Chapter 21: Urban America and the Progressive Era,  
1900–1917

Chapter Review

1. AMERICAN COMMUNITIES The Henry Street Settlement House: Women Settlement House Workers Create a Community of Reform

A shy and frightened young girl appeared in the doorway of a weekly home-nursing class for women on Manhattan’s Lower East Side. The teacher, Lillian Wald, was a twenty-five-year-old nurse at New York Hospital. The Henry Street Settlement stood in the center of perhaps the most overcrowded neighborhood in the world, New York’s Lower East Side. Settlement house living arrangements closely resembled those in the dormitories of such new women’s colleges as Smith, Wellesley, and Vassar. Like these colleges, the settlement house was an “experiment,” but one designed, in settlement house pioneer Jane Addams’ words, “to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of urban life.” Leaders of the movement, including Jane Addams, Lillian Wald, and Florence Kelley, emerged as influential political figures during the progressive era. The settlement house movement embodied the impulses toward social justice and civic engagement that were hallmarks of the progressive movement. As progressive activism spread from reform communities like settlement houses, to city halls and statehouses, and finally to the national stage of the White House and Congress, Americans experimented with new approaches to urgent problems.

1. THE ORIGINS OF PROGRESSIVISM

Between the 1890s and World War I, a large and diverse number of Americans claimed the political label “progressive.” Progressives could be found in all classes, regions, and races. As a political movement, progressivism flowered in the soil of several key issues: ending political corruption, bringing more businesslike methods to governing, and offering a more compassionate legislative response to the excesses of industrialism. As a national movement, progressivism reached its peak in 1912, when the four major presidential candidates all ran on some version of a progressive platform. Some progressives focused on expanding state and federal regulation of private interests for the public welfare. Significantly, many of the intellectual currents informing progressive reform transcended national boundaries. American progressives engaged in running dialogues with European counterparts who also contended with crafting effective and rational responses to the needs of overcrowded cities, impoverished industrial workers, and unresponsive political systems.

a. Unifying Themes of Progressivism

Unlike Populist era reformers, who were largely rural and small town-oriented, progressives focused their energies on the social and political ills experienced by Americans in factories or mines and in dreary city tenements or filthy streets. At the same time, progressives shared an essential optimism about the ability of citizens to improve social and economic conditions. Second, progressives emphasized social cohesion and common bonds as a way of understanding how modern society and economics actually worked. Third, progressives believed in the need for citizens to intervene actively, both politically and morally, to improve social conditions. Progressive rhetoric and methods drew on two distinct sources of inspiration. One was evangelical Protestantism, particularly the late nineteenth-century social gospel movement. Social gospelers rejected the idea of original sin as the cause of human suffering. A second strain of progressive thought looked to natural and social scientists to develop rational measures for improving the human condition.

b. New Journalism: Muckraking

Changes in journalism helped fuel a new reform consciousness by drawing the attention of millions to urban poverty, political corruption, the plight of industrial workers, and immoral business practices. Jacob Riis’ book included a remarkable series of photographs he had taken in tenements, lodging houses, sweatshops, and saloons. The key innovator was S. S. McClure, a young Midwestern editor who, in 1893, started America’s first large-circulation magazine, *McClure’s*. Lincoln Steffens’ series *The Shame of the Cities* (1902) revealed the widespread graft at the center of American urban politics. Ray Stannard Baker wrote detailed portraits of life and labor in Pennsylvania coal towns. *McClure’s* and other magazines discovered that “exposure journalism” paid off handsomely in terms of increased circulation. A series such as Steffens’ fueled reform campaigns that swept individual communities. Between 1902 and 1908, magazines were full of articles exposing insurance scandals, patent medicine frauds, and stock market swindles. In an effort to boost sales, Upton Sinclair’s publisher devoted an entire issue of a monthly magazine it owned, *World’s Work*, to articles and photographs that substantiated Sinclair’s devastating portrait.

