

# US History/Progressive Era

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## Progressivism

Industrialization led to the rise of big businesses at the expense of the worker. Factory laborers faced long hours, low wages, and unsanitary conditions. The large corporations protected themselves by allying with political parties. The parties, in turn, were controlled by party leaders, rather than by the members. The Progressive movement was an effort to cure America of all its problems. These problems include the idea of slavery, reconstruction from the American Civil War, and women's rights. Progressivism rejects the church for the main source of change throughout the country. The main goals of progressivism were to remove corrupt political machines from office and get more common people in the political process. Progressivism was not so much an organized movement as it was a general spirit of reform embraced by Americans with diverse goals and backgrounds during the early twentieth century <sup>[1]</sup> Progressivism, belief that you can make the world a better place with a certain method to employ and achieve the goal. Federal level, state, public and private. Local public safety, less corruption, efficiency, regulation, reform, specialization, social justice and social control of knowledge. By activating this, brings equality for men and women no matter, gender or race; or social background.

## Local Reform

At the urban level, Progressivism mainly affected municipal government. The system whereby the city is governed by a powerful mayor and a council was replaced by the *council-manager* or the *commission* system. Under the council-manager system, the council would pass laws, while the manager would do no more than ensure their execution. The manager was essentially a weak mayor. Under the commission system, the executive would be composed of people who each controlled one area of government. The commission was essentially a multi-member, rather than single-member, executive.

At the state level, several electoral reforms were made. Firstly, the secret ballot was introduced. Prior to the secret ballot, the ballots were colored papers printed by the political parties. Due to the lack of secrecy, bribing or blackmailing voters became common. It was to prevent businessmen or politicians from thus coercing voters that the secret ballot was introduced. Also, reforms were made to give voters more say in government. The initiative allowed voters to propose new laws. The referendum allowed certain laws (for example tax increases) to be approved by the voters first. Finally, the recall, allowed the voters to remove public officials for wrongdoing while in office.

In addition, Progressives sought to combat the power of party leaders over which candidates would be nominated. The *direct primary* was instituted, under which the voters cast ballots to nominate candidates. Before the primary was introduced, the party leaders or party faithful were the only ones allowed to nominate candidates. The South pioneered some political reforms; "the direct primarily originated in North Carolina; the city commission plan arose in Galveston Texas; and the city manager plan began in Staunton-Virginia. Progressive governors introduced business regulation, educational expansion, and other reforms that duplicated actions taken by northern counterparts.

## Labor Reforms

Progressive movement also attempted to give more power over legislation to the general populace. Three practices - the *referendum*, the *initiative*, and the *recall* - were created. The referendum allowed the voters to vote on a bill at an election before it took force as law. The initiative permitted the voters to petition and force the legislature to vote on a certain bill. Finally, the recall permitted voters to remove elected officials from office in the middle of the term. State laws were formed to improve labor conditions. Many states enacted factory inspection laws, and by 1916 nearly two-thirds of the states required compensation for the victims in industrial accidents.

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In 1901, Jane Addams founded the Juvenile Protective Association, a non-profit agency dedicated to protecting children from abuse. In 1903, Mary Harris Jones organized the Children's Crusade, a march of child workers from Kensington, Pennsylvania to the home of President Theodore Roosevelt in Oyster Bay, New York, bringing national attention to the issue of child labor. In 1909, President Roosevelt hosted the first White House Conference on Children, which continued to be held every decade through the 1970s. In 1912, the United States Children's Bureau was created in order to investigate "all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people." At the instigation of middle class coalitions, many states enacted factory inspection laws, and by 1916 two-thirds of the states required compensation for victims of industrial accidents. An alliance of labor and humanitarian groups induced some legislatures to grant aid to mothers with dependent children. Under pressure from the National Child Labor to Committee, nearly every state set a minimum age for employment and limited hours that employers could make children work. Families that needed extra income evaded child labor restrictions by falsifying their children's ages to employers.

