Chapter 21: A Unified Body of Action, 1900-1916

Overview
The progressives, as they called themselves, concerned themselves with finding solutions to the problems created by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. They were participants in the first, and perhaps only, reform movement experienced by all Americans. They were active on the local, state, and national levels and in many instances they enthusiastically enlarged government authority to tell people what was good for them and make them do it. They addressed a wide variety of problems. Membership was as diverse as the problems they attacked. What unified the Progressives was a tendency or way of approaching problems. Scientific investigations and expertise was favored along with efficiency and organization. Progressives used the political process to break the power of the political machine and its connection to business and then influenced elected officials who would champion the reform agenda. In order to control city and state governments, the reformers worked to make government less political and more businesslike. The progressives found their champion in Theodore Roosevelt. His commitment to reform was strengthened in the two years he spent as the head of the New York City board of police commissioners. When he arrived in the White House as President McKinley’s vice president and then as President, Roosevelt seized the opportunity to implement Progressive reforms as well as implement a new job description for the presidency. Roosevelt’s return to the American political scene in 1910 featured a more radical Roosevelt. His position on corporations, public welfare, and labor were more extreme. The election of 1912 became a race that would define the future of industrial America.

Key Topics The information in chapter 21 introduces your students to the following key topics:
- The new conditions of life in urban, industrial society create new political problems and responses to them.
- A new style of politics emerges from women’s activism on social issues.
- Nationally organized interest groups gain influence amid the decline of partisan politics.
- Cities and states experiment with interventionist programs and new forms of administration.
- Progressivism at the federal level enhances the power of the executive to regulate the economy and make foreign policy.

Chapter Outline with review questions
Vignette: Alice Hamilton
Toward a New Politics
- The Insecurity of Modern Life
- The Decline of Partisan Politics Social Housekeeping
- Evolution or Revolution?
The Progressives
- Social Workers and Muckrakers
- Dictatorship of the Experts
- Progressives on the Color Line

Feature: Protective Laws on Trial: Muller v. Oregon
Progressives in State and Local Politics
- Redesigning the City
- Reform Mayors and City Services
- Progressivism and the States

The Presidency becomes “the Administration”
- The Executive Branch Against the Trusts
Annotated chapter outline

**Alice Hamilton:** Dr. Alice Hamilton was a professor of pathology at Northwestern University. She was also interested in the relationship of Chicago’s slum dwellings, sanitation, and the prevalence of disease. Her work on behalf of the poor was similar to that of many of her generation who used their training to improve the environment and lives of those around her.

**Toward a New Politics:** The progressives, as they called themselves, concerned themselves with finding solutions to the problems created by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. They were participants in the first, and perhaps only, reform movement experience by all Americans. The progressives were active on the local, state, and national levels and in many instances they enthusiastically enlarged government authority to tell people what was good for them and make them do it. The progressive Movement rewrote the Democrat and Republican platforms and therefore gave politics a new purpose.

- Progressives were particularly outraged at government and corporate corruption and irresponsibility. They believed that government and corporations ought to be run more efficiently and effectively. If this was accomplished, the progressives believed, cities would be better places to live and work.
- The political parties were either responsive to the peoples’ problems nor willing to work for reform so the progressives pushed their legislative agenda, which included an end to political “machines”, and voted for which party supported their programs. Voluntary organizations organized around a reform issue took the responsibility of energizing voters.
- Women’s social clubs took on a more politically active role at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mostly middle and upper class white women, they directed their formidable energies at the nation’s social problems. As the women organized themselves and learned to use the political process to their advantage they increased their own stake in the political system.
- Other Americans searched for social and political reform in the Socialist Party of America and the Industrial Workers of the World as well as other movements. The Socialist party was very popular with American voters, especially in the plains states. The Industrial Workers of the World, nicknamed the Wobblies, talked about social change but instead of using the ballot, the Wobblies talked violent revolution. Although membership remained small, fewer than 100,000 members, the message appealed to miners, loggers, even rodeo cowboys in the West. The effect of the Socialists and Wobblies was to push conservatives to support moderate reform in fear of enhancing the radical population and encouraging their extreme positions.

Was the political culture that women activists like Jane Addams and Alice Hamilton fought against a male culture?

