

# The Progressive Era

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- ❖ **From what social bases did progressivism emerge?**
  - ❖ **What were the basic elements of Progressive reform?**
  - ❖ **What events shaped the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt, William H. Taft, and Woodrow Wilson?**
  - ❖ **Why was the election of 1912 so significant?**
- Theodore Roosevelt's emergence as a national leader coincided with the onset of the Progressive Era
  - Progressive movement arose in response to societal changes
  - People responded to depression and distress in rural areas—more activism

## Elements of Reform

- **Progressivism was a reform movement; no distinct definition**
  - Political Progressives crusaded against urban bosses and robber barons
  - Goals were greater than democracy: honest government, more effective regulation, social justice
  - Local, state, and federal government should work together
- **Progressivism contained element of conservatism**
  - Big business wanted regulation of themselves by government to avoid chaos
  - Moral reforms, prohibition
  - **What reformers shared was a common assumption that the complex social ills and tensions generated by the urban-industrial revolution required new responses**
  - More government involvement desired in all domestic affairs
  - Drive toward welfare state

## The Antecedents of Progressivism

- **Populism was one of the catalysts of progressivism**
  - Populist platform of 1892: listed reforms that would be accomplished in progressive era
  - Middle-class activists attacked political bossism
  - Mugwumps fought spoils system, supported merit system
  - Honest-government ideal prevailed
- **Socialist doctrines and criticism of working and living conditions also fostered Progressive spirit**
  - Socialist party of the time served as the left wing of Progressivism
  - Dramatized need for reform

## The Muckrakers

- **Poverty, unsafe working conditions, child labor, mines, and factories were complex social issues**
  - Remedy required awareness
  - Political action was needed
  - The **muckrakers** were writers who thrived on exposing social ills
  - **Henry Demarest Lloyd** was first of the muckrakers
  - Criticized Standard Oil Company and other monopolies in *Wealth Against Commonwealth*
  - **Jacob Riss** exposed slum conditions in *How the Other Half Lives*

- Outlets for criticism in cheap magazines like *Arena* and *McClure's*
- **Lincoln Steffens** wrote on city corruption in *The Shame of the Cities*
- **Ida M Tarbell's** *History of the Standard Oil Company*
- **Without the muckrakers, Progressivism would never have achieved widespread support**
  - Fed public desire for facts
  - Progressives were stronger on diagnosis than on remedy
  - Correction would follow automatically after revelation

## Features of Progressivism

### Democracy

- **Most important reform was direct primary—nomination of candidates by vote of all part members**
  - Traditional method allowed season leaders to sift through candidates
  - South Carolina adopted the first statewide primary in 1896
- **Broad movement for greater public participation in political process**
  - South Dakota became first state to adopt **initiative and referendum** procedures that allowed voters to enact laws directly
  - Within a decade nearly 20 states adopted initiative and referendum
- **Most states adopted the party primary even in the choice of US senators**
  - Nevada was first in 1899
  - Popular election of Senators required constitutional amendment, **17<sup>th</sup> Amendment authorized popular election of senators, ratified in 1913**

### Efficiency

- **Second major theme of Progressivism was the “gospel of efficiency”**
  - **Frederick Taylor** wrote *The Principles of Scientific Management*
  - **Taylorism** promised to reduce waste through analysis of processes
  - Promise of higher wages for higher productivity
- **Many workers resented Taylor's innovations**
  - Saw Taylorism as a tool for employers to make people work faster than was healthy or fair
  - Taylorism brought concrete improvements though
- **In government the efficiency movement demanded reorganization of agencies to eliminate redundancy**
- **Two new ideas for making municipal government more efficient:**
  - **The commission system:** placed ultimate authority in a board composed of elected representative heads of city departments—commissioners, sanitation, police, utilities
  - **City-manager plan:** professional administration ran the municipal government
  - Virginia was first to adopt
  - By 1914 the **National Association of City Managers** brought new professions
- **Many functions of government and business had come to require specialists**
  - Principle of government by experts was promoted by **Robert Follette**
  - “Wisconsin idea” of efficient government, direct primary, stronger railroad regulation, conservation of resources, workmen's compensation programs

