because of its support for pacifism and labor organizing.

Virtually all socialists agreed on the need for basic structural changes in the economy, but they differed



MAY DAY, 1900 The American Socialist Party staged this vast rally in New York City's Union Square to celebrate May Day in 1900. The Second Socialist International had designated May Day as the official holiday for radical labor in 1899. (*Brown Brothers*)

widely on the extent of those changes and the tactics necessary to achieve them. Some socialists endorsed the radical goals of European Marxists; others envisioned a moderate reform that would allow small-scale private enterprise to survive but would nationalize major industries. Some believed in working for reform through electoral politics; others favored militant direct action. Among the militants was the radical labor union the Industrial

“Wobblies”

Workers of the World (IWW), known to opponents as the “Wob-

blies.” Under the leadership of William (“Big Bill”) Haywood, the IWW advocated a single union for all workers and abolition of the “wage slave” system; it rejected political action in favor of strikes—especially the general strike. The Wobblies were widely believed to have been responsible for the dynamiting of railroad lines and power stations and other acts of terror in the first years of the twentieth century.

The IWW was one of the few labor organizations of the time to champion the cause of unskilled workers and had particular strength in the West—where a large group of migratory laborers (miners, timbermen, and others) found it very difficult to organize or sustain conventional unions. In 1917, a strike by IWW timber workers in Washington and Idaho shut down production in the industry. That brought down upon the union the wrath of the federal government, which had just begun mobilizing for war and needed timber for war production. Federal authorities imprisoned the leaders of the union, and state governments between 1917 and 1919 passed a series of laws that effectively outlawed the IWW. The organization survived for a time, but never fully recovered.

Moderate socialists who advocated peaceful change through political struggle dominated the Socialist Party. They emphasized a gradual education of the public to the need for change and patient efforts within the system to enact it. But by the end of World War I, because the party

Socialism’s Demise

had refused to support the war effort and because of a growing

wave of antiradicalism that subjected the socialists to enormous harassment and persecution, socialism was in decline as a significant political force.

Decentralization and Regulation

Most progressives retained a faith in the possibilities of reform within a capitalist system. Rather than nationalize basic industries, many reformers hoped to restore the economy to a more human scale. Few envisioned a return to a society of small, local enterprises; some consolidation, they recognized, was inevitable. They did, however, argue that the federal government should work to break up the largest combinations and enforce a balance between the need for bigness and the need for competition.

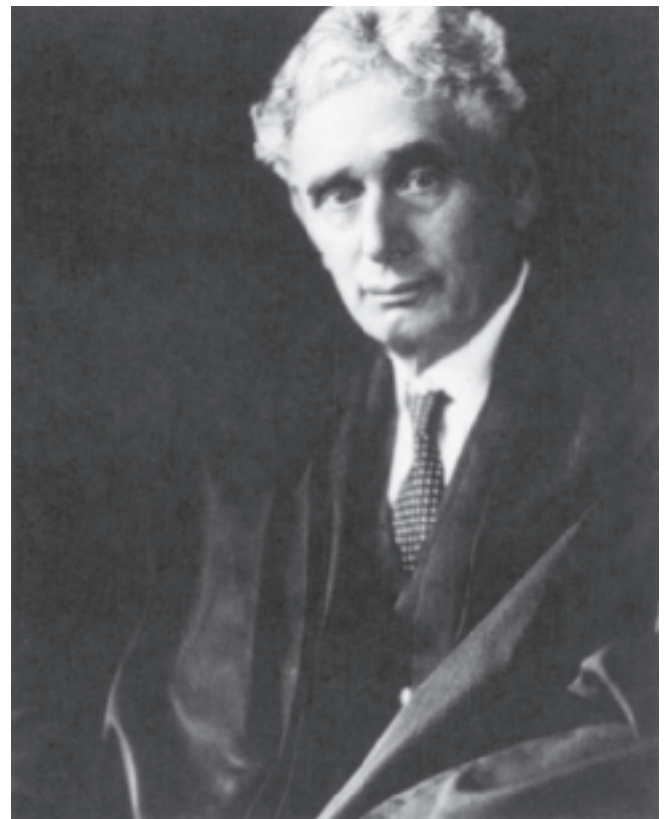
This viewpoint came to be identified particularly closely with Louis D. Brandeis, a brilliant lawyer and later justice of the Supreme Court, who wrote widely (most notably in his 1913 book *Other People’s Money*) about the “curse of bigness.”

Brandeis and his supporters opposed bigness in part because they considered it inefficient. But their opposition had a moral basis as well.

Bigness was a threat not just to efficiency but to freedom. It limited the ability of individuals to

The Problem of Corporate Centralization

control their own destinies. It encouraged abuses of power. Government must, Brandeis insisted, regulate competition in such a way as to ensure that large combinations did not emerge.



