**Learning Objective:**

Compare the goals and effects of the Progressive reform movement.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Debates fostered by social and political groups about the role of government in American social, political, and economic life shape government policy, institutions, political parties, and the rights of citizens.*

1. In the Progressive Era of the early 20th century, Progressives responded to political corruption, economic instability, and social concerns by calling for greater government action and other political and social measures.
2. 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.
   1. Call for Reform
      1. ***Progressivism*** was a response to the excesses of the Gilded Age, including income disparity, lavish lifestyles, and the practices of robber barons.
      2. Progressive reformers rejected Social Darwinism, arguing that cooperation offered the best way to improve society.
      3. Most progressives also attempted to correct the radical extremes of Marxist revolutionaries and radicals among intellectuals and labor activists.
      4. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union successfully convinced many women that they had a moral responsibility to improve society by working for prohibition. Carry Nation was one of the best known and most outspoken leaders of the WCTU. Passage of child labor laws were particularly pushed for by women.
   2. Muckrakers
      1. ***Muckrakers*** were investigative reporters who promoted social and political reforms by exposing corruption and urban problems. They were the leading critics of urban bosses and corporate robber barons. The rise of mass-circulation newspapers and magazines enabled muckrakers to reach a large audience.
      2. Upton Sinclair wrote the novel *The Jungle*, graphically exposing abuses in the Chicago meatpacking industry, helping convince Congress to pass the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act.
      3. Ida Tarbell was the foremost woman in the muckraking movement, who published a highly critical history of Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company, calling it the “Mother of Trusts.”
      4. Jacob Riis was a journalist and photographer working primarily in New York City, whose book *How the Other Half Lives* provided poignant pictures that gave a human face to the poverty and despair experienced by immigrants living in New York City’s Lower East Side.
      5. Ida B. Wells was an African American civil rights advocate and an early women’s rights advocate, who was the principal public opponent of lynching in the South.
3. 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 woman suffrage.
   1. Theodore Roosevelt’s “Square Deal”
      1. Progressive reformers believed that government should be used to ameliorate social problems.
      2. Theodore Roosevelt used the presidency as the “bully pulpit” to advocate all his ideas, setting the agenda and putting pressure on Congress.
      3. The Anthracite Coal Strike was a protest by the United Mine Workers of America in the coal fields of Eastern Pennsylvania in 1902. Roosevelt promoted a Square Deal for labor by using arbitration to settle the strike. He reversed the precedent established during the Gilded Age by intervening on the side of labor.
      4. Roosevelt addressed trusts based on his determination whether they were “good” or “bad,” yet still fashioned himself a “trustbuster.” He managed trusts through the Bureau of Corporations. Roosevelt broke up monopolization and consolidation in the railroad industry with his assault on the Northern Securities Company, a corporation which had been put together by J.P. Morgan.
   2. Woodrow Wilson’s “New Freedom”
      1. Woodrow Wilson was a vigorous reformer who launched an all-out assault on high tariffs, banking problems, and trusts in his “New Freedom” program.
      2. Wilson saw big business as immoral, so he pushed to break up corporations rather than simply regulate them.
      3. The matured American industry no longer feared foreign competition, and subsequently the Underwood Tariff reduced rates and instituted an income tax. The 16th Amendment gave Congress the power to lay and collect taxes on individuals’ incomes. The new income supplanted money from the sale of western lands and supplemented tariff duties. The initial income tax only ranged from 1-7%.
   3. Political Reforms
      1. The secret ballot reduced voter intimidation and led to the weakening of political machines.
      2. Instead of party nominating conventions whereby the political party elites selected candidates for office, states began implementing primary elections whereby voters could choose between candidates seeking the party’s nomination.
      3. The 17th Amendment provided that senators shall be elected by popular vote. This power was previously held by state legislatures.
      4. Initiatives, referendums, and recalls are special elections gave citizens more influence over legislation and forced officials to act for the public good.
      5. The women’s movement benefited from strong leadership such as Susan B. Anthony. The 19th Amendment (1920) granted women the right to vote. The only states to grant women’s suffrage before 1900 were located west of the Mississippi River.
   4. Economic Reforms
      1. Following a panic in 1907, it was generally agreed that there was a need for more stability in the banking industry and for a currency supply which would expand and contract to meet business needs.
      2. Wilson supported the Federal Reserve Act of 1913. The Federal Reserve is a system of district banks coordinated by a central board. This made currency and credit more elastic. The Federal Reserve banks held the gold reserves of their members, then loaned money to member banks by rediscounting their commercial and agricultural paper (that means the money was loaned at interest less than the public paid to the member banks, and the notes of indebtedness of businesses and farmers to the member banks were held as collateral). This allowed the Fed to control interest rates by raising or lowering the discount rate. The money loaned to the member banks was in the form of a new currency, Federal Reserve Notes, which was backed 60% by commercial paper (short-term bonds issued by large corporations) and 40% by gold. This currency was designed to expand and contract with the volume of business activity and borrowing. The Fed serviced the financial needs of the federal government.
      3. Woodrow Wilson preferred the competition of small businesses to massive corporations. Under the Clayton Antitrust Act, competing corporations were prohibited from investing in each other’s stocks. It expanded the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to outlaw price-fixing and specifically exempted unions. His administration created the F.T.C., an independent regulatory commission that is designed to prevent unfair business practices.
   5. Social/Moral Reforms
      1. The 18th Amendment forbade the sale or manufacture of intoxicating liquors. The amendment was later repealed by the 21st Amendment in 1933 due to a rise in organized crime.
      2. The Keating-Owens Child Labor Act created laws restricting child labor. Working hours were also limited for women and children and employees in certain industries such as mining.
      3. Parents became more supportive and sympathetic to their children and less authoritarian and restrictive. States led the way with programs such as public aid to mothers of dependent children.
4. 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 restriction.
   1. Civil Rights
      1. During the Progressive Era, W.E.B. DuBois emerged as the most influential advocate of full political, economic, and social equality for Blacks. DuBois advocated the intellectual development of a “talented tenth” of the Black population. He hoped that this group would become influential by continuing their education, writing books, or becoming directly involved in social change.
      2. In his Atlanta Compromise speech in 1895, Booker T. Washington called on Blacks to seek economic opportunities rather than political rights. He supported accommodation to White society, economic self-help, and industrial education. DuBois opposed the implementation of Booker T. Washington’s program for Black progress. DuBois supported cooperation with Whites to further Black progress, with his goal being integration rather than Black separatism, believing that education was worthless without political equality.
      3. W.E.B. Du Bois founded the Niagara Movement (1905) to call for federal legislation to protect racial equality and full rights of citizenship. Du Bois later founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. The NAACP rejected Booker T. Washington’s gradualism and separatism. It focused on using the courts to achieve equality and justice.
      4. The Ku Klux Klan first emerged during Radical Reconstruction. D.W. Griffith’s epic film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) became controversial because of its depiction of KKK activities as heroic and commendable and played a role in the resurgence of the KKK during the Progressive Era. The KKK favored White supremacy and immigration restriction.
      5. Civil rights laws for Black Americans were not part of the Progressive program of reforms. Progressive era legislation was least concerned with ending racial segregation. Members of Woodrow Wilson’s cabinet segregated workers by race in their departments with no objections from the President. He gained a reputation for being inimical to civil rights.
   2. Municipal Reform
      1. After a hurricane and tidal wave destroyed much of Galveston, Texas in 1903, progressive businessmen and Texas state legislators removed the ineffective and corrupt mayor and city council and established a city government of five elected commissioners who were experts in their field to rebuild Galveston. Numerous other cities adopted the commission form of government.
      2. Reforms to local government led to a weakening in the power of political machines.
   3. Political Fracturing
      1. Progressives wanted a lower tariff but Taft signed a higher one. The passage of the tariff caused the Republican Party to split into “Old Guard” and “Insurgent” factions.
      2. In the 1912 election, Roosevelt (Republican “insurgent”) ran as the Progressive (Bull Moose) candidate for president, while Taft ran as an “Old Guard” Republican. Wilson ran as a Democrat and won, returning the Democrats to power for the first time since the Civil War. The election altered the Republican Party by moving them away from Progressivism, returning to a more conservative approach.

