The Progressive Era (1900-1917)

*Who were the progressives and what reforms did they pursue?*

* To answer this question, we must analyze the causes of progressivism
* General causes: The 1890s – the 1890s were a cause of Progressivism, mainly b/c they sucked. In the 1890s, all the tensions built up during industrialization broke loose in the **Panic of 1893**, labor problems, political issues, and foreign entanglements.
* Capitalism out of control– Partially b/c of the depression, many people started to realize that capitalism, w/ its monopolistic tendencies and rampant destruction of natural resources needed just a bit of restraint.
* Screwed-Up Cities – Disease, poverty and crime were often rampant.
* Immigration– viewed as problems to society, feared urban immorality, social disorder, etc.

Thus… **Progressivism**- series of political and cultural responses to industrialization and its by-poducts: immigration, urban growth, rise of corporate power/ socio-economic elite, widening class divisions; desire to build new institutions, fear of alien, desire to end abuses of power, efficiency, and desire to achieve *perfection*

Society is responsible for individuals and should HELP them!

*Intellectuals offer new social views*

**Thorstein Veblen** - sharpest critic of new business order. Wrote **The Theory of the Leisure Class** in which he satirized the lifestyle of the newly rich captains of industry- “conspicuous consumption” argued they were selfish people who flaunted their wealth and didn’t give a flip about other people. Later said that workers/ engineers were better fitted to lead society b/c they were shaped by the discipline of the machine

“**Pragmatism**”- truth doesn’t emerge from abstract theorizing, it emerges from the experience of coping w/ life’s realities; argued by William James

**Herbert Croly**- captured faith in power of new ideas to transform society. **The Promise of American Life-** called for activist gov. like Alexander Hamilton’s but argued this gov. would instead promote the welfare of all citizens rather than serving only business class

**Jane Addams**- settlement-house leader. Argued each individual’s well-being depends on well-being of all; urged people to take lead in demanding better conditions in factories, slums, etc. Settlement house was called Hull House- center of social activism and legislative-reform initiatives

**John Dewey**- said public schools are the potent engines of social change- interaction between pupils necessary to learn to live in social groups

*Novelists, journalists, artists*

Novelists and journalists roused the reform spirit by chronicling corporate wrong doing, municipal corruption, slum conditions, and industrial abuses

* **The Octopus** by Frank Norris portrayed epic struggle between railroad owners and wheat growers. Theodore Dreiser’s **The Financier** undermined reputation of industrial elite
* “**muckrakers**”- emphasized facts rather than abstractions, awaken readers to conditions of industrial America by exposing urban political corruption and corporate wrongdoing- **McClure’s** and **Collier’s** magazines whose circulation soared b/c public loved scandals

*Politics*

*Party loyalty and voter turnout declined* as *politics opened to new interest groups*, each of which had their own agendas – i.e. the Progressive Era witnessed the birth of that delightful phenomenon: the nationwide [charitable] organization that calls your house and asks you for money eight times a day. These organizations included: professional groups, women’s organizations, issue-oriented groups, civic clubs, and minority groups. So, *politics became more fragmented and issue-driven*

*-* the **initiative** [propose laws], the **referendum** [vote on laws], and the **recall** [get rid of offending officials] to restore gov. by the people, aimed to democratize voting

*-* **electoral-reform movement**- states replaced old system of voting that involved preprinted ballots bearing names of candidates with better secret ballot which made it harder to rig elections

*Regulating business*

Many workers benefitted from corporate growth of later nineteenth century when giants like Carnegie Steel and

Standard Oil were produced. Industrial worker’s average real wages rose from $532 to $687 by 1915, yet wages still could barely support family, (aww…) sooo, to survive families went to work (duh) and women worked as factory help or domestics or small establishments like laundries and bakeries. Laborers faced long hours and great hazards.

* **Frederick W. Taylor**- Principles of Scientific managements- we can increase output by standardizing job routines and reward fastest workers! “Efficiency”= big deal, resented by most workers though
* “**Wisonsin idea**”- **La Follette** adopted direct-primary system, set up railroad regulatory commission, increased corporate taxes, and limited campaign spending; reforms gained national attention

*Livability of cities*

America= urban nation in early 20th century. By 1920, had passed the 50 percent mark but conditions in cities were sucky and plagued with political corruption.

* **Frederick Law Olmstead** and others campaigned for parks, blvds, and street lights, proposed laws against billboards/electrical wires overhead, etc. **Daniel Burnham**, architect of Chicago World Fair led successful effort in reviving plan for Washington and developed other city plans that offer a seductive-like city both more efficient and more beautiful. Wanted lakefront parks, museums, wide blvds, blah blah blah.
* **Municipal reform**- wanted decent housing and better garbage collection and street cleaning. NY legislature passed laws imposing strict health and safety regulations on tenements in 1911.
* **Public health**- They finally discovered that germs cause diseases in the 1880s, omg! So, progressive reformers pushed for improved water and sewer systems, regulations of milk spoilers and food handlers, school medical exams, vaccinations, etc.
* Infant mortality dropped that’s to all of the efforts and the tb rate fell by nearly half. Campaigns often had targeted the immigrants/poor though and demonized some like “Typhoid Mary”

*Myaaar. Immigrants= Peeps who must be watched: Social Control*

Reformers ended up imposing their own moral standards by force of law on the immigrants.