LOUIS BRANDEIS Brandeis graduated from Harvard Law School in 1877 with the best academic record of any student in the school’s previous or subsequent history. His success in his Boston law practice was such that by the early twentieth century he was able to spend much of his time in unpaid work for public causes. His investigations of monopoly power soon made him a major figure in the emerging progressive movement. Woodrow Wilson nominated him for the United States Supreme Court in January 1916. He was one of the few nominees in the Court’s history never to have held prior public office, and he was the first Jew ever to have been nominated. The appointment aroused five months of bitter controversy in the Senate before Brandeis was finally confirmed. For the next twenty years, he was one of the Court’s most powerful members—all the while lobbying behind the scenes on behalf of the many political causes (preeminent among them Zionism, the founding of a Jewish state) to which he remained committed. (*Bettmann/Corbis*)

Other progressives were less enthusiastic about the virtues of competition. More important to them was efficiency,

“Good Trusts” and
“Bad Trusts”

which they believed economic concentration encouraged. What government should do, they argued,

was not to fight “bigness,” but to guard against abuses of power by large institutions. It should distinguish between “good trusts” and “bad trusts,” encouraging the good while disciplining the bad. Since economic consolidation was destined to remain a permanent feature of American society, continuing oversight by a strong, modernized government was essential. One of the most influential spokesmen for this emerging “nationalist” position was Herbert Croly, whose 1909 book *The Promise of American Life* became an influential progressive document.

Increasingly, the attention of nationalists such as Croly focused on some form of coordination of the industrial economy. Society must act, Walter Lippmann wrote in a notable 1914 book, *Drift and Mastery*, “to introduce plan where there has been clash, and purpose into the jungles of disordered growth.” To some, that meant businesses themselves learning new ways of cooperation and self-regulation. To others, the solution was for government to play a more active role in regulating and planning economic life. One of those who came to endorse that position (although not fully until after 1910) was Theodore Roosevelt, who once said: “We should enter upon a course of supervision, control, and regulation of those great corporations.” Roosevelt became for a time the most powerful symbol of the reform impulse at the national level.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND THE MODERN PRESIDENCY

“Presidents in general are not lovable,” the writer Walter Lippmann, who had known many, said near the end of his life. “They’ve had to do too much to get where they are. But there was one President who was lovable—Teddy Roosevelt—and I loved him.”

Lippmann was not alone. To a generation of progressive reformers, Theodore Roosevelt was more than an admired public figure; he was an idol. No president before, and few since, had attracted such attention and devotion. Yet, for all his popularity among reformers, Roosevelt was in many respects decidedly conservative. He earned his extraordinary popularity less because of the extent of the reforms he championed than because he brought to his office a broad conception of its powers and invested the presidency with something of its modern status as the center of national political life.

The Accidental President

When President William McKinley suddenly died in September 1901, the victim of an assassination, Roosevelt

(who had been elected vice president less than a year before) was only forty-two years old, the youngest man ever to assume the presidency. “I told William McKinley that it was a mistake to nominate that wild man at Philadelphia,” party boss Mark Hanna was reported to have exclaimed. “Now look, that damned cowboy is President of the United States!”

Roosevelt’s reputation as a wild man was a result less of the substance of his early political career than of its style. As a young member of the New York legislature, he had displayed an energy seldom seen in that lethargic body. As a rancher in the Dakota Badlands (where he retired briefly after the sudden death of his first wife), he had helped capture outlaws. As New York City police commissioner, he had been a flamboyant battler against crime and vice. As assistant secretary of the navy, he had been a bold proponent of American expansion. As commander of the Rough Riders, he had led a heroic, if militarily useless, charge in the battle of San Juan Hill in Cuba during the Spanish-American War.

Roosevelt’s Background



THEODORE ROOSEVELT This heroic portrait of Theodore Roosevelt is by the great American portraitist John Singer Sargent. It hangs today in the White House. (*White House Historical Association*)



BOYS IN THE MINES These young boys, covered in grime and no more than twelve years old, pose for the noted photographer Lewis Hine outside the coal mine in Pennsylvania where they worked as “breaker boys,” crawling into newly blasted areas and breaking up the loose coal. The rugged conditions in the mines were one cause of the great strike of 1902, in which Theodore Roosevelt intervened. (*Library of Congress*)

But Roosevelt as president never openly rebelled against the leaders of his party. He became, rather, a champion of cautious, moderate change. Reform, he believed, was a vehicle less for remaking American society than for protecting it against more radical challenges.