c. Intellectual Trends Promoting Reform

Progressive reformers linked the systematic analysis of society and the individual characteristic of these new fields of inquiry to the project of improving the material conditions of American society. Dewey’s belief that education was the “fundamental method of social progress and reform” inspired generations of progressive educators. Ely believed the state must directly intervene to help solve public problems. Like Commons, Ely worked with Wisconsin lawmakers, applying his expertise in economics to reforming the state’s labor laws. Progressive legal theorists began challenging the conservative view of constitutional law that had dominated American courts. The Supreme Court and state courts had thus made the Fourteenth Amendment a bulwark for big business and a foe of social welfare measures. Massachusetts Judge Holmes believed the law had to take into account changing social conditions. And courts should take care not to invalidate social legislation enacted democratically. After his appointment to the Supreme Court in 1902, Holmes authored a number of notable dissents to conservative court decisions overturning progressive legislation.

d. The Female Dominion

Settlement workers found they could not transform their neighborhoods without confronting a host of broad social questions: chronic poverty, overcrowded tenement houses, child labor, industrial accidents, public health. As on Henry Street, college-educated, middle-class women constituted a key vanguard in the crusade for social justice. Settlement work provided these women with an attractive alternative. Addams often spoke of the “subjective necessity” of settlement houses. Lillian Wald attracted a dedicated group of nurses, educators, and reformers to live at the Henry Street Settlement. Social reformer Florence Kelley helped direct the support of the settlement house movement behind groundbreaking state and federal labor legislation. Arriving at Hull House in 1891, Kelley found what she described as a “colony of efficient and intelligent women.” New female-dominated occupations, such as social work, public health, nursing, and home economics, allowed women to combine professional aspirations with the older traditions of female moral reform, especially those centered on child welfare.

1. PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN CITIES AND STATES

Progressive reformers focused much of their zeal and energy into local political battles. In cities and states across the nation, progressive politicians became a powerful force, often balancing the practical need for partisan support with non-partisan appeals to the larger citizenry.

a. The Urban Machine

The keys to machine strength were disciplined organization and the delivery of essential services to both immigrant communities and business elites. In exchange for votes, machine politicians offered their constituents a variety of services. For those who did business with the city—construction companies, road builders, realtors—staying on the machine’s good side was simply another business expense. In exchange for valuable franchises and city contracts, businessmen routinely bribed machine politicians and contributed liberally to their campaign funds. Vaudeville and burlesque theater, boxing, horse racing, and professional baseball were other urban enterprises with economic and political links to machines. Entertainment and spectacle made up a central element in the machine political style as well. On New York City’s Lower East Side, where the Henry Street Settlement was located, Timothy D. “Big Tim” Sullivan embodied the popular machine style. Critics charged that Sullivan controlled the city’s gambling and made money from prostitution. As Jewish and Catholic immigrants expanded in number and proportion in the city population, urban machines also began to champion cultural pluralism, opposing prohibition and immigration restrictions and defending the contributions made by new ethnic groups in the cities.

b. Political Progressives and Urban Reform

Political progressivism originated in the cities. Most New York City neighborhoods rarely enjoyed street cleaning, and playgrounds were nonexistent. The “good government” movement, led by the National Municipal League, fought to make city management a nonpartisan, even nonpolitical, process by bringing the administrative techniques of large corporations to cities. Reformers revised city charters in favor of stronger mayoral power and expanded use of appointed administrators and career civil servants. Business and professional elites became the biggest boosters of structural reforms in urban government. The city commission, enjoying both policy-making and administrative powers, proved very effective in rebuilding Galveston. By 1917, nearly 500 cities, including Houston, Oakland, Kansas City, Denver, and Buffalo, had adopted the commission form of government. Another approach, the city manager plan, gained popularity in small and midsized cities. In this system, a city council appointed a professional, nonpartisan city manager to handle the day-to-day operations of the community.

c. Statehouse Progressives

On the state level, progressives focused upon two major reform themes that sometimes co-existed uneasily. Western progressives displayed the greatest enthusiasm for institutional political reform. Other reforms included the direct primary, which allowed voters to cross party lines, and the recall, which gave voters the right to remove elected officials by popular vote. Western progressives also targeted railroads, mining and timber companies, and public utilities for reform. Between 1905 and 1909, nearly every Southern state moved to regulate railroads by mandating lower passenger and freight rates. Southern progressives also directed their energies at the related problems of child labor and educational reform. With African Americans removed from political life, white Southern progressives argued, the direct primary system of nominating candidates would give white voters more influence. This systematic disfranchisement of African American voters stripped black communities of any political power. To prevent the disfranchisement of poor white voters under these laws, states established so-called understanding and grandfather clauses. Southern progressives also supported the push toward a fully segregated public sphere.