**The Progressives:** The term “progressive” and the movement the progressives fostered defies the simple definition. Because America’s social and economic problems were so many and so diverse, they were all the focus of some progressive group or another. They addressed a wide variety of problems. Nor were progressive reformers a monolithic group. Membership was as diverse as the problems they attacked. What unified the progressives was a tendency or way of approaching problems. Scientific investigations and expertise was favored along with efficiency and organization. The progressives were also opinionated and authoritarian as they imposed their ideas and solutions on others. In most instances the good of society out-weighed any argument of traditional value. With God
and science on their side, the progressives were not only certain they were right, they were also convinced that their own hesitation or timidity could be dangerous to the society.

- The progressives targeted the urban poor. They lived among the urban poor in settlement houses which became the social centers of urban neighborhoods. Children’s issues, labor problems, garbage collection and city servers were just a few of the problems the progressives attacked. Others focused on prostitution, gambling, and saloons. In the process, the progressives trained a generation of social workers who continued the work for decades to come. Newspaper accounts of the plight of the urban poor energized others and encouraged other newspapers and magazines and reporters to take up the progressive banner.

- The progressives were particularly fond of scientific investigations and solutions that came from professionally trained experts. Communicable diseases were attacked using modern medicines rather than home remedies. Crime, labor relations, education, and other problems were attacked by social scientists. The progressives were so certain of their positions as experts and the correctness of their findings and solutions that they tended to disregard the opinions, and experience, of others.

- Ida Wells-Barnett, an African-American progressive, used her own research and magazine articles to expose the horrors and commonness of lynching in an attempt to energize an outraged public. Her efforts, although recognized by other progressives, fell outside of the progressive mainstream who wanted to avoid divisions based on race. Many progressive organizations were not only segregated but followed the conventions of the time by questioning whether non-Anglo-Saxon people could actually progress to the extent of white Europeans. Where white progressives failed to deal with the problems of African-Americans, African-American reformers, like Wells-Barnett W.E.B. DuBois, documented the costs of racism.

Progressives in State and Local Politics: Progressives used the political process to break the power of the political machine and its connection to business. With these ties broken, the progressives could then influence elected officials who would champion the reform agenda. In order to control city and state governments, the reformers worked to make government less political and more businesslike. More and more power to attack problems was given to unelected commissions. The reformers gained power and those whom the progressives wanted to reform lost political power.

- The progressives’ plan for American cities focused on reforming the ways in which cities were run. They wanted to replace elected mayors and aldermen, all elected officials, with professional city employees who were experts in their fields. Voters found that modern management techniques were expensive. Budgets increased because Americans had also come to rely on services that the city provided.

- Reform mayors who attempted to make American cities more humane relied on the support of architects, engineers, and city planners. They tried to improve urban life with city parks and other public spaces. Zoning laws and planning commissions became a permanent part of city government.

- Reform on the state level reflected a regional character. Reform governors championed consumers over corporations, voters over party machines, and working people over employers. In general, progressives made government more responsive to voters and to the demands of reformers. What reformers knew was that state and local politicians could attack state and local problems. In order to deal with national issues, they looked to the federal government and that meant capturing the White House.

1. Why did reformers feel that contracts between elected city governments and privately owned utilities invited corruption?
2. What were the Oregon System and the Wisconsin Idea?
3. Were the progressives’ goals conservative or radical? How about their strategies?

The Presidency Becomes “the Administration”: The progressives found their champion in Theodore Roosevelt. His birth into an elite family should have precluded a life in politics but Roosevelt believed that if the upper classes avoided politics that would leave offices to those who were not fit to lead. His commitment to reform was strengthened in the two years he spent as the head of the New York City board of police commissioners. When he arrived in the White House as President McKinley’s vice president and then as President, Roosevelt seized the opportunity to implement progressive reforms as well as implement a new job description for the presidency.
Order, efficiency, and energy characterize Roosevelt’s approach to the job he acquired when President McKinley was assassinated. He initiated legislation, much of it reform oriented, molded public opinion, and guarded American interests at home and abroad. He created the Department of Commerce and Labor in 1903 with a Bureau of Corporations to examine corporate mergers and activities. The Justice Department revitalized the Sherman Antitrust Act and filed suit against one of the worst offenders J.P. Morgan’s holding company. Roosevelt was heralded as a “trust buster”. The Interstate Commerce Commission was revitalized and its powers broadened to include the telephone and telegraph, as well as shipping rates. Under Roosevelt, the federal government gained authority and tools to counterbalance the power of business.