Government, Capital, and Labor

Roosevelt allied himself with those progressives who urged regulation (but not destruction) of the trusts. At the heart of Roosevelt’s policy was his desire to win for government the power to investigate the activities of corporations and publicize the results. The new Department of Commerce and Labor, established in 1903 (later to be divided into two separate departments), was to assist in this task through its investigatory arm, the Bureau of Corporations.

Although Roosevelt was not a trustbuster at heart, he made a few highly publicized efforts to break up combinations. In 1902, he ordered the Justice Department to invoke the Sherman Antitrust Act against a great new railroad monopoly in the Northwest, the Northern Securities Company, a \$400 million enterprise pieced together by J. P. Morgan and others. To Morgan, accustomed to a warm, supportive relationship with Republican administrations, the action was baffling. He told the president, “If we have done anything wrong, send your man to my man and they can fix it up.” Roosevelt proceeded with the case nonetheless, and in 1904 the Supreme Court ruled that the Northern Securities Company must be dissolved. Although he filed more than forty

Roosevelt’s Vision
of Federal Power

Northern Securities
Company

additional antitrust suits during the remainder of his presidency, Roosevelt had no serious commitment to reverse the prevailing trend toward economic concentration.

A similar commitment to establishing the government as an impartial regulatory mechanism shaped Roosevelt’s policy toward labor. In the past, federal intervention in industrial disputes had almost always meant action on behalf of employers. Roosevelt was willing to consider labor’s position as well. When a bitter 1902 strike by the United Mine Workers endangered coal supplies for the coming winter, Roosevelt asked both the operators and the miners to accept impartial federal arbitration. When the mine owners balked, Roosevelt threatened to send federal troops to seize the mines. The operators finally relented. Arbitrators awarded the strikers a 10 percent wage increase and a nine-hour day, although no recognition of their union—less than they had wanted but more than they would likely have won without Roosevelt’s intervention. Roosevelt viewed himself as no more the champion of labor than as that of management. On several occasions, he ordered federal troops to intervene in strikes on behalf of employers.

The “Square Deal”

During Roosevelt’s first years as president, he was principally concerned with winning reelection, which required that he not antagonize the conservative Republican Old Guard. By skillfully dispensing patronage to conservatives and progressives alike, and by winning the support of northern businessmen while making adroit gestures to reformers, Roosevelt had neutralized his opposition within the party by early 1904. He won its presidential

nomination with ease. And in the general election, where he faced a dull conservative Democrat, Alton B. Parker, he captured over 57 percent of the popular vote and lost no states outside the South.

During the 1904 campaign, Roosevelt boasted that he had worked in the anthracite coal strike to provide everyone with a “square deal.” One of his first targets after the election was the powerful railroad industry. The Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, establishing the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), had been an early effort to regulate the industry; but over the years, the courts had sharply limited its influence. Roosevelt asked Congress for legislation to increase the government’s power to oversee railroad rates. The Hepburn Railroad Regulation Act of 1906 sought to restore some regulatory authority to the government, although the bill was so cautious that it satisfied few progressives.

Hepburn Act

Roosevelt also pressured Congress to enact the Pure Food and Drug Act, which restricted the sale of dangerous or ineffective medicines. When Upton Sinclair’s powerful novel *The Jungle* appeared in 1906, featuring appalling descriptions of conditions in the meat-packing industry, Roosevelt pushed for passage of the Meat Inspection Act, which helped eliminate many diseases once transmitted in impure meat. Starting in 1907, he proposed even more stringent reforms: an eight-hour day for workers, broader compensation for victims of industrial accidents, inheritance and income taxes, regulation of the stock market, and others. He also started openly to criticize conservatives in Congress and the judiciary who were obstructing these programs. The result was a widening gulf between the president and the conservative wing of his party.

Pure Food and Drug Act

Roosevelt and Conservation

Roosevelt’s aggressive policies on behalf of conservation contributed to that gulf. Using executive powers, he restricted private development on millions of acres of undeveloped government land—most of it in the West—by adding them to the previously modest national forest system. When conservatives in Congress restricted his authority over public lands in 1907, Roosevelt and his chief forester, Gifford Pinchot, seized all the forests and many of the water power sites still in the public domain before the bill became law.

Roosevelt was the first president to take an active interest in the new and struggling American conservation movement. In the early twentieth century, the idea of preserving the natural world for ecological reasons was not well established. Instead, many people who considered themselves “conservationists”—such as Pinchot, the first director of the National Forest Service (which he helped to create)—promoted policies to protect land for carefully managed development.

The Old Guard eagerly supported another important aspect

Federal Aid to the West

of Roosevelt’s natural resource policy: public reclamation and irrigation projects. In 1902, the president backed the National Reclamation Act, better known as the Newlands Act (named for its sponsor, Nevada senator Francis Newlands). The Newlands Act provided federal funds for the construction of dams, reservoirs, and canals in the West—projects that would open new lands for cultivation and (years later) provide cheap electric power.