1. SOCIAL CONTROL AND ITS LIMITS

Many middle- and upper-class Protestant progressives feared that immigrants and large cities threatened the stability of American democracy. They worried that alien cultural practices were disrupting what they viewed as traditional American morality. Edward A. Ross’s landmark work *Social Control* (1901), a book whose title became a key phrase in progressive thought, argued that society needed an “ethical elite” of citizens “who have at heart the general welfare and know what kinds of conduct will promote this welfare.” Progressives often believed they had a mission to frame laws and regulations for the social control of immigrants, industrial workers, and African Americans. This was the moralistic and frequently xenophobic side of progressivism, and it provided a powerful source of support for the regulation of drinking, prostitution, leisure activities, and schooling. Organizations devoted to social control constituted other versions of reform communities. But these attempts at moral reform met with mixed success amid the extraordinary cultural and ethnic diversity of America’s cities.

a. The Prohibition Movement

The WCTU appealed especially to women angered by men who used alcohol and then abused their wives and children. By 1911, the WCTU, with a quarter million members, was the largest women’s organization in American history.

Other temperance groups had a narrower focus. The Anti-Saloon League, founded in 1893, began by organizing local-option campaigns in which rural counties and small towns banned liquor within their geographical limits. The league was a one-issue pressure group that played effectively on anti-urban and anti-immigrant prejudice. League lobbyists hammered away at the close connections among saloon culture, liquor dealers, brewers, and big city political machines.

The battle to ban alcohol revealed deep ethnic and cultural divides within America’s urban communities. Opponents of alcohol were generally “pietists,” who viewed the world from a position of moral absolutism. These included native-born, middle-class Protestants associated with evangelical churches, along with some old-stock Protestant immigrant denominations.

b. The Social Evil

Anti-prostitution campaigns epitomized the diverse makeup and mixed motives of so much progressive reform. Male business and civic leaders joined forces with feminists, social workers, and clergy to eradicate “commercialized vice.” Between 1908 and 1914, exposés of the “white slave traffic” became a national sensation. Dozens of books, articles, and motion pictures alleged an international conspiracy to seduce and sell girls into prostitution. In 1910, Congress passed legislation that permitted the deportation of foreign-born prostitutes or any foreigner convicted of procuring or employing them. Reformers had trouble believing that any woman would freely choose to be a prostitute; such a choice was antithetical to conventional notions of female purity and sexuality. But for wage-earning women, prostitution was a rational choice in a world of limited opportunities.

The anti-vice crusades succeeded in closing down many urban red-light districts. Rather than eliminating prostitution, reform efforts transformed the organization of the sex trade.

c. The Redemption of Leisure

Progressives faced a thorny issue in the growing popularity of commercial entertainment. For large numbers of working-class adults and children, leisure meant time and money spent at vaudeville and burlesque theaters, amusement parks, dance halls, and motion picture houses. These competed with municipal parks, libraries, museums, YMCAs, and school recreation centers. As with prostitution, urban progressives sponsored a host of recreation and amusement surveys detailing the situation in their individual cities. By 1908, movies had become the most popular form of cheap entertainment in America. One survey estimated that 11,500 movie theaters attracted 5 million patrons each day. As the films themselves became more sophisticated and as “movie palaces” began to replace cheap storefront theaters, the new medium attracted a large middle-class clientele as well. In 1909, New York City movie producers and exhibitors joined with the reform-minded People’s Institute to establish the voluntary National Board of Censorship (NBC). A revolving group of civic activists reviewed new movies, passing them, suggesting changes, or condemning them.

d. Standardizing Education

Progressive educators looked to the public school primarily as an agent of “Americanization.” Children began school earlier and stayed there longer. Kindergartens spread rapidly in large cities. By 1918, every state had some form of compulsory school attendance. High schools also multiplied, extending the school’s influence beyond the traditional grammar school curriculum. High schools reflected a growing belief that schools should be comprehensive, multifunctional institutions. In 1918, the National Education Association offered a report defining Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education. Academic programs prepared a small number of students for college. Girls learned typing, bookkeeping, sewing, cooking, and home economics.