- During the anthracite strike of 1902 the plight of miners’ working conditions as well as low pay infuriated President Roosevelt. Only after Roosevelt threatened to place the mines under government control did the mine owners agree to arbitration. Roosevelt’s actions set a precedent for government intervention in a labor dispute which put the government as an equal partner in the solution instead of it automatically siding with the corporation and against the worker.
- President Roosevelt could not abide limitations on his actions as the president so he worked to expand the powers of the office for his agenda to be implemented. Nowhere was this more so than in the area of conservation. President Roosevelt, himself an environmentalist, was also influenced by Gifford Pinchot, the nation’s chief forester, who saw conservation as a new frontier. Natural resources, they concluded, had to be managed efficiently and used wisely. Pinchot and Roosevelt, like their Progressive colleagues, substantiated their position with scientific research. During Roosevelt’s terms in office, millions of acres of land were reclaimed from desert and used for farmlands. Employees in the forest service, like those in other government agencies, became professionally trained and their training was directed to managing the nation’s natural resources. Roosevelt helped launch the modern environmental movement.
- Roosevelt’s interests did not stop at the nation’s borders nor did it concern itself with just the here and now. He was convinced that the United States had to remain dominant in commerce, imperialism, and military modernization. The progressive Roosevelt saw nothing questionable about the United States dominating less advanced people and nations. Roosevelt’s foreign policy philosophy, articulated in a policy statement entitled the “Roosevelt Corollary”, said that when intervention in any Latin American nation was necessary the United States would do the intervening. The progressive ideals of order and efficiency were extended to foreign policy and Progressivism was exported to the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia. When disputes broke out among the European imperial nations, Theodore Roosevelt was there to negotiate settlements and to extend open door trade policies and prevent larger wars.
- Roosevelt’s hand-picked successor was William H. Taft. Elected along with a progressive Congress Taft consolidated Roosevelt’s programs and extended the Roosevelt Corollary into the Caribbean. Taft used American dollars, or “dollar diplomacy”, to replace military-enforced foreign policy but in reality the dollars usually preceded bullets. Taft’s actions eventually disappointed Progressives and conservatives in the party as well as Theodore Roosevelt who felt that Taft was not using the full measure of the power of the president’s office. Roosevelt began to think he should return to the Oval Office.

Theodore Roosevelt has been called the first modern president. In what ways did his administration change the presidency?

Rival Visions of the Industrial Future: Roosevelt’s return to the American political scene in 1910 featured a more radical Roosevelt. His position on corporations, public welfare, and labor were more extreme. The election of 1912 became a race that would define the future of industrial America.

- Roosevelt called his new political program “New Nationalism”. In it he pledged to destroy privilege and to give the highest possible value to every individual. Roosevelt was running against William H. Taft for their party’s nomination. Taft won the party’s nomination. This came about because of his ability to control party delegates. Roosevelt then accepted the nomination of the newly formed Progressive Party. The party endorsed Roosevelt’s New Nationalism. It was a party made up of those who created progressivism and women were active delegates.
- The Democrats chose another young, well-educated, rich man: Woodrow Wilson, governor of New Jersey. The Democrats adopted a progressive platform designed to unite the East and South. Wilson’s plan was called “New Freedom”. Its economic and political ideas appealed to reason and self-interest. Wilson benefited from the split of voters between Taft and Roosevelt and he won 42 percent. Wilson cited his 42
percent and Roosevelt’s 27 percent as proof that the voters wanted change from the status quo and he promised to use government power to help implement social, political, and economic change.

- Wilson began to implement that promised change and within a year and a half in office he had produced one of the most coherent and far-reaching legislative programs ever devised by a president. His New Freedom program supported tariff reform, increased competition, and vigorous antitrust enforcement.

Wilson’s New Freedom program linked liberal reform to individual initiative and the free play of markets.

**Feature: Protective Laws on Trial: Muller v. Oregon** The Muller case pitted progressive reforms of women’s workplace regulations (in this case a maximum number of hours a women could legally work per day) against an owner’s right to work employees as needed. The Supreme Court found in favor of the state and against the owner. Of significance in this case, and subsequent cases, was the precedent setting use of scientific evidence in a courtroom.