Roosevelt and Preservation

Despite his sympathy with Pinchot’s vision of conservation, Roosevelt also shared some of the concerns of the naturalists—those within the conservation movement committed to protecting the natural beauty of the land and the health of its wildlife from human intrusion. Early in his presidency, Roosevelt even spent four days camping in the Sierras with John Muir, the nation’s leading preservationist and the founder of the Sierra Club.

Roosevelt added significantly to the still-young National Park System, whose purpose was to protect public land from any exploitation or development at all. Congress had created the first national park—Yellowstone, in Wyoming, in 1872—and had authorized others in the 1890s: Yosemite and Sequoia in California, and Mount Rainier in Washington State. Roosevelt added land to several existing parks and also created new ones: Crater Lake in Oregon, Mesa Verde in Utah, Platt in Oklahoma, and Wind Cave in South Dakota.

The Hetch Hetchy Controversy

The contending views of the early conservation movement came to a head beginning in 1906 in a sensational controversy over the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park. Hetch Hetchy (a name derived from a local Indian term meaning “grassy meadows”) was a spectacular, high-walled valley popular with naturalists. But many residents of San Francisco, worried about finding enough water to serve their growing population, saw Hetch Hetchy as an ideal place for a dam, which would create a large reservoir for the city—a plan that Muir and others furiously opposed.

In 1906, San Francisco suffered a devastating earthquake and fire. Widespread sympathy for the city strengthened the case for the dam; and Theodore Roosevelt—who had initially expressed some sympathy for Muir’s position—turned the decision over to his chief forester, Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot had no interest in Muir’s aesthetic and spiritual arguments. He approved construction of the dam.

For over a decade, a battle raged between naturalists and the advocates of the dam, a battle that consumed the energies of John Muir for the rest of his life and that eventually, many believed, helped kill him. “Dam Hetch Hetchy!” Muir once said. “As well dam for water-tanks the people’s cathedrals and churches, for no holier

Competing Conservationist Visions



ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL PARKS AND FORESTS This map illustrates the steady growth throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the systems of national parks and national forests in the United States. Although Theodore Roosevelt is widely and correctly remembered as a great champion of national parks and forests, the greatest expansions of these systems occurred after his presidency. Note, for example, how many new areas were added in the 1920s. ♦ *What is the difference between national parks and national forests?*



ROOSEVELT AND MUIR IN YOSEMITE John Muir, founder and leader of the Sierra Club, considered Theodore Roosevelt a friend and ally—a relationship cemented by a four-day camping trip the two men took together in Yosemite National Park in 1903. Roosevelt was indeed a friend to the national park and national forest systems and added considerable acreage to both. Among other things, he expanded Yosemite (at Muir's request). But unlike Muir, Roosevelt was also committed to economic development. As a result, he was not always a reliable ally of the most committed preservationists. (Bettmann/Corbis)

temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.” To Pinchot, there was no question that the needs of the city were more important than the claims of preservation. Muir helped place a referendum question on the ballot in 1908, certain that the residents of the city would oppose the project “as soon as light is cast upon it.” Instead, San Franciscans approved the dam by a huge margin. Although there were many more delays in succeeding years, construction of the dam finally began after World War I.

This setback for the naturalists was not, however, a total defeat. The fight against Hetch Hetchy helped mobilize a new coalition of people committed to preservation, not “rational use,” of wilderness.

The Panic of 1907

Despite the flurry of reforms Roosevelt was able to enact, the government still had relatively little control over the industrial economy. That became clear in 1907, when a serious panic and recession began.

Conservatives blamed Roosevelt’s “mad” economic policies for the disaster. And while the president naturally (and correctly) disagreed, he nevertheless acted quickly to reassure business leaders that he would not interfere with their recovery efforts. J. P. Morgan, in a spectacular display of his financial power, helped construct a pool of the assets of several important New York banks to prop up shaky financial institutions. The key to the arrangement, Morgan told the president, was the purchase by U.S. Steel of the shares of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, currently held by a threatened New York bank. He would, he insisted, need assurances that the purchase would not prompt antitrust action. Roosevelt tacitly agreed, and the Morgan plan proceeded. Whether or not as a result, the panic soon subsided.

Roosevelt loved being president. As his years in office produced increasing political successes, as his public popularity continued to rise, more and more observers began to assume that he would run for reelection in 1908, despite the longstanding tradition of presidents serving no more than two terms. But the Panic of 1907, combined with Roosevelt’s growing “radicalism” during his second term, so alienated conservatives in his own party that he might have had difficulty winning the Republican nomination. In 1904, moreover, he had made a public promise to step down four years later. And so in 1909, Roosevelt, fifty years old, retired from public life—briefly.