## Regulation

- **Regulation of giant corporations became the third major theme of Progressivism**
  - Bipartisan concern
  - Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890—more symbolic than effective
- **The problem of concentrated economic power and its abuse offered a dilemma for progressives**
- **Four broad solutions were available to regulating corporations**
  - **two extremes:** (1) letting business work out its own destiny under laissez-faire and (2) adopting socialist program
  - Socialism was somewhat adopted on the local level for utilities and transportation
  - **Other choices:** (3) adopt trust-busting policy or (4) accept big business but regulate to prevent abuses
  - **Efforts to restore the competition of small firms proved unworkable because breaking up large corporations was complex and difficult**
  - Responsibility given to Interstate Commerce Commission

## Social Justice

- **Fourth important feature of Progressive spirit was impulse toward social justice**
  - Promotion of charities and campaigns against child labor and alcohol
  - Settlement house movement led to social workers and reformers
  - Social evils needed government intervention
- **Labor legislation was the most significant reform to emerge**
  - **National Child Labor Committee** led movement for laws banning child labor
  - Lewis W. Hine: photographer
  - Child labor banned in most states, hours limited
- **Closely linked to child labor reform movement was that of working hours for women**
  - Spearheaded by **Florence Kelley**: head of the National Consumers' League
  - Outlawed night work in many states
  - Inadequate enforcement
- **The Supreme Court pursued curiously erratic course in ruling on state labor laws**
  - **Lochner v. New York**: ten-hour workday voided
  - **Muller v. Oregon**: upheld ten-hour workday law for women
  - **Bunting v. Oregon** 1917: accepted ten-hour workday for both men and women
- **Legislation to protect workers gained impetus from disasters**
  - Workers died, trapped
  - Stricter building codes followed
  - **One of the most important advances was workers' compensation laws; first in Maryland**

## Prohibition

- **Prohibition was the fifth area of progressivism**
  - Older religious ethics with new social ethics
  - Prohibition bypassed complexities of corporate regulation issues
- **Battle against booze started in 19<sup>th</sup> century**
  - Women's Christian Temperance Union
  - Prohibition party
  - **Anti-Saloon League was most successful**

- **Jubilee Convention:** endorsed prohibition amendment

## Roosevelt's Progressivism

- **Calls for national reform efforts began to appear around 1900**
  - Roosevelt endorsed progressivism
- **Roosevelt was an activist**
  - Cautious approach
  - Sought to avoid extremes
  - Steered Congress away from divisive issues

## Executive Action

- **Roosevelt promised to sustain McKinley's policies**
  - Roosevelt would accomplish more through presidential power than through legislation
- **1902 Roosevelt endorsed "square deal", calling enforcement of existing anti-trust laws and stricter control on business**
  - From the outset, Roosevelt balked at wholesale trust-busting
  - Roosevelt sought to force issue of regulation through prosecution of Sherman Anti-Trust Act
  - ***United States v. EC Knight and Company***: Supreme Court declared manufacturing strictly an intrastate activity
  - Railroads subject to federal authority
- **1902 Roosevelt ordered his attorney general to break up Northern Securities Company, a conglomerate of railroads**
  - Stock battle raised threat of panic
  - Settlement resulted in formation of holding company

## The 1902 Coal Strike

- **Support for Roosevelt's use of the "big stick" against corporations was strengthened**
  - Stubbornness of mine owners in the anthracite coal strike of 1902
  - Miners in Pennsylvania's United Mine Workers walked off the job
  - Mine owners tried to starve out the miners by closing down the mines
- **Previous presidents responded to labor unrest by dispatching troops; Roosevelt aggressively intervened**
  - Was concerned about economic and political effects of the coal revolt
  - Roosevelt decided on a bold move: invited leaders of both sides to Conference at Washington
  - Mine owners were stubborn and didn't want to talk
  - Roosevelt threatened complete federal control
- **Coal strike ended with agreement to submit issues to arbitration commission**
  - Enhanced Roosevelt's prestige
  - Only partial victory for miners