1. CHALLENGES TO PROGRESSIVISM: WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITIES AND PROTEST

While most progressive reformers had roots in Protestantism and the middle class professions, other Americans vigorously challenged their political vision. Organized workers often invoked progressive rhetoric and ideals but for quite different, sometimes radical, ends. The Industrial Revolution, which had begun transforming American life and labor in the nineteenth century, reached maturity in the early twentieth. In 1900, out of a total labor force of 28.5 million, 16 million people worked at industrial occupations and 11 million on farms. By 1920, in a labor force of nearly 42 million, almost 29 million were in industry, but farm labor had declined to 10.4 million. The world of the industrial worker included large manufacturing towns in New England; barren mining settlements in the West; primitive lumber and turpentine camps in the South; steelmaking and coal-mining cities in Pennsylvania and Ohio; and densely-packed immigrant ghettos from New York to San Francisco, where workers toiled in garment-trade sweatshops.

All these industrial workers shared the need to sell their labor for wages in order to survive. At the same time, differences in skill, ethnicity, and race proved powerful barriers to efforts at organizing trade unions that could bargain for improved wages and working conditions. Industrial workers also became a force in local and national politics, adding a chorus of insistent voices to the calls for social justice.

a. The New Global Immigration

Immigrant communities used ethnicity as a collective resource for gaining employment in factories, mills, and mines. The low-paid, backbreaking work in basic industry became nearly the exclusive preserve of the new immigrants. Between 1900 and 1914, the number of people of Mexican descent living and working in the United States tripled, from roughly 100,000 to 300,000. Mexican immigrants attracted by jobs in the smelting industry made El Paso the most thoroughly Mexican city in the United States. By 1910, San Antonio contained the largest number of Mexican immigrants of any city. In southern California, labor agents for railroads recruited Mexicans to work on building new interurban lines around Los Angeles.

Between 1898 and 1907, more than 80,000 Japanese entered the United States. American law prevented Japanese immigrants (the Issei) from obtaining American citizenship, because they were not white.

b. Urban Ghettos

In large cities, new immigrant communities took the form of densely packed ghettos. Workers in the urban garment trades toiled for low wages and suffered layoffs, unemployment, and poor health. But conditions in the small, labor intensive shops of the clothing industry differed significantly from those in the large-scale, capital intensive industries like steel.

New York City had become the center of both Jewish immigration and America’s huge ready-to-wear clothing industry. The garment industry was highly seasonal. Often forced to work in cramped, dirty, and badly lit rooms, garment workers strained under a system in which time equaled money. In November 1909, two New York garment manufacturers responded to strikes by unskilled women workers by hiring thugs and prostitutes to beat up pickets. The strikers demanded union recognition, better wages, and safer and more sanitary conditions. They drew support from thousands of suffragists, trade unionists, and sympathetic middle-class women as well.

c. Company Towns

Immigrant industrial workers and their families often established their communities in a company town, where a single large corporation was dominant. In Gary, non-English-speaking immigrant steelworkers suffered twice the accident rate of English-speaking employees, who could better understand safety instructions and warnings. Working-class women felt the burdens of housework more heavily than their middle-class sisters. The daily drudgery endured by working-class women far outlasted the “man-killing” shift worked by the husband. The Colorado Fuel and Iron Company (CFI) employed roughly half of the 8,000 coal miners who labored in that state’s mines. In mining towns such as Ludlow and Trinidad, the CFI thoroughly dominated the lives of miners and their families. In September 1913, the United Mine Workers led a strike in the Colorado coalfields, calling for improved safety, higher wages, and recognition of the union. Thousands of miners’ families moved out of company housing and into makeshift tent colonies provided by the union. The coal companies then brought in large numbers of private mine guards who were extremely hostile toward the strikers.

d. The AFL: “Unions, Pure and Simple”

Samuel Gompers’ strategy of recruiting skilled labor into unions organized by craft had paid off. Union membership climbed from under 500,000 in 1897 to 1.7 million by 1904. Most of this growth took place in AFL affiliates in coal mining, the building trades, transportation, and machine shops. The national unions—the United Mine Workers of America, the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, the International Association of Machinists—represented workers of specific occupations in collective bargaining. Trade autonomy and exclusive jurisdiction were the ruling principles within the AFL. With 260,000 members in 1904, the UMWA became the largest AFL affiliate.