THE TROUBLED SUCCESSION

William Howard Taft, who assumed the presidency in 1909, had been Theodore Roosevelt’s most trusted lieutenant and his hand-picked successor; progressive reformers

believed him to be one of their own. But Taft had also been a restrained and moderate jurist, a man with a punctilious regard for legal process; conservatives expected him to abandon Roosevelt’s aggressive use of presidential powers. By seeming acceptable to almost everyone, Taft easily won election to the White House in 1908. He received his party’s nomination virtually uncontested. His victory in the general election in November—over William Jennings Bryan, running for the Democrats for the third time—was a foregone conclusion.

Four years later, however, Taft would leave office the most decisively defeated president of the twentieth century, his party deeply divided and the government in the hands of a Democratic administration for the first time in twenty years.

Taft and the Progressives

Taft’s first problem arose in the opening months of the new administration, when he called Congress into special session to lower protective tariff rates, an old progressive demand. But the president made no effort to overcome the opposition of the congressional Old Guard, arguing that to do so would violate the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers. The result was the feeble Payne-Aldrich Tariff, which reduced tariff rates scarcely at all and in some areas raised them. Progressives resented the president’s passivity.

Taft may not have been a champion of reform, but neither was he a consistent opponent of change. In 1912, he supported and signed legislation to create a federal Children’s Bureau to investigate “all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life.” Julia Lathrop, the first chief of the bureau, was a veteran of Hull House and a close associate of Jane Addams. She helped make the Children’s Bureau a force for progressive change not just in federal policy, but also in state and local governments.

A sensational controversy broke out late in 1909 that helped destroy Taft’s popularity with reformers for good. Many progressives had been unhappy when Taft replaced Roosevelt’s secretary of the interior, James R. Garfield, an aggressive conservationist, with Richard A. Ballinger, a conservative corporate lawyer. Suspicion of Ballinger grew when he attempted to invalidate Roosevelt’s removal of nearly 1 million acres of forests and mineral reserves from private development.

In the midst of this mounting concern, Louis Glavis, an Interior Department investigator, charged Ballinger with having once connived to turn over valuable public coal lands in Alaska to a private syndicate for personal profit. Glavis took the evidence to Gifford Pinchot, still head of the Forest Service and a critic of Ballinger’s policies. Pinchot took the charges to the president. Taft investigated them and decided they were

Tennessee Coal and Iron Company

up shaky financial institutions. The key to the arrangement, Morgan

told the president, was the purchase by U.S. Steel of the shares of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, currently held by a threatened New York bank. He would, he insisted, need assurances that the purchase would not prompt antitrust action. Roosevelt tacitly agreed, and the Morgan plan proceeded. Whether or not as a result, the panic soon subsided.

Payne-Aldrich Tariff

William Howard Taft

tenant and his hand-picked successor; progressive reformers

Ballinger-Pinchot Dispute



WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT Taft could be a jovial companion in small groups, but his public image was of a dull, stolid man who stood in sharp and unfortunate contrast to his dynamic predecessor, Theodore Roosevelt. Taft also suffered public ridicule for his enormous size. He weighed as much as 350 pounds at times, and wide publicity accompanied his installation of an oversized bathtub in the White House. (Bettmann/Corbis)

groundless. But Pinchot was not satisfied, particularly after Taft fired Glavis for his part in the episode. He leaked the story to the press and asked Congress to investigate the scandal. The president discharged him for insubordination. The congressional committee appointed to study the controversy, dominated by Old Guard Republicans, exonerated Ballinger. But progressives throughout the country supported Pinchot. The controversy aroused as much public passion as any dispute of its time; and when it was over, Taft had alienated the supporters of Roosevelt completely and, it seemed, irrevocably.

The Return of Roosevelt

During most of these controversies, Theodore Roosevelt was far away: on a long hunting safari in Africa and an

extended tour of Europe. To the American public, however, Roosevelt remained a formidable presence. His return to New York in the spring of 1910 was a major public event. Roosevelt insisted that he had no plans to reenter politics, but within a month he announced that he would embark on a national speaking tour before the end of the summer. Furious with Taft, he was becoming convinced that he alone was capable of reuniting the Republican Party.

The real signal of Roosevelt's decision to assume leadership of Republican reformers came in a speech he gave on September 1, 1910, in Osawatomic, Kansas. In it he outlined a set of principles, which he labeled the "New Nationalism," that made clear he had moved a considerable way from the cautious conservatism of the first years of his presidency. He argued that social justice was possible only through the vigorous efforts of a strong federal government whose executive acted as the "steward of the public welfare." Those who thought primarily of property rights and personal profit "must now give way to the advocate of human welfare." He supported graduated income and inheritance taxes, workers' compensation for industrial accidents, regulation of the labor of women and children, tariff revision, and firmer regulation of corporations.

