Chapter 21
The Progressive Era, 1900—1917

Chapter Summary

Chapter 21 explores early twentieth-century reform through the Progressive movement. Topics examined in this chapter include the historical context for Progressive reform; early strides in urban, rural, social, and industrial reform; early twentieth-century political reform; and progressive change under Theodore Roosevelt, William Taft, and Woodrow Wilson.

I. The Ferment of Reform
   A. The Context of Reform: Industrial and Urban Tensions
   B. Church and Campus
   C. Muckrakers
   D. The Gospel of Efficiency
   E. Labor’s Demand for Rights
   F. Extending the Woman’s Sphere
   G. Trans-Atlantic Influences
   H. Socialism
   I. Opponents of Reform

II. Reforming Society
   A. Settlement Houses and Urban Reform
   B. Protective Legislation for Women and Children
   C. Reshaping Public Education
   D. Challenging Gender Restrictions
   E. Reforming Country Life
   F. Social Control and Moral Crusades
      1. Controlling immigrants
      2. Prohibition
      3. Suppressing prostitution
   G. For Whites Only?
      1. Black activism

III. Reforming Politics and Government
   A. Woman Suffrage
   B. Electoral Reform
   C. Municipal Reform
   D. Progressive State Government

IV. Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Presidency
   A. TR and the Modern Presidency
   B. Roosevelt and Labor
   C. Managing Natural Resources
   D. Corporate Regulation
   E. Taft and the Insurgents
V. Woodrow Wilson and Progressive Reform
   A. The Election of 1912
   B. Implementing the New Freedom
   C. The Expansion of Reform

VI. Conclusion

Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 21, students should be able to do the following:

1. Discuss the philosophy of the Social Gospel movement and identify the major philosophers who originated the movement.

2. Explain the liberalization of American religion during the early twentieth century. Explain how social scientists reinforced and supported the Social Gospel movement.

3. Define the term *muckraker* and explain the importance of this form of journalism to the Progressive movement. Identify some of the major writers associated with this genre of journalism.

4. Identify the major national labor unions of the Progressive era.

5. Describe the major changes in the role and status of women during the Progressive era. Identify the clubs and organizations that helped to politically organize women during the Progressive era.

6. Identify the major sources of opposition to the Progressive movement.

7. Define the term *settlement house* and connect the settlement movement to the role of women in the Progressive movement. Explain the impact of the settlement movement on traditional American ideas regarding poverty.

8. Identify the challenges that faced those attempting to gain effective child labor legislation during the Progressive era.

9. Discuss the philosophical dilemma facing feminists and lawmakers who were attempting to pass women’s labor reform legislation during the Progressive era.

10. Identify some key legislative initiatives of the Progressive era that can be identified with the origins of the welfare state.

11. Identify the key improvements in southern public education during the Progressive era. Explain how racial segregation impacted the quality of southern public education.

12. Identify Margaret Sanger and explain her role in challenging gender restrictions.

13. Explain the impact of the Progressive movement on life in rural America.

14. Explain the provisions of the Eighteenth Amendment and discuss the reasons for Progressive support of prohibition.
15. Discuss African American interest in Progressive urban reform. Identify W. E. B. Du Bois and discuss his contributions to civil rights reform during the early twentieth century.

16. Explain the provisions of the Nineteenth Amendment and discuss the moderation of the woman’s suffrage argument at the turn of the century.

17. Identify Robert La Follette and describe his contribution to Progressive political reform.

18. Identify three ways in which Theodore Roosevelt modernized the role of the president.

19. Explain the role played by Theodore Roosevelt in settling the anthracite coal strike of 1902.

20. Discuss Roosevelt’s program for conservation of natural resources. Identify the sources of opposition to this program.

21. Explain Roosevelt’s theory regarding trustbusting. Identify three laws passed during the Roosevelt administration that effectively expanded the police power of the federal government.

22. Identify the major political problems that confronted William Taft during his presidential administration. Explain the impact of these problems on the presidential election of 1912.

23. Discuss the political background of Woodrow Wilson. Explain the philosophical contest between New Nationalism and New Freedom in the 1912 presidential campaign.

24. List the major pieces of reform legislation coming out of the Wilson administration that addressed tariff, banking, business, farming, and labor reform.

