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Summary

TELESCOPING THE TIMES *The Progressive Era*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW In the first two decades of the 1900s, Americans embrace the Progressive movement and many of its reforms.

1 The Origins of Progressivism

KEY IDEA Social and economic changes create broad reform movements in American society.

As the 1900s opened, reformers pushed for a range of changes to society in a movement called Progressivism, which had four major goals:

- Protecting social welfare by easing the ills of urban society. The YMCA built libraries and exercise facilities while the Salvation Army offered the urban poor food and nursery care.
- Promoting moral reform, especially by working to ban alcoholic beverages. Prohibitionists—many of whom were members of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)—often came into conflict with immigrant groups. The saloons the reformers attacked served vital functions such as offering cheap meals in immigrant communities.
- Reforming the economy. Some criticized the vast wealth amassed by industrialists and the treatment of workers. Journalists called “muck-rakers” published stories about business corruption and unfair practices.
- Making businesses more efficient and profitable. Scientific management and the adoption of the assembly line for the manufacture of goods enabled factories to increase production.

Progressives also reformed politics. Reform mayors routed corruption out of Detroit and Cleveland, among other cities. Wisconsin Governor Robert M. La Follette took steps to regulate businesses in his state. Reformers managed to pass laws in almost every state to ban child labor and limited the number of hours women could work. Reformers passed laws requiring the use of secret ballots in elections and allowing voters to remove elected officials from office. The Seventeenth Amendment allowed for voters to elect senators directly.

2 Women in Public Life

KEY IDEA Women increasingly enter public life as reformers and workers.

On the nation’s farms, women continued to play the vital roles they had filled earlier. They helped with the farm’s crops and animals as well as cooking, cleaning, sewing, and child rearing. Many urban women who lacked education joined the workforce by becoming servants. African-American and unmarried immigrant women often used this route to employment. In 1900, a quarter of women who worked outside the home worked in industry. Half of them toiled in the garment industry. With the growth of business, more and more women worked in offices as stenographers and typists. As a result, more women sought high school educations to train for these jobs.

Many middle- and upper-class women joined groups aiming to promote culture. The number of women’s colleges grew, and many who graduated from these colleges joined the reform movements. Major goals of these movements were making workplace and home safer. The National Association of Colored Women helped African Americans by creating nurseries, reading rooms, and kindergartens.

Many women joined in the effort to seek the right to vote, or suffrage. Spearheading the effort was the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Wyoming, in 1869, became the first state to grant this right to women. Some other western states followed suit. Another effort failed when the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution did not guarantee women the right to vote. Women pushed for an amendment to the Constitution granting suffrage, but for the first two decades of the 1900s, it did not pass.

3 Teddy Roosevelt's Square Deal

KEY IDEA *Teddy Roosevelt pursues a reform agenda—the Square Deal—and contributes to the emergence of the modern presidency.*

When President William McKinley was killed in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt became president. He showed great energy and bold decision making and won publicity. He launched a program of reforms called the “Square Deal.” With his vigorous leadership, he changed the presidency.

Roosevelt thought that a more complex American society needed a powerful federal government. He intervened in a bitter 1902 coal strike to lead both sides to an agreement. He had the government sue business trusts to improve competition. He pushed through laws increasing the government’s power to regulate railroads. After reading a book, *The Jungle*, that exposed poor sanitary practices in the meatpacking industry, Roosevelt gained passage of the Meat Inspection Act. The Pure Food and Drug Act banned food processors from adding dangerous chemicals to food or from making false claims regarding medicines. Roosevelt also took steps to preserve the nation’s wild natural areas.

Roosevelt, though, did not back civil rights for African Americans. So black leaders, plus some white reformers, formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 to push for full racial equality.

4 Progressivism Under Taft

KEY IDEA *William H. Taft ignores the progressive mood of the American people and loses the White House.*

William Howard Taft became president in 1909. He pursued many Progressive policies but more cautiously—and with less publicity—than Roosevelt. And he divided his own party.

One issue was the tariff. Taft wished to lower the tariffs. When conservatives in the Senate passed a weakened version of the measure, Taft signed it anyway and Progressives complained. He also angered conservationists by appointing officials who favored development of wild lands rather than preservation of them.

With the Republican Party split between reformers and conservatives, Democrats won control of the House for the first time in almost two decades. In 1912, Roosevelt tried to regain the Republican nomination for president. Failing that,

Roosevelt formed a third party—the Bull Moose party—and ran on a platform of reform.

The Democrats nominated reformer Woodrow Wilson, the governor of New Jersey. As Taft and Roosevelt bitterly denounced each other, Wilson won the election—and a Democratic majority in Congress. About three-quarters of the vote went to candidates in favor of economic reform.

5 Wilson's New Freedom

KEY IDEA *Wilson claims the presidency as a progressive leader and establishes a strong reform agenda.*

A religious and scholarly man, Wilson stayed independent of party bosses and pursued his policies of reform called the “New Freedom.” With the Clayton Anti-Trust Act of 1914, the government strengthened laws against business trusts and workers’ rights. The Federal Trade Act created the Federal Trade Commission to investigate unfair business practices. Another law lowered tariffs. With decreased tariff revenues, the government began collecting taxes on workers’ income. Wilson also secured passage of a law creating the Federal Reserve System to improve the nation’s banking practices.

Meanwhile, women continued in their drive to win the right to vote. From 1910 to 1912, women’s suffrage was approved in five states. Defeats in other states, though, led some women to try more militant tactics. Alice Paul organized a group that picketed the White House and the Democratic Party. Finally, the Nineteenth Amendment, ratified in 1920, gave women the right to vote.

Wilson did not push social reform ideas. He did little to support women’s suffrage, nor did he help African Americans. In fact, he appointed southerners who took steps to extend segregation. Blacks who had voted for Wilson felt betrayed, and a meeting between Wilson and African-American leaders ended in anger.