Spreading Insurgency

The congressional elections of 1910 provided further evidence of how far the progressive revolt had spread. In primary elections, conservative Republicans suffered defeat after defeat while almost all the progressive incumbents were reelected. In the general election, the Democrats, who were now offering progressive candidates of their own, won control of the House of Representatives for the first time in sixteen years and gained strength in the Senate. But Roosevelt still denied any presidential ambitions and claimed that his real purpose was to pressure Taft to return to progressive policies. Two events, however, changed his mind. The first, on October 27, 1911, was the announcement by the administration of a suit against U.S. Steel, which charged, among other things, that the 1907 acquisition of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company had been illegal. Roosevelt had approved that acquisition in the midst of the 1907 panic, and he was enraged by the implication that he had acted improperly.

Roosevelt was still reluctant to become a candidate for president because Senator Robert La Follette, the great Wisconsin progressive, had been working since 1911 to secure the presidential nomination for himself. But La Follette's candidacy stumbled in February 1912 when, exhausted, and distraught over the illness of a daughter, he appeared to suffer a nervous breakdown during a speech in Philadelphia. Roosevelt announced his candidacy on February 22.



ROOSEVELT AT OSAWATOMIE Roosevelt's famous speech at Osawatimie, Kansas, in 1910 was the most radical of his career and openly marked his break with the Taft administration and the Republican leadership. "The essence of any struggle for liberty," he told his largely conservative audience, "has always been, and must always be to take from some one man or class of men the right to enjoy power, or wealth, or position or immunity, which has not been earned by service to his or their fellows." (*Brown Brothers*)

Roosevelt Versus Taft

La Follette retained some diehard support. But for all practical purposes, the campaign for the Republican nomination had now become a battle between Roosevelt and Taft. Roosevelt scored overwhelming victories in all thirteen presidential primaries. Taft, however, remained the choice of most party leaders, who controlled the nominating process.

The battle for the nomination at the Chicago convention revolved around an unusually large number of contested delegates: 254 in all. Roosevelt needed fewer than half the disputed seats to clinch the nomination. But the Republican National Committee, controlled by the Old Guard, awarded all but 19 of them to Taft. At a rally the night before the convention opened, Roosevelt addressed 5,000 cheering supporters. "We stand at Armageddon," he told the roaring crowd, "and we battle for the Lord." The next day, he led his supporters out of the convention, and out of the party. The convention then quietly nominated Taft on the first ballot.

Roosevelt summoned his supporters back to Chicago in August for another convention, this one to launch the

new Progressive Party and nominate himself as its presidential candidate. Roosevelt approached the battle feeling, as he put it, "fit as a bull moose" (thus giving his new party an enduring nickname).

The Progressive Party

The "Bull Moose" party was notable for its strong commitment to a wide range of progressive causes that had grown in popularity over the previous two decades. The party advocated additional regulation of industry and trusts, sweeping reforms of many areas of government, compensation by the government for workers injured on the job, pensions for the elderly and for widows with children, and (alone among the major parties) woman suffrage. The delegates left the party's convention filled with hope and excitement.

Roosevelt himself, however, entered the fall campaign aware that his cause was almost hopeless, partly because many of the insurgents who had supported him during the primaries refused to follow him out of the Republican Party. It was also because of the man the Democrats had nominated for president.

WOODROW WILSON AND THE NEW FREEDOM

The 1912 presidential contest was not simply one between conservatives and reformers. It was also one between two brands of progressivism. And it matched the two most important national leaders of the early twentieth century in unequal contest.

Woodrow Wilson

Reform sentiment had been gaining strength within the Democratic as well as the Republican Party in the first years of the century. At the 1912 Democratic Convention in Baltimore in June, Champ Clark, the conservative Speaker of the House, was unable to assemble the two-thirds majority necessary for nomination because of progressive opposition. Finally, on the forty-sixth ballot, Woodrow Wilson, the governor of New Jersey and the only genuinely progressive candidate in the race, emerged as the party's nominee.

Wilson had risen to political prominence by an unusual path. He had been a professor of political science at Princeton until 1902, when he was named president of the university. Elected governor of New Jersey in 1910, he demonstrated a commitment to reform. During his two years in the statehouse, he earned a national reputation for winning passage of progressive legislation. As a presidential candidate in 1912, Wilson presented a progressive program that came

Wilson's "New Freedom"

Wilson's "New Freedom"

to be called the "New Freedom." Roosevelt's New Nationalism advocated accepting economic concentration and using government to regulate and control it. But Wilson seemed to side with those who (like Louis Brandeis) believed that bigness was both unjust and inefficient, that the proper response to monopoly was not to regulate it but to destroy it.