**Topics for Classroom Lecture**

1. Present a comparison and contrast of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois as philosophical and political leaders for African Americans at the turn of the century. Look at the differences between the Atlanta Compromise and the Niagara Movement as approaches to gaining social, economic, and political rights for African Americans at the turn of the century.

2. Discuss the life and work of Margaret Sanger as an example of the political complexity of the Progressive era. On one hand, she contributed to the liberation of American women by removing barriers to birth control and fighting for reproductive rights for women. On the other hand, she was a student of eugenics, a pseudo-scientific theory that advocated the promotion of reproduction within superior gene pools and the discouragement of reproduction within inferior gene pools. Have students consider whether Sanger was a liberal or a conservative.

3. Discuss the issue of laissez faire during the Progressive era. Describe how Progressives continued to change traditional American ideas about the role of government. Cite specific laws passed during the Progressive era giving more power to the federal government. Discuss the issue of police power and the laws that expanded that area of authority for the federal government. Examine the office of the presidency during the Progressive era. How did it change under Roosevelt and Wilson? How did the love of order and organization impact the size of the federal government? Why did Americans endorse these changes in the size and power of the federal government?
Topics for Class Discussion and Essays

1. Have students discuss American ideas regarding poverty, focusing on a comparison of the Social Gospel and the Protestant work ethic. How did Progressives at the turn of the century challenge traditional American ideas regarding the source of individual poverty? How did changes in beliefs about the source of poverty impact Progressive ideas about who was responsible for minimizing the suffering associated with poverty? How did religion contribute to both the Protestant work ethic and the Social Gospel?

2. Discuss American socialism during the Progressive era. After providing some historical background on socialist leaders, organizations, and parties at the turn of the century, ask students to assess the appeal, or lack of appeal, socialism has historically held for Americans. Have Americans historically been attracted to socialist thought? What factors have contributed to socialism’s limited appeal in the United States? Have students consider traditional American political values, the structure and function of the American political system, and traditional American ideas regarding wealth and poverty. How have these issues defined the American response to socialism?

3. Compare and contrast the Populist and Progressive movements. Have students recall the Omaha Platform from the Populist movement and determine which of these goals were achieved by the Populists themselves and which by the Progressives. Look at the participants in each movement. How do they differ from each other? Are there any groups that were drawn to both movements? Did the nature of the membership in each movement impact the level of success attained by each? Also, use this opportunity to predict the next link in the evolution of twentieth-century American reform between the Progressive movement and the New Deal. What has been achieved in the Progressive movement that will be used, resurrected, or extended during the New Deal?

4. Was the Progressive movement liberal or conservative? The Progressive movement is included in the string of American reform movements dating from the Populist movement through the reform era of the 1960s. Yet, historian Gabriel Kolko has characterized the Progressive era as “a triumph of conservatism.” Have students discuss this issue by focusing on the following questions:
   a. How were the Progressives motivated? What did they want and why did they want it?
   b. How did middle-class Progressives feel about the communities they assisted? Have students consider the impact of nativism and Social Darwinism on Progressive motivation. How did these ideas connect to the Social Gospel and the Gospel of Efficiency?
   c. Consider issues connected to paternalism, control, and authority. Why were Progressives willing to take responsibility for reform? If they did not assume responsibility for change, who did they fear would take that responsibility? Was the Progressive movement in any way a contest between mainstream Americans and radicals for the right to control reform?

Topics for Class Projects and Term Papers

1. Have students participate in a class project focusing on muckraking. Assign students the task of writing an expose of wrongdoing in their own community. You may want to provide students with a list of topics from which to choose or let them choose their own. This is a good option for group projects that can be presented in class. It is also a good way to help students link the past and present.

2. Examine prohibition from the perspective of a distillery. Look at the growth of the distillery business at the turn of the century, perhaps focusing on one company such as Anheuser-Busch. Connect the growth in the distillery business to turn of the century immigration. How did distilleries like Anheuser-Busch fight prohibition? How did these companies survive the years of prohibition?
Resources for Lectures and Research Projects


Audio-Visual Resources

Ken Burns looks at the story of the historic friendship between Stanton and Anthony and how it figured into the quest for woman`s suffrage.

*Potions or Poisons?* The History Channel, 50 minutes.
This is an educational and entertaining examination of turn of the century quackery in America.

This video is a four-part series chronicling the life of Theodore Roosevelt.

The video presents a look at the life of Theodore Roosevelt with commentary by Edmund Morris.