**Conclusion:** Middle class reformers created a new style of political participation in the first decade of the new century. They were not radicals in search of revolutionary change but rather well educated and informed men and women who wanted orderly, well-reasoned change. Government was not unaffected by the progressives and one area of government, namely the executive branch, acquired significantly more power during this period.

**Making links to other ideas** Using the maps and websites, in addition to your prepared lectures and other assignments, can give you more resources to enable your students to see that history is much more than memorizing names and dates. You will find that the websites are even more comprehensive and adaptable than described and because they have been collected here in one volume you have a world of information no further away than the click of your mouse. If you are new to the web’s opportunities, you will be pleasantly surprised at the breadth and depth of the information available in these sites.

Map 01. Why were so many more parks and forests designated in the western states than the eastern states? Identify the dates for establishment. Do they cluster around certain times or are additions made regularly by all presidents?

Map 02. Why did the United States need the Panama Canal? Would it not have been easier and cheaper for several nations to have shared in the cost of construction and operation? Why was this not an option? While constructing the Panama Canal why would a railroad be necessary?

Map 03. What accounts for Wilson’s winning all but a handful of states? In the chronology identify the progressive movements and legislation. How influential was the acceptance of progressive change with the publication of magazine articles and books?

**Web connections and resources** Consider using these websites to supplement your students’ reading and analytical skills. The sites were chosen because of their relevance to the material in the chapter -- not just to mirror it but to provide additional materials and perspectives. Questions from the student study guide have been included so that you can use or amend them to your own needs. Your students may find it insightful for you to guide them through the site as you help them develop research strategies.

“A United Body of Action” www.prenhall/boydstohn/hetchhetchy

The controversy over damming Hetch Hetchy Valley, a portion of Yosemite National Park, to provide water to San Francisco pitted leaders of the new conservation movement and competing definitions of conservation against each other. On the side of the dam was Gifford Pinchot, founder of the National Forest Service and close advisor to Theodore Roosevelt. Leading the opposition was John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club and in whose honor T.R. dedicated Muir Woods just north of San Francisco.

1. What were the arguments for and against the dam?
2. What were the competing definitions of conservation?
3. Who were the members of the competing factions?

“The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire” http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/
This rich and informative site details this now infamous workplace disaster. Through use of an interpretative introductory essay, photographs, oral histories of survivors, and contemporary newspaper accounts, this source explains the impact of the industrial accident on workplace safety reform.

1. One hundred and forty seven workers were killed in the fire but no one was found guilty of creating the potential for an accident of this nature. Why?
2. What were the reforms which resulted from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire?
3. If you had been on the jury how would you have voted -- remember to make your decision as if you were living in New York in 1911, not today.

Explore this area of Progressive reform through timelines that link to important documents in conservation history, such as Teddy Roosevelt’s addresses on the subject and Acts of Congress.

1. What were Americans concerned about protecting? From whom?
2. Why did conservation become such a popular topic at this time and not sooner?

“The Urban Log Cabin” http://www.wnet.org/tenement/logcabin.html
See what living conditions were like in a 1915 tenement house. This site describes the many conditions Progressives were battling, including over-crowding, poor sanitary conditions, and disease.

1. Compare the tenants living in this house. What did they have in common?
2. What does this tenement building say about the landlord?
3. What would the progressives concerned about urban living have to say about the situation here?

“How the NAACP Began” http://www.naacp.org/history.asp
This section of the NAACP web site offers a copy of Mary White Ovington’s history of the organization as originally printed in 1914. In this document, Ovington, who was a former executive secretary and chairperson of the organization, outlined the NAACP’s original platform, detailed acts of civil injustices against blacks, and discussed the role of W.E.B. DuBois.

1. Summarize Mary White Ovington’s evidence of racial injustice.
2. What were the planks of the NAACP’s original platform?
3. How did members go about recruiting new members?

Analytical reading Your students may need more experience analyzing a short reading passage so that he or she can determine its component parts. They may need help identifying primary and supporting information as well as the author’s analysis. The analytical reading passages and the questions from the student study guide have been duplicated in the instructor’s manual for your use. Your students may need direction and encouragement in using them.