The 1912 presidential campaign was an anticlimax. William Howard Taft, resigned to defeat, barely campaigned. Roosevelt campaigned energetically (until a gunshot wound from a would-be assassin forced him to the sidelines during the last weeks before the election), but he failed to draw any significant numbers of Democratic progressives away from Wilson. In November, Roosevelt and Taft split the Republican vote; Wilson held on to most Democrats and won. He polled only 42 percent of the vote, compared with 27 percent for Roosevelt, 23 percent for Taft, and 6 percent for the socialist Eugene Debs. But in the electoral college, Wilson won 435 of the 531 votes. Roosevelt had carried only six states, Taft two, Debs none.

The Scholar as President

Wilson was a bold and forceful president. He exerted firm control over his cabinet, and he delegated real authority only to those whose loyalty to him was beyond question. His most powerful adviser, Colonel Edward M. House, was an intelligent and ambitious Texan who held no office and whose only claim to authority was his personal intimacy with the president.



WOODROW WILSON CAMPAIGNING

Woodrow Wilson, former president of Princeton University and current governor of New Jersey, gives a political speech in Virginia (his native state) in 1912, early in his campaign for the presidency. (Getty Images)

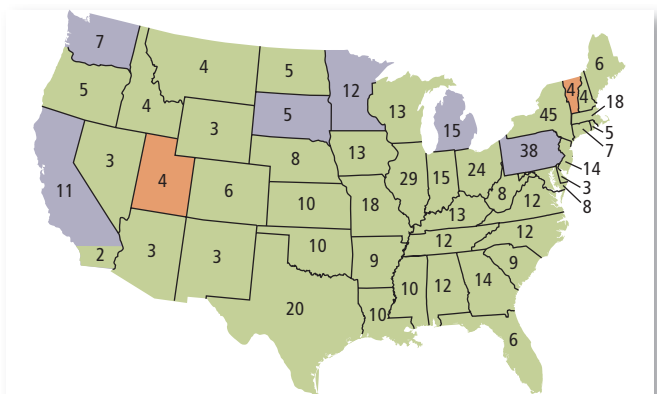
In legislative matters, Wilson skillfully welded together a coalition that would support his program. Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress made his task easier. Wilson's first triumph as president was

the fulfillment of an old Democratic (and progressive) goal: a substantial lowering of the protective tariff. The Underwood-Simmons Tariff provided substantial enough, progressives believed, to introduce real competition into American markets and thus to help break the power of trusts. To make up for the loss of revenue under the new tariff, Congress approved a graduated income tax, which the recently adopted Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution now permitted. This first modern income tax imposed a 1 percent tax on individuals and corporations earning more than \$4,000 a year, with rates ranging up to 6 percent on incomes over \$500,000 annually.

Wilson held Congress in session through the summer to work on a major reform of the American banking sys-

tem: the Federal Reserve Act, which Congress passed and the president signed on December 23, 1913. It created twelve regional banks, each to be owned and controlled by the individual banks of its district. The regional Federal Reserve banks would hold a certain percentage of the assets of their member banks in reserve; they would use those reserves to support loans to private banks at an interest (or "discount") rate that the Federal Reserve system would set; they would issue a new type of paper currency—Federal Reserve notes—that would become the nation's basic medium of trade and would be backed by the government. Most important, they would be able to shift funds quickly to troubled areas—to meet increased demands for credit or to protect imperiled banks. Supervising and regulating the entire system was a national Federal Reserve Board, whose members were appointed by the president. Nearly half the nation's banking resources were represented in the system within a year, and 80 percent by the late 1920s.

Federal Reserve Act



Candidate (Party)	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote (%)
William H. Taft (Republican)	8	3,484,980 (23.2)
Woodrow Wilson (Democratic)	435	6,293,454 (41.9)
Theodore Roosevelt (Progressive/Bull Moose)	88	4,119,538 (27.4)
Eugene V. Debs (Socialist)	—	900,672 (6.0)
Other parties (Prohibition, Socialist Labor)	—	235,025

58.8% of electorate voting

ELECTION OF 1912 The election of 1912 was one of the most unusual in American history because of the dramatic schism within the Republican Party. Two Republican presidents—William Howard Taft, the incumbent, and Theodore Roosevelt, his predecessor—ran against each other in 1912, opening the way for a victory by the Democratic candidate, Woodrow Wilson, who won with only about 42 percent of the popular vote. A fourth candidate, the socialist Eugene V. Debs, received a significant 6 percent of the vote. ♦ *What events caused the schism between Taft and Roosevelt?*

