

AP United States History
Unit 7: A Colossus Emerges
Topic- The Progressives: Reading Selections

Compare the goals and effects of the Progressive reform movement.

Some Progressive Era journalists attacked what they saw as political corruption, social injustice, and economic inequality, while reformers, often from the middle and upper classes and including many women, worked to effect social changes in cities and among immigrant populations.

The Progressives

From 1890 to 1920, America went through a period in which progressivism became a dominant political force. The progressives believed in the power of the federal government, the use of science, and came from the ranks of the new well-educated middle class in America. They were Christians, who much like the Social Gospel Movement that preceded them, believed that it was their duty to create a society that was fair and just for everyone. Women played a very important role in the progressive movement and by the conclusion of it, had earned the right to vote and had taken their first steps into becoming a political force in American life. Progressives were concerned about the abuses of industrialization, the rampant growth of America's cities, and what they viewed as corruption in both American business and politics. The progressives were also concerned about the natural environment and were among the very first groups in American life to take important steps in trying to protect it. It was the progressives who brought America into the twentieth century.

Though we might consider the settlement house movement, the Populist Party movement, the Social Gospel movement, and other early political reformers to be the first progressives, most historians recognize the muckraking journalists of the period from 1890-1920, to be the first progressive-minded reformers. The term muckraker was coined by Theodore Roosevelt, who stated that these investigative journalists raked up the muck (or filth) in American society. The first of the great muckraking journalists was the Danish immigrant, Jacob Riis, who used the power of photography in his book and expose of photographs (using a flash, which was a new technology at the time) to capture the horrific conditions of the urban poor (many of them immigrants, too). His book, *How the Other Half Lives*, in 1890, shocked the nation, as his images showcased poverty, filth, disease, and crime in America's largest cities. It led to housing regulations, playgrounds, and parks to be created to improve the quality of life in America's cities. The book also led to a public campaign to clean up the waste and filth in America's cities which gave us the introduction of waste and sewage systems and groups— like the White Wings (or, Ducks) who were the first sanitation groups, and later, sanitation departments who would clean-up America's city streets and remove garbage from homes. Other muckrakers included Lincoln Steffens who worked to clean-up city governments and to diminish the power of political machines, Ida Tarbell, whose expose's in *McClure's* magazine in 1904 helped lead to the antitrust lawsuit that would eventually break up John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company in 1911, and Frank Norris whose work helped to bring down railroad monopolies in the West. But, perhaps the most influential muckraker was Upton Sinclair, whose book, *The Jungle* (1906), exposed the horrors in America's meatpacking industry. Originally, Sinclair intended for his book to be about the exploitation of immigrant workers in Chicago's meatpacking plants, but the horrific conditions that he exposed (rats being ground into sausage, human appendages being made into processed meat, and diseased animals being slaughtered to create meat products, etc.) even made President Theodore Roosevelt, sick to his stomach. It led to the Meat Inspection Act, and later, along with the work of Dr. Harvey Wiley (whose poison squad consisted of young men who would eat the unhealthy products that were being served to the American public as test subjects) led to the creation of the FDA, or the Food and

Drug Administration— which regulates America's food and medicines to this day. The muckraking journalists of the period were not the only Progressives, other Progressive reformers worked to change the nature of American government and too, who could participate in the American experiment.

The Progressives were divided over many issues. Some Progressives supported Southern segregation, while others ignored its presence. Some Progressives advocated expanding popular participation in government, while others called for greater reliance on professional and technical experts to make government more efficient. Progressives also disagreed about immigration restrictions.