* **Ragtime** music and five-cent movies “**nickelodeons**” became highly popular and ironically what made cities more livable was “evviiill” and were thought of as moral traps, so reformers campaigned to regulate it all
* Reformers also targeted prostitution ex: **Mann Act** made it illegal to transport a woman across a state line for immoral purposes
* Temperance- long been part of reform agenda. **Anti-Saloon League** shifted emphasis to legislating ban on sale of alcoholic beverages though and added to efforts of **Women’s Christian Temperance** **Union**. This was a heavy drinking era and drunkards and alcohol abuse was not uncommon. Campaign against drug abuse also came out in these years and gov. had **Narcotics Act/Harrison Act** that banned distribution of heroin, morphine, etc. except by licensed physicians/pharmacists
* **Eugenics**– B/c of Darwin, some people [**Francis Galton**] came up w /the idea that society had an obligation to prevent “defective” people from reproducing. This resulted in laws in some states allowing sterilization of criminals and the mentally ill. This thinking received a boost in **The Passing of the Great Race**(1916) by Madison Grant, which held that immigrants were threatening the superior Nordic race
* **Immigration restriction**- if immigrant city is the source of social problems, let’s get rid of them! **Immigration Restriction League** in 1894
* **Racism**- self-explanatory. “**Jim Crow**” segregated everything from parks to cemeteries. Labor unions excluded blacks. Two hundred thousand migrated north thinking it would be better there. **The Birth of a Nation** by Griffith disparaged blacks and glorified KKK; lynchings occurred yearly.

*Organization of blacks/ women*

Most minorities were ignored by Progressives, but they found their own leaders willing to challenge inequality.

* There were two main leaders/responses to the problem faced by blacks:

**Booker T. Washington** [rural] – Through “Self-Help” [hard work leading to economic success], Washington felt that blacks could *eventually* acquire social and political rights. For the time being, however, he felt that they should compromise with whites – though he did not feel blacks were inferior, he still endorsed a separate-but-equal policy. But his views, as presented in the **Atlanta Exposition** (1895), encountered opposition from more radical elements.

* **WEB Du Bois** [urban]– In response to Washington, DB felt that blacks should not have to tolerate white domination and should immediately fight for their social and political rights. DB met with supporters at the **Niagara Conference**, and, in 1909, he joined w/white liberals to form the NAACP, which advocated an end to discrimination

As for women…..

* By 1910, women could only vote in WY, UT, CO, and ID. Woman suffrage had failed in six state referenda after 1896. **Harriot Blatch**- feminists argued that women needed the vote as political leverage to get better working conditions [all women worked, she argued, whether paid/unpaid].
* Anyhow, the suffragists achieved successes through letter-writing, NAWSA articles, marches of the **National Woman’s Party** [**Alice Paul**] and, most of all, women’s roles in WWI. As a result, the nat’l suffrage amendment was finally passed in 1920. Nevertheless, women remained subordinate to men socially and economically for some time. NAWSA’s membership also remained largely white. native born, and middle class.
* idea of “sex rights” and birth control as proposed by leader **Margaret Sanger**, who formed the **American Birth Control League** and managed to make the issue part of public debate, championed direct action, and insisted contraceptives only be available through physicians. **Mary Dennet** was also a feminist and activist who advocated birth control and sex education, urged lobbying efforts to amend obscenity laws and argued should that contraceptives should be freely available. Broad relations between Sanger and Dennet existed.

*Workers Organize*

Labor unions continued to expand. AFL grew to 4 million by 1920 which was still only a mere 20 percent of the industrial work force.

* **Danbury Hatters** case- unions forbidden from organizing boycotts in support of strikes, were a “constraint of trade” and violation of Sherman Anti-trust Act
* **IWW** tried to reach out factories and mills where most immigrants and women worked. Nicknamed the “Wobblies” and had a reputation for violence. Other workers turned to socialism and we all know who the big socialist leader was…

*“Teddy” Bear and progressivism*

After the assassination of McKinley in **September 1901**, young **Theodore Roosevelt** was sent into the White House. Roosevelt supported regulatory legislation, obsessed over “manliness,” and was a brilliant rhetorician and publicity monger.