In 1914, turning to the central issue of his 1912 campaign, Wilson proposed two measures to deal with the problem of monopoly. In the process he revealed how his own approach to the issue was beginning to change. There was a proposal to create a federal agency through which the government would help business police itself—a regulatory commission of the type Roosevelt had advocated in 1912. There were also proposals to strengthen the government's ability to break up trusts—a decentralizing approach characteristic of Wilson's 1912 campaign. The two measures took shape as the Federal Trade Commission Act and the Clayton Antitrust Act. The Federal Trade Commission Act created a regulatory agency that would help businesses determine in advance whether their actions would be acceptable to the government. The agency would also have authority to launch prosecutions against "unfair trade practices," and it would have wide power to investigate corporate behavior. Wilson signed the Federal Trade Commission Bill happily. But he seemed to lose interest in the Clayton Antitrust Bill and did little to protect it from conservative assaults, which greatly weakened it. The future, he had apparently decided, lay with government supervision.

Retreat and Advance

By the fall of 1914, Wilson believed that the program of the New Freedom was essentially complete and that agitation for reform would now subside. He refused to support the movement for national woman suffrage. Deferring to southern Democrats, and reflecting his own southern background, he condoned the reimposition of segregation in the agencies of the federal government (in contrast to Roosevelt, who had ordered the elimination of many such barriers). When congressional

progressives attempted to enlist his support for new reform legislation, Wilson dismissed their proposals as unconstitutional or unnecessary.

The congressional elections of 1914, however, shattered the president's complacency. Democrats suffered major losses in Congress, and voters who in 1912 had supported the Progressive Party began returning to the Republicans. Wilson would not be able to rely on a divided opposition when he ran for reelection in 1916. By the end of 1915, therefore, Wilson had begun to support a second flurry of reforms. In January 1916, he appointed Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court, making him not only the first Jew but also the most advanced progressive to serve there. Later, he supported a measure to make it easier for farmers to receive credit and one creating a system of workers' compensation for federal employees.

Wilson was sponsoring measures that expanded the powers of the national government in important ways. In 1916, for example, Wilson supported the Keating-

Owen Act, the first federal law regulating child labor. The measure prohibited the shipment of goods produced by underage children across state lines, thus giving an expanded importance to the constitutional clause assigning Congress the task of regulating interstate commerce. The president similarly supported measures that used federal taxing authority as a vehicle for legislating social change. After the Court struck down Keating-Owen, a new law attempted to achieve the same goal by imposing a heavy tax on the products of child labor. (The Court later struck it down too.) And the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 demonstrated another way in which the federal government could influence local behavior; it offered matching federal grants to support agricultural extension education. Over time, these innovative uses of government overcame most of the constitutional objections and became the foundation of a long-term growth in federal power over the economy.

Child-Labor Laws

CONCLUSION

The powerful surge of reform efforts in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth—reforms intended to help the United States deal with the extraordinary changes and the vexing problem of the modern industrial era—caused many Americans to come to identify themselves as “progressives.” That label meant many different things to many different people, but at its core was a belief that human effort and government action could improve society. The reform crusades gained strength steadily, driven by both men and women, and by people of many races and ethnicities. By the early twentieth century, progressivism had become a powerful, transformative force in American life.

This great surge of reform eventually reached the federal government and national politics, as progressives began to understand the limits of state and local reform. Success, they came to believe, required the engagement of the federal government. Two national leaders—Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson—contributed to a period of national reform that made the government in Washington a great center of power for the first time since the Civil War—a position it has never relinquished. Progressivism did not solve the nation's problems, but it gave movements, organizations, and governments new tools to deal with them.

INTERACTIVE LEARNING

The *Primary Source Investigator CD-ROM* offers the following materials related to this chapter:

- A short documentary movie, **Votes for Women**, on the story of the fight by women for the right to vote in the United States (D15).
- Interactive maps: **U.S. Elections (M7)**, **Woman Suffrage (M16)**, and **The United States and Latin America (M21)**.
- Documents, images, and maps related to the rise of progressivism, highlighted by the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Highlights include images and documents related to the settlement house movement; images of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire; the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution,

which gave women the right to vote; images of women hanging pro-suffrage posters and a video clip of women suffragists meeting with President Roosevelt; the text of the congressional act establishing Yellowstone National Park; photographs taken of the stockyards; correspondence between President Roosevelt and Upton Sinclair; and the text of the 1906 Meat Inspection Act and an image of a promotional poster for an early movie version of *The Jungle*.

Online Learning Center (www.mhhe.com/brinkley13e)

For quizzes, Internet resources, references to additional books and films, and more, consult this book's Online Learning Center.

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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