Economic slumps, technological changes, and aggressive counterattacks by employer organizations could be devastating. Trade associations using management-controlled efficiency drives fought union efforts to regulate output and shop practices. The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), a group of smaller industrialists founded in 1903, launched an “open shop” campaign to eradicate unions altogether.

e. The IWW: “One Big Union”

Some workers developed more radical visions of labor organizing. The Western Federation of Miners (WFM) had gained strength in the metal mining regions of the West by leading several strikes marred by violence. Desperate miners retaliated by destroying a company mill with dynamite. In 1905, leaders of the WFM, the Socialist Party, and various radical groups gathered in Chicago to found the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW charter proclaimed bluntly, “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common.” The Wobblies concentrated their efforts on miners, lumberjacks, sailors, “harvest stiffs,” and other casual laborers. The IWW briefly became a force among Eastern industrial workers, tapping the rage and growing militance of the immigrants and unskilled. In 1909, an IWW–led steel strike at McKee’s Rocks, Pennsylvania, challenged the power of U.S. Steel. In the 1912 “Bread and Roses” strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, IWW organizers turned a spontaneous walkout of textile workers into a successful struggle for union recognition.

f. Rebels in Bohemia

During the 1910s, a small but influential community of painters, journalists, poets, social workers, lawyers, and political activists coalesced in the New York City neighborhood of Greenwich Village. “Village bohemians,” especially the women among them, challenged the double standard of Victorian sexual morality, rejected traditional marriage and sex roles, advocated birth control, and experimented with homosexual relations. Other American cities, notably Chicago at the turn of the century, had supported bohemian communities. But the Village scene was unique, if fleeting. Regular contributors included radical labor journalist Mary Heaton Vorse, artists John Sloan and George Bellows, and writers Floyd Dell and Sherwood Anderson.

For some, Greenwich Village offered a chance to experiment with sexual relationships or work arrangements. Intellectuals and artists, as well as workers, feeling alienated from the rest of society, sought shelter in the collective life and close-knit social relations of the Village community.

The Paterson, New Jersey, silk workers’ strike of 1913 provided the most memorable fusion of bohemian sensibility and radical activism. After hearing Haywood speak about the strike at Mabel Dodge’s apartment, John Reed offered to organize a pageant on the strikers’ behalf at Madison Square Garden.

1. WOMEN’S MOVEMENTS AND BLACK AWAKENING

Like working class radicals, politically engaged women and African American activists often found themselves at odds with more moderate and mainstream progressive reformers. Progressive era women were at the forefront of several campaigns, such as the settlement house movement, prohibition, suffrage, and birth control. Millions of others took an active role in new women’s associations that combined self-help and social mission. These organizations gave women a place in public life, increased their influence in civic affairs, and nurtured a new generation of female leaders. In fighting racial discrimination, African Americans had a more difficult task.

a. The New Woman

A steady proliferation of women’s organizations attracted growing numbers of educated, middle-class women in the early twentieth century. At the same time, more middle-class women were graduating from high school and college.

In 1870, only 1 percent of college-age Americans had attended college, about 20 percent of them women; by 1910, about 5 percent of college-age Americans attended college, but the proportion of women among them had doubled to 40 percent. Single-sex clubs brought middle-class women into the public sphere by celebrating the distinctive strengths associated with women’s culture: cooperation, uplift, service. The formation of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1890, brought together 200 local clubs representing 20,000 women. The women’s club movement combined an earlier focus on self-improvement and intellectual pursuits with newer benevolent efforts on behalf of working women and children. The Buffalo Union, for example, sponsored art lectures for housewives, and classes in typing, stenography, and bookkeeping for young working women. For many middle-class women, the club movement provided a new kind of female-centered community. Other women’s associations made even more explicit efforts to bridge class lines between middle-class homemakers and working-class women.

b. Birth Control

The phrase “birth control,” coined by Margaret Sanger around 1913, described her campaign to provide contraceptive information and devices for women. In 1910, Sanger was a thirty-year-old nurse and housewife living with her husband and three children in a New York City suburb. Excited by a socialist lecture she had attended, she convinced her husband to move to the city, where she threw herself into the bohemian milieu. When postal officials confiscated the paper for violating obscenity laws, Sanger left for Europe to learn more about contraception. Sanger’s journal celebrated female autonomy, including the right to sexual expression and control over one’s body. The new birth control advocates embraced contraception as a way of advancing sexual freedom for middle-class women, as well as responding to the misery of those working-class women who bore numerous children while living in poverty. Sanger returned to the United States in October 1915. After the government dropped the obscenity charges, she embarked on a national speaking tour. In 1916, she again defied the law by opening a birth control clinic in a working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn and offering birth control information without a physician present.