States also regulated female labor by setting maximum work hours, especially when an accident at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory resulted in the deaths of more than 100 women. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of regulated work hours for women in "Muller v. Oregon". Finally, some minimum wage provisions were introduced (for men and women).

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded in Chicago in 1905 at a convention of anarchist and socialist union members who were opposed to the policies of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Unlike the AFL, which was a group composed of separate unions for each different trade (craft unionism), the IWW supported the concept of industrial unionism, in which all workers in a given industry are organized in one union, regardless of each worker's particular trade. They promoted the idea of "One Big Union" in the hopes that one large, centralized body would be better equipped to deal with similarly-large capitalist enterprises.

1881 The Great influx of Russian and Polish Jews. They formed an objectable part of the population, because they couldn't speak English, lived closely crowded, and dirty. Penniless and unfamiliar with industrial conditions. They were apart of industrial, intellectual, and civil life. Their willingness to work 18 hours obnoxiously was crazy compared to Americans who worked (part-time). "It's not the condition that the immigrant comes from that determines he's usefulness; But the power one shows to rise above the condition."

## President Theodore Roosevelt

At the national level, Progressivism centered on defeating the power of large businesses. President Theodore Roosevelt, who succeeded to the Presidency when President McKinley was assassinated in 1901, helped the Progressive movement greatly.

In early 1902, anthracite (coal) miners struck, demanding that the mine owners correct abuses of the miners. The miners complained that they had not received a pay raise in over two decades. Furthermore, miners' payments came in the form of *scrip*. Scrips were essentially coupons for goods from company stores. These stores usually charged unfair prices.

The leader of the mine owners, George F. Baer, suggested that miners had committed an error by failing to trust the mine owners. He declared that the mine owners were good, Christian men who could be trusted more than union leaders.

The owners and the miners refused to negotiate with each other. As autumn approached, many feared that the coal strike would cripple the economy. President Roosevelt intervened by asking the owners and miners to submit to arbitration. The miners accepted, but the owners refused Roosevelt's suggestion. Roosevelt then threatened to use the Army to take over the mines. The owners finally acquiesced; the strike was settled in 1903. Roosevelt's policy triumphed in 1904 when the Supreme Court, convinced by the government's arguments, created by J.P. Morgan and his business allies. Roosevelt chose however, not to attack others' trust, such as U.S. Steel another of Morgan's creations. Prosecution of Northern Securities began reportedly collared Roosevelt and offered "if we have done

anything wrong, send your man to my man and we can fix it up". Roosevelt continued his Progressive actions when he revived the Sherman Antitrust Act. The Act sought to prevent companies from combining into trusts and gaining monopolies. A *trust* is formed when many companies loosely join together under a common board of directors to gain total control of an entire market so that prices can be raised without the threat of competitors. This total control of a market and subsequent price raising is a *monopoly*. However, until Roosevelt's administration, the Act was rarely enforced. Roosevelt also enforced the Hepburn Act, which allowed the Interstate Commerce Commission to regulate railroads. The railroads had allied themselves with large businesses, charging higher rates to those business' competitors. Thus, the large businesses would gain even more power. The Hepburn Act prevented railroads from granting reduced rates to businesses. Roosevelt also championed the cause of conservation. He set aside large amounts of land as part of the national park system.

### **Conflicts with other Imperialist Nations**

Imperialism was yet a common theme in the relations between nations in this era. It should be noted that although the US annexed Hawaii, Japan also had interests in the island and an aggressive foreign policy; Japan had already seized Taiwan from China in 1885 and would annex Korea in 1905. Imperial Germany was another aggressive power. The U.S. and Germany had conflicts over who would control Samoa, in the Pacific, as well as nearly faced a naval war with Germany in 1902 over German plans to seize the customs revenues of Venezuela.