## Expanding Federal Power

- **Roosevelt continued to use his executive powers to enforce Sherman Anti-Trust Act**
  - Most notable victory came from ***Swift and Company v. United States***: decision against "beef trust," Supreme Court put forth "stream of commerce" doctrine—manufacturing was not strictly intrastate
  - Broadened definition of interstate commerce

- **1903 Congress passed Elkins Act**
  - Made it illegal for railroads to take or give secret rebates
- New Bureau of Corporations
- Standard Oil refused to disclose records to Bureau—resulted in its breakup
- American Tobacco Company also dissolved by Supreme Court

## Roosevelt's Second Term

- **Roosevelt's policies built a coalition of Progressive and conservative-minded voters who assured his election in 1904**
  - **Roosevelt nominated by Republican Convention**
  - **Democrats turned to Alton B. Parker**
    - Presented as a conservative—futile
    - Business interests contributed to Roosevelt's campaign
- **Invincible popularity plus sheer force of personality led to Roosevelt's victory**
  - Lopsided victory
  - Parker won South votes

## Legislative Leadership

- **Roosevelt approached second term with confidence**
- **Stronger commitment to Progressive reform**
  - Elkins Act outlawed secret rebates
- **New proposal for railroad regulation**
  - Sought to extend authority of the Interstate Commerce Commission
  - **Hepburn Act of 1906:** gave ICC power to set maximum freight rates
  - Uniform system
- **Regulation of railroads was Roosevelt's first priority**
- **Discontent with abuses of other industries due to muckraker influence**
  - *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Collier's*
  - Dangerous ingredients
  - Fake medicine
- **Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle***
  - Meant to promote socialism, but main impact was portrayal of filthy conditions
  - Roosevelt reacted quickly—sent agents
- **Congress and Roosevelt responded by creating the Meat Inspection Act of 1906**
  - Required inspection
  - Agriculture Department proposed standards
  - **Pure Food and Drug Act** placed restrictions on prepared foods

## Conservation

- **Roosevelt's support for conservation movement**
  - Recognized the natural resources were not unlimited
  - Corporate exploitation of environment
  - Scientific management must be implemented

- **Opposition to unregulated exploitation**
  - Timber companies stripped forests and left debris
  - Ranchers abused native grasslands—overgrazing
- **Reckless abuse eventually generated intense concern**
  - **George Perkins Marsh** was one the first advocates
  - Published *Man and Nature*
  - Urged Americans to intervene to protect long-term environment
- **Many people were heeding Marsh’s warning**
  - Activists
  - First promoters were sport hunters and anglers
  - **George Grinnell** *Forest and Stream*, founded Audubon Society
  - Club’s goal was to ensure that big-game animals prospered
  - *American Sportsman, Forest and Stream, Field and Stream*
  - Most states enacted laws
- **Concern about water quality**
  - Government management of rivers and streams
  - Desire for railroads through wilderness = displacement of Indians
  - **Yellowstone National Park**
  - Congress created **Division of Forestry** within Interior
  - **Forest Commission** managed timber
  - **Adirondack Park** established
  - Forest police enforced new regulations
  - **Roosevelt created fifty federal wildlife refuges, approved five new national parks, designated national monuments**
- **Roosevelt endorsed Gifford Pinchot**
  - Head of Division of Forestry
  - Protecting beauty, but objective was utilitarian
- **Roosevelt and Pinchot championed the Progressive notion of efficiency and government regulation**
  - Utilitarian
  - Not romantic about nature
  - Wisest use of natural resources
- **Roosevelt and Pinchot were concerned about millions of acres of public land still owned by government**
  - Federal land sold to business enterprises
  - Opposed mindless clear-cutting
  - **Forest Reserve Act** protected timberland
- **Congressional resistance to Pinchot and Roosevelt**
  - National Conservation Commission, thorough survey of resources
  - Conservation commissions
  - **Environmental movement remained divided** between those who wanted to conserve resources and those who wanted to set aside areas as wilderness preserves
- **Pinchot provoked naturalist John Muir when he endorsed a water reservoir in Hetch Hetchy Valley**
  - Proposed Hetch Hetchy Valley
  - Forced Roosevelt to choose between preserving a mountain valley and providing water to city