While segregation may have divided Americans, particularly in the South, it also divided the progressives. Some progressives favored segregation measures, others ignored it, but some fought against it. While we have seen the story of Ida B. Wells and her crusade against lynching, it was during this era in which that crusade actually started. After the murders of her neighbors, Wells, launched her crusade, creating a newspaper which detailed the lynchings of African-Americans throughout the South during the 1890s and in the early 1900s. The great reformers of the period created an organization composed mostly of lawyers, the Niagara Movement and created it to battle the institution of racial segregation. In 1909, she joined another fellow reformer, W.E.B. Dubois in developing an organization that would be dedicated to the crusade for civil rights for African-Americans. It was this organization, the NAACP, that would lead the process of ending segregation in America by taking their case to America's courts. Dubois wanted an immediate end to segregation, prejudice, and discrimination. Dubois, opposed the ideas of gradualism, as espoused by Booker T. Washington. Washington wanted African-Americans to become well-educated, to work hard, and to earn the respect of the dominant white population in the South. Dubois, rejected this point of view, and worked to convince African-Americans to take pride in their heritage and abilities. He also opposed such prominent thinkers as Frederick Douglas and stood against integration. His book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903, traced the history of African-Americans in America and examines their struggles in the post-Reconstruction Era. But, throughout the period, from 1900-1919, African-American lynchings increased. Even though we may refer to the era as a Progressive Era and it did see the birth of the NAACP out of the Niagara Movement, it was an era of Jim Crow segregation for the African-Americans who lived in the South.

Progressive reformers wanted to use the power of the government to develop policies, organizations, and agencies to benefit the American people. In 1884, with the passage of the Pendleton Civil Service Act and in 1889, with the creation of the Civil Service Commission, jobs in the federal government were now earned by people who could pass an examination, or in other words based on their abilities. It was an important first step in political reform because it ended the practice of patronage— or, giving government positions to people not based on their merits, but upon political favoritism. While applying scientific principles, or Taylorism, led to the creation of assembly lines which made factories much more efficient, Progressive reformers sought to use the scientific method to improve local, state and even the federal government. These reforms came first to American cities. Cities began to own utilities and to provide services for the first time. Cities administered electricity and took care of such issues as garbage collection, sewage, water systems, and created fire and police departments. Government by city council, or using commissioners, who oversaw areas within a city became increasingly popular. The first city in Texas to be electrified and to use the commissioner form of Progressive city government was Galveston, Texas, which instituted the new form of government in response to the need for cleaning up and rebuilding the city after the 1900 Storm— one of the greatest natural disasters in human history (It was a devastating hurricane which killed over 5,000 residents of the city and destroyed many of its great homes and businesses). At the state level, Progressives introduced such measures as initiative, referendum, and recall. Initiative allows citizens to introduce legislation and to be able to vote on whether or not it should be passed. Referendum allows voters to compel legislators to place a policy on the ballot for all of the voters to be able to approve. Recall allows voters to be able to remove an official that they may deem as corrupt or incompetent from office. During this period, states also began to pass laws to curb child labor, regulate housing, and to introduce safety and health conditions in factories— including, limiting the number of hours women could work and forcing, in a few cases, employers to give workers compensation to those injured on the job. At the federal level, the Progressives scored two major victories, securing the secret ballot to protect

the right to vote, and gaining passage of the 17th Amendment (1913) which led to the direct election of U.S. Senators. It diminished the power of the political machines that had long dominated city, state, and national politics. But, at the federal level, three Progressive Presidents from 1900-1920, enacted reforms that would impact the entire nation and change the American way of life.

On the national level, Progressives sought federal legislation that they believed would effectively regulate the economy, expand democracy, and generate moral reform. Progressive amendments to the Constitution dealt with issues such as prohibition and women's suffrage.

After the assassination of President William McKinley, in 1901, three successive Presidents: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson would usher in a wave of progressive reforms. Each of these Presidents developed reforms for such issues as the consolidation of big business, consumer protection, the rights of workers, and the conservation of our natural resources. However, it was also the beginning of America's involvement in the First World War which brought the high tide of Progressive reform to a halt. Throughout this period, women would also play a major role in shaping the Progressive movement and by the end of it, had earned the right to vote which is often considered by most historians as the final act of the Progressive Movement and the beginning of the era of the Roaring Twenties (1920s).