However, under the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt, the United States became more open in asserting international power. In 1905, Russia and Japan went to war over control of Korea and China. The Japanese won naval victories over two Russian fleets, in the Battles of the Yellow Sea and Tsushima. President Roosevelt offered to negotiate peace between the two nations, and in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a peace treaty was signed.

To demonstrate the ability of the United States to project power around the world (unlike Russia), Roosevelt ordered a fleet of U.S. men-o-war to sail around the world. The fleet left the east coast of the U.S. in 1908 and returned in 1909, visiting ports in Europe, Australia, and Japan.

### **President William Howard Taft**

William Howard Taft, tried to win over the Filipino people by reforming education, transportation, and health care. New railroads, bridges, and telegraph lines strengthened the economy. A public school system was set up, and new health care policies virtually eliminated severe diseases such as cholera and smallpox. These reforms slowly reduced Filipino hostility. Roosevelt, following the tradition upheld by every reelected president before him, decided not to run for reelection for a third term in 1908. Republicans nominated William Howard Taft as their candidate for the 1908 election, and he easily defeated the Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan, supporting the continuation of Roosevelt's progressive programs. Taft was somewhat more cautious and quiet than Roosevelt, and therefore, had less public attention.

Although Taft was less of an attention grabber than Roosevelt, he went far beyond what Roosevelt ever did. Taft used the Sherman Antitrust Act, a law passed in 1890 that made trusts and monopolies illegal, and they had to sue many large and economically damaging corporations. For comparison, Taft won more antitrust lawsuits in four years than Roosevelt won in seven.

Taft also pushed for the passing of the Sixteenth Amendment, which gave the federal government the right to tax citizens' incomes. The purpose of the amendment was to supply the government with cash to replace the revenue generated from tariffs, which progressives hoped that Taft would lower. Taft failed in getting a lower tariff, and in addition, he failed to fight for conservation and environmentalism, and actually weakened some conservation policies to favor business. When Roosevelt came back from an expedition to Africa in 1910, he was disappointed in Taft, and vigorously campaigned for progressive republicans in the congressional elections of 1910.

Because of Roosevelt's enormous popularity, he ran for reelection to a third term in 1912, but he failed to win the nomination for the Republican Party because Taft had connections to influential people in the party. Roosevelt and his supporters broke off from the Republicans and formed the Progressive Party, which later came to be known as the Bull Moose party after Roosevelt declared that he felt "as strong as a bull moose!" The split in the party came to hurt the two candidates, and Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson gathered a 42 percent plurality of the popular votes and 435 out of 531 electoral votes.

### **On the Supreme Court**

Taft would later become a member of the Supreme Court, making him the only former President to do so. In 1921, when Chief Justice Edward Douglass White died, President Warren G. Harding nominated Taft to take his place, thereby fulfilling Taft's lifelong ambition to become Chief Justice of the United States. Very little opposition existed to the nomination, and the Senate approved him 60-4 in a secret session, but the roll call of the vote has never been made public. He readily took up the position, serving until 1930. As such, he became the only President to serve as Chief Justice, and thus is also the only former President to swear in subsequent Presidents, giving the oath of office to both Calvin Coolidge (in 1925) and Herbert Hoover (in 1929). He remains the only person to have led both the Executive and Judicial branches of the United States government. He considered his time as Chief Justice to be the highest point of his career: he allegedly once remarked, "I don't remember that I ever was President."

### **President Woodrow Wilson**

Although Woodrow Wilson was a Democrat, he still pushed for progressive reforms. One of the first successes of his administration was the lowering of tariffs, which he accomplished in 1913. Wilson believed that increased foreign competition would spur U.S. based manufacturers to lower prices and improve their goods. That same year, Wilson passed the Federal Reserve Act, which created twelve regional banks that would be run by a central board in the capitol. This system gave the government more control over banking activities. A few years later he wrote: "I am a most unhappy man. I have unwittingly ruined my country. A great industrial nation is controlled by its system of credit. Our system of credit is concentrated. The growth of the nation, therefore, and all our activities are in the hands of a few men. We have come to be one of the worst ruled, one of the most completely controlled and dominated Governments in the civilized world no longer a Government by free opinion, no longer a Government by conviction and the vote of the majority, but a Government by the opinion and duress of a small group of dominant men. -Woodrow Wilson"