- Favored domestic use as most important use
- Postponed action after Congressional opposition
- **Roosevelt’s conservation efforts encompassed reclamation and irrigation projects**
  - **Reclamation Act:** established new agency called Reclamation Service to administer new program designed to bring water to western cities
  - Use federal funds to construct dams, etc
  - Large commercial farms dominated, agribusiness
- **Federal and state initiatives to conserve the nation’s natural resources and manage them for public welfare brought many improvements but also consequences**
  - National parks came at expense of Indian exclusion
  - Succeeded in regulating exploitation

## From Roosevelt to Taft

- **Roosevelt opted for retirement**
- **Republicans nominated William Taft --Secretary of State**
- **Democrats nominated William Bryan**
- **Republican platform declared support for Roosevelt’s policies—conservation, ICC**
- **Democratic platform was same on regulation, endorsed lower tariff, opposed court injunctions against labor actions**
- **Taft won 1908**

## Tariff Reform

- **Taft’s domestic policies generated a storm of controversy within his own party**
  - Preferred lower tariff, contrary to Republican opinion
  - He was less skilled than Roosevelt at dealing with Congress—tariff bill passed with ease
  - **Nelson Aldrich, chairman of Senate Finance Committee** guided a revised bill—some reductions
- **In response to higher rates in Aldrich’s bill, Midwestern Republicans took Senate floor to fight**
  - Ten progressive Republicans joined Democrats in effort to defeat the bill—failed
  - Taft supported majority to prevent split, even though majority Republicans wanted higher tariff

## Ballinger and Pinchot

- **Taft’s policies drove wedge between conservative and Progressive Republicans**
  - **Ballinger-Pinchot controversy**
  - Ballinger was secretary of the interior under Taft
  - Ballinger and westerners were against conservation efforts, Pinchot was from the east
  - **Ballinger turned over federal coal lands to tycoons—Taft supported**
- **Pinchot made the controversy public—Taft fired him**
  - Ballinger relieved of charges but he resigned due to pressure from Progressives
- **Taft’s image tarnished**
- **Rebellion broke out among Progressive Republicans**
  - Desire to investigate Ballinger
  - Bipartisan coalition changed the Rules Committee—enlarged it, elective
- **Taft was cast in a conservative role**

- Pro-Taft congressional candidates were defeated
- **Democratic majority in House**
- **Progressive Republican dominance in Senate**

## Taft and Roosevelt

- **Followers urged Roosevelt to act**
  - Taft's dismissal of Pinchot angered Roosevelt
  - Roosevelt promoted Progressive candidates
  - "New Nationalism"
  - Called for federal regulation laws, social welfare, direct democracy
- **Relations between Roosevelt and Taft split in 1911**
  - Taft administration announced an anti-trust suit against United States Steel on the basis of something approved by Roosevelt
  - Roosevelt argued that federal regulation should increase
- **Many progressive Republicans who assumed that Roosevelt would not run again proposed to back Wisconsin senator Robert La Follette in 1912, but ready to switch to Roosevelt**
  - Follette failed at speech, Republicans called for Roosevelt
  - **Roosevelt decided to enter the race**
- **Roosevelt ran against Taft—seen as implicit rebuke**
  - Political factors had tarnished Taft's image
  - Achievements came too late
  - Under **Appalachian Forest Reserve Act**, he enlarged the national forest by purchasing land in the East
- In 1910, Congress passed **Mann-Elkins Act** which empowered the Interstate Commerce Commission to initiate railroad freight rate changes, extended regulation to telephone and telegraph companies, and set up the Commerce Court to expedite appeals of ICC rulings
- Taft also established **Bureau of Mines** and **Children's Bureau**
- Called for statehood for Arizona and New Mexico
- **Ratified Sixteenth Amendment which authorized federal income tax**
- **Ratified Seventeenth Amendment which provided for the popular election of Senators**
- **Despite Taft's Progressive record, Roosevelt now hastened Taft's demise**
  - Roosevelt won
- **Roosevelt delegates—mostly social workers, reformers, intellectuals assembled in rump convention**
  - Roosevelt issued call for Progressive party convention
  - Progressive torch was about to be passed to Democrats