Issues addressed by TR:

* **Trust-Busting** – TR agreed with Progressives that the new era needed a bigger/ stronger national gov. that would act as an umpire in the big business game, deciding which business were okay and which weren’t. TR wasn’t as big a “trust-buster” as he claimed and only attacked “bad” trusts [he even instructed his **Bureau of Corporations** to assist in some forms of expansion], he did use the Justice Dept. to prosecute trusts that were exploiting the public, like the Northern Securitiescase (NS violated Sherman Anti-Trust). Neither feared nor liked business tycoons
* **Regulatory legislation**– TR also supported regulatory legislation, like the **Hepburn Act**- gave the ICC more authority to set RRD rates. Also, TR investigated the meat industry [Sinclair’s **The Jungle**] and subsequently supported the **Meat Inspection Act** and the **Food and Drug Act** (self-explanatory). In both areas, however, TR compromised rather than risk not gaining anything
* labor – generally favored investigation and arbitration. In the **United Mine Workers Strike** (1902), he raised public opinion in favor of the miners and threatened to use troops to reopen the mines to force arbitration by a commission, which eventually raised wages, reduced hours and required dealing w/grievances [but didn’t require recognition of the union]. With labor, TR felt only some organizations were legitimate; wished to keep control. In “**Square Deal**” denounced special treatment for capitalists
* **Conservation** – TR made huge changes in federal policy towards resources by keeping land in the public domain and supporting the **Newlands Reclamation Act**, which controlled sales of irrigated land in the West. Increased national forests, created the **US Forest Service** w/**Gifford Pinchot**- who advocated scientific management to prevent overuse. Measures of these years transformed west from a series of “island settlements” into an interconnected region. By temperament, TR was actually a preservationist.

Omg. I’m hungry now.

*Taft Taffy in the White House*

TR pledge not to run for a third term to the sorrow of millions… the republican party’s most conservative elements easily regained party control in the 1908 election and nominated TR’s choice, **William Howard Taft** for president, but chose a conservative vp nominee. The Democrats meanwhile nominated **William Jennings Bryan** for a third and final time and called for a lower tariff, denounced trusts, and embraced the cause of labor. Taft coasted to victory and pledge to carry on TR’s program…

* Taft was caught in the middle of a rift between the conservative and Progressive wings of the Republican Party. First, Taft moved to cut tariffs, but was blocked by Progressives, who felt the tariff benefited special interests. So, the cuts were restored in the **Payne-Aldrich Tariff**, which *also* angered Progressives
* Taft supported the **Mann-Elkins Act**, which beefed up the ICC’s rate-setting powers and extended its regulatory authority to telephone and telegraph companies. He even prosecuted more antitrust cases than TR but he didn’t get a good reputation because he wasn’t good with press which sucked. His happy days would come later as chief justice.
* **Ballinger-Pinchot affair**- widened rift between Taft and progressive Republicans. When a group of Progressives challenged the conservative speaker, who controlled the legislative progress, Taft first supported and then abandoned them. He did, however, enlarge the Rules Committee, and therefore help the Progressives, but he angered them more by firing conservationist Pinchot.

*Election of 1912*

When TR got back from Africa, he realized that his party had split into the **National Progressive Republican League** [**La Follette**] and the side that stayed loyal to Taft. Disappointed, he began speaking out, and eventually organized the **Bull Moose Party** [from the Progressives] when LF got sick. Taft gave up, happy to have kept his party safe for conservation, the Democrats nominated Woodrow Wilson, and the Socialist party had Debs of course. Wilson and TR had two competing visions for the country…

-**New Nationalism**- TR- the new corporate order is here to stay, but big business must be strictly regulated in the public interest

-**New Freedom**- Wilson- new corporate order is choking off opportunity for ordinary Americans. Wanted small gov, small business, and free competition

- Because the Republicans were divided, the democrats achieved an easy win and took both houses of Congress. The election firmly linked the Democrats with reform (except on the issue of race).

Weeee, if you’ve actually read up to here… wow. xD

*A Wilson for President*

Under Wilson, the national progressive movement gained powerful new momentum.

* Tariff and banking reform- The **Underwood Tariff** encouraged imports (to help consumers) and instituted a graduated income tax on residents. **Federal Reserve Act** established another national bank and district banks [regulated by the **Federal Reserve Board**] that would lend $ to member banks at rates that could be adjusted to increase/decrease the $ in circulation – loosen/tighten credit. Right before the war he also passed the **Federal Farm Loan Act**, which allowed $ to be lent at moderate interest to farmers.
* Regulating business- expanded government regulation with the **Clayton Anti-Trust Act**, which outlawed monopolistic practices and took a legal approach as opposed to the Sherman Act, and had a bill creating the **Federal Trade Commission**, which could investigate companies and order them to stop unfair trade tactics. Wilson’s sympathies for the underdog stopped at the color line though and he displayed a patronizing attitude toward blacks
* Muller v. Oregon- Supreme Court upheld an Oregon ten-hour law for women laundry workers, marked a breakthrough in making the legal system more responsive to social realities. Louis Brandeis had defended the constitutionality of the Oregon law and was nominated to Supreme Court where he possessed an innovative approach to the law
* Sixteenth Amendment- congress has authority to impose income tax
* Seventeenth- required direct election of U.S. senators by vote
* Eighteenth- prohibit manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors, no vodka for you!
* Nineteenth- grants women the vote

*I’m almost done... election of 1916*

Wilson easily won the renomination in 1916, duh. The Republicans turned to Charles Evan Hughes, a Supreme Court justice and the Progressives courted TR but ended up endorsing Hughes and effectively committing political suicide. Wilson ran his “He kept us out of war” deal and won. As for the progressive movement, it lost momentum as the nation’s attention turned from reform to war.