Wilson also pushed for governmental control over business. In 1914, a Democratic-controlled Congress established the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate companies that participated in suspected unfair and illegal trade practices. Wilson also supported the Clayton Antitrust Act, which joined the Sherman Antitrust Act as one the government's tools to fight trusts the same year.

By the end of Wilson's First term, progressives had won many victories. The entire movement lost steam, though, as Americans became much more interested in international affairs, especially the war that had broken out in Europe in 1914.

### **The Supreme Court and Labor**

**Upset workers had succeeded in lobbying Congress** to pass legislation that improved work conditions. However, the Supreme Court of the United States somewhat limited the range of these acts. In *Holden v. Hardy* (1896), the Supreme Court ruled that miners' hours must be short because long hours made the job too dangerous. However, in *Lochner v. New York* laws ruled that bakery workers did not have a job dangerous enough to put restrictions on the free sale of labor. Putting aside this decision, in 1908, the decision in *Muller v. Oregon* said that women's *health must be protected "to preserve the strength and vigor of the race."* This did, clearly, protect women's health, but it also locked them into menial jobs.

## Controlling Prostitution

Moral outrage erupted when muckracking journalists charged that international gangs were kidnapping young women and forcing them into prostitution, a practice called white slavery. Accusations were exaggerated, but they alarmed some moralists who falsely perceived a link between immigration and prostitution. Although some women voluntarily entered "the profession" because it offered income and independence from their male counterparts, some women had very little option to a life where they had little if any amenities and many were forced into this profession and lifestyle. Reformers nonetheless believed they could attack prostitution by punishing both those who promoted it and those who practiced it. In 1910 Congress passed the White Slave Traffic Act (Mann Act), prohibiting interstate and international transportation of a woman for immoral purposes. By 1915 nearly all states outlawed brothels and solicitation of sex. Such laws ostensibly protected young women from exploitation, but in reality they failed to address the more serious problem of sexual violence that women suffered at the hands of family members, presumed friends, and employers. <sup>[2]</sup>

## Football and the Formation of the NCAA

By the turn of the century American football was already in the process of becoming a large national sport. Originally formed and played at universities as an intercollegiate sport, it was seen as only for the upper class. The size of the field depended on what the players agreed with, but it was almost always over 100 yards. Once a player started a game, the player could not leave unless he/she became injured. <sup>[3]</sup> Very soon the sport began to gain spectators, and with spectators came controversy. With over 15 deaths in 1905 alone, many saw a need for change in the sport. However, others liked the violence and would watch because of this. President Roosevelt formed a group to reconstruct the rules of football and make it less violent. Standard rules would not be made and used until 1894. <sup>[4]</sup> The group was originally named the Intercollegiate Athletic Association, and in 1910 it was renamed to the National College Athletic Association.

## William Taft

William Howard Taft (September 15, 1857 – March 8, 1930) was the 27th President of the United States and later the tenth Chief Justice of the United States. He is the only person to have served in both offices. Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, into the powerful Taft family, "Big Bill" graduated from Yale College Phi Beta Kappa in 1878, and from Cincinnati Law School in 1880. He worked in a number of local non-descript legal positions until he was tapped to serve on the Ohio Supreme Court in 1887. In 1890, Taft was appointed Solicitor General of the United States and in 1891 a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit.

## References

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[2] Mary Beth Norton et al., "A People and A Nation: A History of the United States; The Progressive Era; 1895-1920," ed. Mary Beth Norton et al. (Boston: Cengage Learning 2009).

[3] <http://www.1890sweekend.com/19th-century-football.htm>

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