## Wilson's Progressivism

### Wilson's Rise

- **Thomas Woodrow Wilson as the Democratic nominee in 1912**
  - *Congressional Government*—argued that president should be the leader of party government
  - Called for strong president
  - Views closer to Roosevelt than to those of Taft
  - Critical of big business, organized labor, and agrarian radicalism



- **Wilson accepted governor nomination for New Jersey in 1910**
  - Conservatism
  - Elected as a reform candidate
  - Promoted Progressive measures
  - Compensation law, corrupt-practices law, public utilities regulation
- **Wilson presidential campaign**
  - Tour of the country
  - Clinched the nomination

## The Election of 1912

- **1912 election involved four candidates: Wilson (Democrat), Taft (Republican), Debs (Socialist), Roosevelt (Progressive)**
  - All believed in active measures to promote general welfare
- **Roosevelt was shot by John Schrank**
  - “It takes more than this to kill a bull moose”
- **Taft quickly lost ground**
  - Roosevelt’s New Nationalism and Wilson’s New Freedom
  - *The Promise of American Life*, by Herbert Croly, presented ideas of New Nationalism
  - Government activism on behalf of business interests should be used to achieve democratic goals
  - Big business required big government
- **New Nationalism would enable government to promote social justice and effect reforms such as graduated income tax, workers compensation, regulation of labor, stronger Bureau of Corporations**
  - Platform of the Progressive party, called for federal trade commission with sweeping authority and tariff commission to set rates on “scientific basis”
- **Before the end of his administration, Wilson would be swept into current of New Nationalism**
  - He initially adhered to decentralizing anti-trust traditions of his party
  - **Conferred with Louis Brandeis—design for New Freedom differed from New Nationalism in belief that the federal government should restore the competition among small economic units rather than regulate huge monopolies**
  - **Vigorous anti-trust policy, lowering tariffs to allow competition with foreign goods**
  - **Vigorous expansion of federal power was temporary necessity**
  - **Huge industries needed to be broken up**
  - Roosevelt dismissed New Freedom—believed expansion of federal power could not be temporary
  - Taft accused both of having too many meddling policies
- **The Republican schism between Taft and Roosevelt opened the way for Woodrow Wilson to win**
  - Wilson won as Democrat
- **The 1912 election was significant in several ways**
  - **High-water mark for Progressivism**
  - First to feature presidential primaries
  - **Election gave Democrats effective national power for the first time since the Civil War**
  - **Election of Wilson brought southerners back into the orbit of national and international affairs**
  - Cabinet members from the south
  - Colonel Edward House of Texas
  - **The election began to alter the character of the Republican party**

- Progressive wing was weakened

### Wilsonian Reform

- **Promised lower tariff and new banking system**
- **Congressional Government:** presidential conviction
- Wilson used patronage power
- Made use of party caucus

### The Tariff

- **First big test was on issue of tariff reform**
  - Tariffs were abused by corporations to suppress foreign trade competition
  - “Tariffs made the trusts”
  - Sought honest government
  - Summoned Congress into special session
    - Congress acted vigorously on tariff reductions
    - Passed
- **Crunch for lower tariffs came in the Senate**
  - President turned the tables with public statement
- **The Underwood-Simmons Tariff became law in 1913**
  - Reduced import duties
  - Lowered tariff rates but raised federal revenues with the first income tax

### The Federal Reserve Act

- **Administration proposed the first major banking and currency reform since Civil War**
  - Federal money had since been stored in private banks—decentralized and ineffective
- **The Federal Reserve Act of 1913 created a new national banking system**
  - Regional reserve banks supervised by directors
  - 12 Federal Reserve banks, each owned by member banks
  - Would issue Federal Reserve notes
  - All national banks became members
  - This arrangement made it possible to expand money supply and bank credit
- **This new system corrected three great defects**
  - Banks reserves could be pooled
  - Currency and bank credit became more elastic
  - Concentration of reserves in New York was decreased