c. Racism and Accommodation

In the cities, most blacks were relegated to menial jobs, but a small African American middle class of entrepreneurs and professionals gained a foothold by selling services and products to the black community. By portraying blacks as incapable of improvement, racial Darwinism justified a policy of repression and neglect toward African Americans. African Americans also endured a deeply racist popular culture that made hateful stereotypes of black people a normal feature of political debate and everyday life. The black man, Murphy asserted, “will accept in the white man’s country the place assigned him by the white man, will do his work, not by stress of rivalry, but by genial cooperation with the white man’s interests.”

Amid this political and cultural climate, Booker T. Washington won recognition as the most influential black leader of the day. In 1881, he founded Tuskegee Institute, a black school in Alabama devoted to industrial and moral education. Washington’s message won him the financial backing of leading white philanthropists and the respect of progressive whites. With the help of Andrew Carnegie, he founded the National Negro Business League to preach the virtue of black business development in black communities. Washington also had a decisive influence on the flow of private funds to black schools in the South.

d. Racial Justice, the NAACP, Black Women’s Activism

Through essays on black history, culture, education, and politics, Du Bois explored the concept of “double consciousness.” Souls represented the first effort to embrace African American culture as a source of collective black strength and something worth preserving. Du Bois criticized Booker T. Washington’s philosophy for its acceptance of “the alleged inferiority of the Negro.” In 1905, Du Bois and editor William Monroe Trotter brought together a group of educated black men to oppose Washington’s conciliatory views. Du Bois, the only black officer of the original NAACP, founded and edited the *Crisis*, the influential NAACP monthly journal. The disfranchisement of black voters in the South severely curtailed African American political influence. In response, African American women created new strategies to challenge white supremacy and improve life in their communities. Founded in 1900, the Women’s Convention of the National Baptist Convention, the largest black denomination in the United States, offered African American women a new public space to pursue reform work and “racial uplift.” “Lifting As We Climb,” the National Association of Colored Women Clubs by 1914 boasted 50,000 members in 1,000 clubs nationwide.

1. NATIONAL PROGRESSIVISM

The progressive impulse had begun at local levels and percolated up. Some state progressive leaders, such as Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin and Hiram Johnson of California, achieved national influence as they pushed Progressive forces in both major political parties to take a more aggressive stance on the reform issues of the day. On the presidential level, both Republican Theodore Roosevelt and Democrat Woodrow Wilson laid claim to the progressive mantle—a good example of how on the national level, progressivism animated many perspectives. As progressivism moved to Washington, nationally organized interest groups and public opinion began to rival the influence of the old political parties in shaping the political landscape.

a. Theodore Roosevelt and Presidential Activism

Born to a wealthy New York family in 1858, Roosevelt overcame a sickly childhood through strenuous physical exercise and rugged outdoor living. In New York Roosevelt was converted to progressivism by this friend Jacob Riis, the muckraking journalist, who took him on tours of the city’s tenement districts. In 1897 Roosevelt went to Washington as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and during the Spanish-American War he won national fame as leader of the Rough Rider regiment in Cuba. Upon his return, he was elected governor of New York, and then in 1900, Vice President. Roosevelt was a uniquely colorful figure, a shrewd publicist, and a creative politician. Roosevelt preached the virtues of “the strenuous life,” and he believed that educated and wealthy Americans had a special responsibility to serve, guide, and inspire those less fortunate. In style, Roosevelt made key contributions to national progressivism and to changing the office of the president. Roosevelt also pushed for efficient government as the solution to social problems. Unlike most nineteenth-century Republicans, who had largely ignored economic and social inequalities, Roosevelt frankly acknowledged them.