Theodore Roosevelt came from a very wealthy New York family. But, instead of going into business, he chose a career in politics. After graduating from Harvard University, he became a member of the New York Assembly and a well-regarded legislator. However, in 1884, tragedy struck, as his wife and mother died just hours apart on the same day. He retreated to the Dakota Territory and became a rancher, until the terrible blizzards from the winter of 1887-1888, killed most of his cattle. When he returned to New York, he resumed his career in politics, becoming a Civil Service Commissioner, Police Commissioner, and later, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy under President William McKinley. He then formed his own regiment of troops to fight in the Spanish-American War. After returning from the war as a national hero, he was elected as the Governor of the state of New York, but then, he ran into trouble. Roosevelt could not be bought or bullied, and made life difficult for the political machines and corrupt businesses that were operating in the state of New York— in other words, though he was not a progressive per se, he did possess a progressive streak. In order to get rid of him, the political machines and wealthy business interests in his state put him for the Vice-Presidency on the 1900 ticket with President William McKinley. Though McKinley was re-elected, in September, 1901, McKinley was felled by an assassin's bullet, and that made Theodore Roosevelt, at age 42, the youngest President in American history up to that time and its first progressive-leaning chief executive, as well.

Roosevelt wasted no time in enacting his vision for the American people. During his presidency, Roosevelt averted a massive coal strike in 1902 by bringing together both the workers and the management of the coal industry and brokered a settlement which favored the workers and kept the economy running during a terrible series of winter storms. Later that year, he sued J.P. Morgan's Northern Securities Trust, and won— it would be the first in a line of many monopolies and trusts that his administration would break-up (though TR liked to consider himself a trust regulator, rather than a trust-buster, though the latter nickname was what stuck with him throughout his tenure in office). In 1903 and again, in 1906 his administration issued the Elkins and Hepburn Acts which extended the power of the Interstate Commerce Commission to regulate America's railroads, and telegraph and telephone lines. In 1904, after winning the presidency on his own accord, he announced the Square Deal to his voters— to protect public health, to regulate public transportation and utilities, and to conserve America's natural wonders. He accomplished all of his agenda and more. Throughout his presidency, Roosevelt had lived by the African proverb, "Speak softly, and carry a big stick and you will go far," when it came to foreign policy. He used the U.S. Navy as his big stick, first, sending them on a global tour in a showcase of America's growing military might— primarily it was a show of force to intimidate Japan (a growing power that had just defeated the Russian Empire in the Russo-Japanese War). But, throughout his presidency, he used the navy (next to Great Britain, the world's most powerful at the time) to intervene in Latin America and the Caribbean. He made the United States into a broker for the nations of Latin America with the powers of

Europe, so that the Europeans would stay out of the Western Hemisphere. For brokering an end to the Russo-Japanese War, he would become the first President of the United States to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906. In 1906, as mentioned earlier, the Hepburn Act continued the regulation of America's infrastructure (railroads, telegraphs, and telephone services). Also, in 1906 in response to Upton Sinclair's book, *The Jungle*, and the work of Dr. Harvey Wiley's poison squad, Roosevelt's administration signed the Meat Inspection Act into law, and created the FDA (Food and Drug Administration). Earlier, in 1905, Roosevelt, despite being an avid game hunter himself, had signed into law an act creating the National Forest Service, and then began the process of creating national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, and bird sanctuaries for generations of Americans to come to enjoy.

When he left office in 1909, Roosevelt, turned over the presidency to his handpicked successor, William Howard Taft, who shared his vision for trust-busting, but disagreed on tariff rates, and the conservation of natural resources. Angered, Roosevelt and Taft ran against one another in 1912, with Taft being the Republican nominee and Roosevelt the standard bearer for the new Bull Moose Progressive Party. The two former friends split the Republican vote, which handed the election to Woodrow Wilson, the progressive Democratic Governor of New Jersey, who had been the President of Princeton University. Wilson would not just be the first Democrat (other than Grover Cleveland) to win the White House since the Civil War, but he would also be the first native Southerner since the conclusion of the Civil War to serve in the presidency, as well.