### Anti-Trust Laws

- **Wilson made trust-busting the central focus of the New Freedom**
  - Revision of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to define more explicitly restraint of trade
  - Made a strong **Federal Trade Commission**—cornerstone of anti-trust efforts
  - FTC replaced Bureau of Corporations, new powers
- **Henry Clayton drafted an anti-trust bill in 1914 that outlawed practices such as price discrimination, tying agreements, interlocking directorates, and corporations’ acquisition of stock in competing corporations**
  - Conservatives in Senate opposed
  - Amended Clayton Anti-Trust Act to allow for broad judicial review of the FTC’s decisions

- Victims of price discrimination could sue for compensation
- **Agrarian activists in alliance with organized labor won a stipulation that declared farm-labor organizations were not unlawful**
  - Little more than pious affirmations
  - Did little more than affirm the right of unions that already existed
- **Administrations of the anti-trust laws generally proved disappointing to the more vehement Progressives under Wilson**
  - FTC practically abandoned its function as watchdog
  - Justice Department offered help and advice to businessmen
  - Appointment of conservatives to the Interstate Commerce Commission and Federal Reserve disappointed Progressives

## Social Justice

- **Wilson was never a strong Progressive of the social-justice persuasion**
  - The New Freedom was complete
  - Although Wilson endorsed state action for women's suffrage, he decline to support a federal suffrage amendment because his party platform had not done so
  - He withheld support from federal child-labor legislation because he regarded it as a state matter
  - Opposed support for rural credits because it would be unwise to extend credit to a single class of the community
- **La Follette Seamen's Act strengthened shipboard safety requirements, reduced power of captains, set minim food standards, and required regular wage payments**

## Progressivism for Whites Only

- **Wilson showed little interest in plight of African Americans**
  - Denounced KKK
  - Sympathized with motives of restoring white rule in postwar South
- **Wilson courted many African American voters but he rarely consulted black leaders**
  - Southerners in his cabinet were racist
  - Wilson justified segregation, saying it was necessary to eliminate friction

## Progressive Resurgence

- **The need to weld a winning coalition in 1916 pushed Wilson back to reform issues**
  - Issues rose over defense due to WWI
  - Republicans were repairing their own rift, the Bull Moose Progressive party
  - Wilson could only gain reelection by courting all Progressives
  - Nominated Louis Brandeis
- **Wilson promoted broad program of farm and labor reforms**
  - To address shortage of capital, Wilson proposed to set up banks for long-term farm loans
  - **Federal Farm Loan Act:** under control of Federal Reserve banks, farmers were offered loans
- **Dream of federal rural loans sponsored by Alliance members and Populists finally became reality**
  - **Warehouse Act of 1916** authorized federal licensing of private warehouses
  - **Smith-Lever Act of 1914 and Smith-Hughes Act of 1917:** provided federal grants for farmer-demonstration agents, extended agriculture and mechanical education to high schools

- **Farmers with automobiles had more than a passing interest as well in the Federal Highways Act of 1916**
  - Authorized distribution of \$75 million over five years, internal improvements
  - Justified as a defense need
- **Progressive resurgence of 1916 broke logjam on labor reforms as well**
  - Advocates of child-labor legislation persuaded Wilson—signed **Keating-Owen Act** which excluded goods manufactured by kids
- **Another important accomplishment was the 8-hour workday for railroad workers**
  - **Adamson Act** required an 8-hour workday
- **In Wilson's first term, Progressivism was at its zenith**
  - Public service of government was accepted

### Limits of Progressivism

- **Despite reforms, blacks were disenfranchised**
- **Anti-immigration laws**
- **Strengthened executive leadership—decisions made by unelected policy makers**
- **Progressivism was largely middle class**
- **Decreased voter turnout**