As the old politics declined, a new politics of voluntary organizations and activists arose to take its place. Historians have found it difficult to define the Progressives, as they called themselves. Progressives addressed a wide variety of social problems with many different tactics, but for people of the time the connectedness was apparent. A rally to end child labor, for instance, might draw out young lawyers, teachers, labor unionists, woman suffragists, professors, and politicians. “Scores of young leaders in American politics and public affairs were seeing what I saw, feeling what I felt,” journalist William Allen White remembered. “All over the land in a score of states and more, young men in both parties were taking leadership by attacking things as they were in that day.” A series of overlapping movements, campaigns, and crusades defined the era from 1890 to 1920.

Progressivism was not a unified movement with a platform or an agreed-upon set of goals. It was more like a political style, a way of approaching problems. Progressives had no illusions that wage labor or industrialism could be eliminated or that it was possible to recreate a rural commonwealth. Big cities and big corporations, they believed, were permanent features of
modern life. But they shared an optimistic conviction that modern institutions could be made humane, responsive, and moral.

1. What was it about the times that allowed or forced the people known as progressives to come together?
2. Progressivism “was more like a political style, a way of approaching problems.” What do the authors mean by this?

Writing The questions or writing prompts from the student study guide have been duplicated here for your use. These writing topics make good lecture topics especially if you help your students see the development of the idea in lecture format before they refine the idea in their writing assignments.

1. What does the growth of the American Socialist Workers’ Party signify? Why did so many voters, especially in the mid-west, find hope in this party and its ideals?
2. Progressivism was not just an urban movement. In what ways was the message of progressivism made known to Americans living outside American cities?
3. What was W. E. B. Du Bois’s “triple paradox?”
4. Compare President Roosevelt’s “Big Stick” diplomacy with Taft’s “Dollar” diplomacy. Are they different?
5. Why was the election of 1912 referred to as a “race that would define the future?”

Lecture Strategies Ultimately the lecture is where you impart, or profess, your knowledge for the benefit of your students. These strategies were designed around the textbook and if your classroom strategy is to use the organization of the text to organize your course content, these lecture ideas may prove helpful. However, if you lecture around themes please see the section entitled “Thematic Lecture Topics.” You may find that you are more comfortable with and your students are more responsive to a combination of the two.

The progressive movement presents many opportunities to lecture on a variety of topics. If you have laid the groundwork by discussing the social, political, and economic problems created by industrialization, the solutions proposed by the progressives make sense to your students. They can easily see causes and effects.

You can use that same foundation to discuss the radical solutions offered by the Socialist Party and the Wobblies. Having done that, your students can then see why so many Americans opted for progressive solutions rather than the more radical solutions.

Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, the first and the last progressive presidents, offer pertinent examples of what can be positive in an activist government. They are also good examples of leadership in the White House.

Roosevelt’s and Taft’s foreign policy programs, especially where Latin America and Central America are concerned, are also good examples of progressivism on an international level. Roosevelt’s Panama Canal can also illustrate this idea.

The election of 1912 ushered in a new era in American politics. You will need to discuss this election so that subsequent candidates and elections are understandable.

Penguin Classics

Upton Sinclair’s The Jungle, with an afterword by Emory Elliott, New York: A Signet Classic, 1990, epitomizes muckraking and the style of journalistic writing that the progressives employed to not only illustrate the problems of industrialization and urbanization but also to encourage activist change. Published in 1906, The Jungle forced Congress to pass the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906) with its vivid descriptions of slaughterhouses and the production of prepared meats.

In Immigrant Voices: Twenty-four Narratives on Becoming an American, edited by Gordon Hunter, New York: A Signet Classic, 1999, Hunter has chosen twenty-four narratives of immigrants to tell the stories of immigrants’ transformations to Americans. Added to the predominantly European immigrant stories in this late nineteenth century section of the text are those of the Syrian Abraham Rihbany. Consider the following examples as pertinent to the material covered in this chapter: Marie Zakrzewska, one of America’s most successful early female physicians, discusses her transition to American in A Woman’s Quest. This story is set in the late 1850s but is comparable to the twentieth century and illustrates that progressivism as an attitude predated the movement.
Similar to Zakrzewska’s story is that of Anna Howard Shaw, *Story of a Pioneer*. Shaw was also a physician, minister, and organizer of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. See also Ludwig Lewisohn, *Up Steam*, a discussion of anti-semitism in New York in 1910.