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| **Assessing the Progressive Era** | |
| **Weaknesses and Disappearance** | **Heritage** |
| * Material progress of Americans weakened the zeal of reformers. * Many Progressive goals were often confusing and contradictory, as progressives were divided over many issues. * Opposition to Progressivism was apparent as initiatives failed and courts struck down Progressive legislation. * Government remained mainly under the influence of business and industry. * The outbreak of World War I dampened the enthusiasm of attempts to use governments to create just societies on Earth. | * Trust-busting forced industrialists to notice public opinion and legislation gave federal and state governments the tools to protect consumers. * Since the Progressive Era, it has been believed that the government has the responsibility to act for the people’s welfare, initiating a transition from laissez-faire to government regulation. * The ability of democratic institutions to meet all problems arising from urbanization and industrialization at all levels has become ingrained in our culture. * The President is now expected to be strong and effective. |

**Learning Objective:**

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

**Thematic Focus:**

*Geographic and environmental factors, including competition over and debates about natural resources, shape the development of America and foster regional diversity. The development of America impacts the environment and reshapes geography, which leads to debates about environmental and geographic issues.*

1. In the Progressive Era of the early 20th century, Progressives responded to political corruption, economic instability, and social concerns by calling for greater government action and other political and social measures.
2. Preservationists and conservationists both supported the establishment of national parks while advocating different government responses to the overuse of natural resources.
   1. Roosevelt advocated for conservation of natural resources and wildlife. He established the U.S. Forest Service and appointed Gifford Pinchot as director.
   2. A series of laws and executive orders were enacted to create federal irrigation projects, national parks and forests, develop water power, and establish the National Conservation Commission to oversee the nation’s resources.
   3. Preservationists and conservationists both supported the establishment of national parks while advocating different government responses to the overuse of natural resources. Ballinger, the Secretary of the Interior, opposed conservation. Pinchot, the director of the Forest Service, brought charges of collusion against Ballinger. Ballinger was exonerated, but Taft’s siding with him further aggravated the Republican split.