After becoming the President of the United States in 1912, Woodrow Wilson enacted his progressive agenda which he dubbed, the "New Freedom." Wilson was an academic, and compared to the dynamic Roosevelt, a major change for most Americans. His agenda included: diminishing the power of big business, attacking the tariff, and reforming the banking system. During the first term of his presidency, Wilson enacted the Underwood Tariff, which lowered the tariff rates, so that large-scale corporations could not continue to profit off of America's generous tax breaks, and also oversaw the passage of the 16th Amendment, which gave us the graduated income tax. His administration created the Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914 to further business competition, which he reasoned would lead to a growing economy and as an outgrowth of this policy, the Federal Trade Commission, to regulate American business was also created. To regulate the American banking system, which had undergone several financial panics since the end of the Civil War, his administration created the Federal Reserve System to regulate America's currency and its banking system. The Wilson administration also created the Department of Labor to collect data, study labor issues, and to find solutions for the American worker— one of which, child labor, he also tried to tackle, but his Child Labor Act of 1916, would be declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. In 1917, on the eve of America's involvement in the First World War, the Wilson administration created the National Park Service to oversee the national parks, historic sites, and national monuments that had been created and would be developed in the future for all Americans to be able to visit and enjoy. Unfortunately for Wilson's administration, issues in Latin America continued to draw his attention in foreign policy, especially the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, in which America would intervene— not once, but twice, and then the First World War which America entered in 1917. From 1917-1919, Wilson's focus was primarily on winning the war and then securing a lasting peace, which as we will see later, he was incapable of doing. But progressivism continued, and for American women, it would mean a pair of victories, one of which would have a lasting impact on our national politics that continues to be felt to this very day.

As the First World War raged in Europe, American women who had long been a part of the temperance movement and who had sought the right to vote, would win a pair of major victories that would become two constitutional amendments. Since the 1840s, American women had been heavily involved in the temperance movement. During the First World War, anti-immigration sentiment (especially against German-Americans who brewed beer and other alcoholic beverages) fueled the development of the Volstead Act in 1919, which provided the enforcement mechanism for the 18th Amendment (1918) which prohibited the sale and manufacture of alcoholic beverages. A new era in American history, though brief, began, as the nation instituted Prohibition. But the most important victory for American women came after the conclusion of the First World War. In 1920, the 19th Amendment granted American women the right to vote. By the dawn of the twentieth century, it was well-educated, middle-class women who had led this movement to its greatest heights. Though women could vote in the states of the West, prior to the 19th

Amendment, women were now guaranteed the right to vote nationally. Today, American women actually make up the majority of American voters (53% of current eligible voters are women). Despite receiving the right to vote, women have only gradually become more and more involved in American politics. Jeanette Rankin was the very first American woman to be elected to Congress and came from the West. She was elected in 1917 from Montana and again, in 1941. She served her two terms with distinction, and was the only person in Congress to vote against America's involvement in both the First and Second World Wars.

Compare attitudes toward the use of natural resources from 1890 to 1945.

Preservationists and conservationists both supported the establishment of national parks while advocating different government responses to the overuse of natural resources.

In 1872, America created its first national park, which was Yellowstone National Park in the Wyoming Territory. It was the first national park to be created to preserve the natural flora and fauna of a special place of natural beauty in the world. From 1873-1901, more national parks were created to preserve the natural beauty of the American West. At the time, both preservationists and conservationists began to fear that we were losing our natural wonders due to the rise of big business, including commercial mining, timber production, and in some cases the clearing of land for commercial farming and ranching. And as more and more Americans began to live in cities than ever before, it was feared that we were losing touch with the natural world. It was these two groups (preservationists and conservationists) who came to realize that America was vast, but that the resources of the nation were by no means limitless. One major figure who pushed for the preservation of America's places of natural beauty was the naturalist, John Muir. In fact, if Muir is remembered for anything it is for the creation of the Sierra Society (to preserve and protect America's natural landscapes) and his tireless effort to preserve what would eventually become Yosemite National Park in California. But, Muir was not the only figure in the preservation movement who would leave a lasting legacy. The famed photographer, Ansel Adams, dazzled Americans with his photographs of America's natural wonders and it was also his images which inspired the preservation of wilderness areas throughout the American West. Conservationists included Theodore Roosevelt and his head of the National Forestry Service (which was established in 1905 and is today a branch of the Department of Agriculture), Gifford Pinchot. Conservationists believed that the natural beauty of the land could be used for industrial purposes, but once that use had come to a conclusion, that the land must be returned to its natural state, or for example, that you can hunt and fish on the land, but that these activities must be regulated. Both groups fit into the Progressive Era and their concern for the natural environment has continued to the present. In 1917, the National Park Service was established to protect America's natural wonders and to administer its historic sites, national monuments, and national parks.