b. Trustbusting and Regulation

Roosevelt gained a reputation as a “trustbuster.” Forty-three cases were filed under the Sherman Antitrust Act to restrain or dissolve business monopolies. Roosevelt viewed these suits as necessary to publicize the issue and assert the federal government’s ultimate authority over big business. Two other laws passed in 1906 also expanded the regulatory power of the federal government. The battles surrounding these reforms demonstrate how progressive measures often attracted supporters with competing motives. The Pure Food and Drug Act established the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which tested and approved drugs before they went on the market. Large meatpackers such as Swift and Armour strongly supported stricter federal regulation as a way to drive out smaller companies that could not meet tougher standards. Large pharmaceutical manufacturers similarly supported new regulations that would eliminate competitors and patent medicine suppliers. Progressive era expansion of the nation-state had its champions among—and benefits for—big business as well as American consumers.

c. The Birth of Environmentalism

The conservation of forest and water resources, he argued, was a national problem of vital import. Pinchot recruited a force of forest rangers to manage the reserves. On the broad issue of managing America’s natural resources, the Roosevelt administration took the middle ground between preservation and unrestricted commercial development. “Wilderness is waste,” Pinchot was fond of saying, reflecting an essentially utilitarian vision that balanced the demands of business with wilderness conservation. A bitter, drawn-out struggle over new water sources for San Francisco revealed the deep conflicts between conservationists, represented by Pinchot, and preservationists, represented by Muir. After a devastating earthquake in 1906, San Francisco sought federal approval to dam and flood the spectacular Hetch Hetchy Valley, located 150 miles from the city in Yosemite National Park. To John Muir and the Sierra Club, Hetch Hetchy was a “temple” threatened with destruction by the “devotees of ravaging commercialism.” Congress finally approved the reservoir plan in 1913; utility and public development triumphed over the preservation of nature. The Roosevelt Dam on Arizona’s Salt River, along with the forty-mile Arizona Canal, helped develop the Phoenix area. The Imperial Dam on the Colorado River diverted water to California’s Imperial and Coachella Valleys.

d. Republican Split

In 1908, Roosevelt kept his promise to retire after a second term. He chose Secretary of War William Howard Taft as his successor. Taft easily defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan in the 1908 election. During Taft’s presidency, the gulf between “insurgent” progressives and the “stand pat” wing split the Republican Party wide open. In a dozen bitter state presidential primaries (the first ever held), Taft and Roosevelt fought for the nomination. Although Roosevelt won most of these contests, the old guard still controlled the national convention, and renominated Taft in June 1912. Roosevelt’s supporters stormed out, and in August, the new Progressive Party nominated Roosevelt and Hiram Johnson of California as its presidential ticket. Roosevelt’s “New Nationalism” presented a vision of a strong federal government, led by an activist president, regulating and protecting the various interests in American society. The platform called for woman suffrage, the eight-hour day, prohibition of child labor, minimum-wage standards for working women, and stricter regulation of large corporations.

e. The Election of 1912: A Four-Way Race

In 1910, Woodrow Wilson won election as New Jersey’s governor, running against the state Democratic machine. Wilson declared himself and the Democratic Party to be the true progressives. Viewing Roosevelt rather than Taft as his main rival, Wilson contrasted his New Freedom campaign with Roosevelt’s New Nationalism. Crafted largely by progressive lawyer Louis Brandeis, Wilson’s platform was far more ambiguous than Roosevelt’s. Wilson did favor a variety of progressive reforms for workers, farmers, and consumers. Socialist party nominee Eugene V. Debs offered the fourth and most radical choice to voters. Debs and the Socialists also took credit for pushing both Roosevelt and Wilson farther toward the left. In the end, the divisions in the Republican Party gave the election to Wilson. He won easily, polling 6.3 million votes to Roosevelt’s 4.1 million. Eugene Debs won 900,000 votes, 6 percent of the total, for the strongest Socialist showing in American history.

f. Woodrow Wilson’s First Term

With the help of a Democratic-controlled Congress, Wilson pushed through a significant battery of reform proposals.

The Federal Reserve Act that same year restructured the nation’s banking and currency system. It created twelve Federal Reserve Banks, regulated by a central board in Washington. Member banks were required to keep a portion of their cash reserves in the Federal Reserve Bank of their district. By giving central direction to banking and monetary policy, the Federal Reserve Board diminished the power of large private banks.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), established in 1914, sought to give the federal government the same sort of regulatory control over corporations that the ICC had over railroads. Wilson believed a permanent federal body like the FTC would provide a method for corporate oversight superior to the erratic and time-consuming process of legal trustbusting. A Southerner, Wilson also sanctioned the spread of racial segregation in federal offices. Although it covered less than 10 percent of the nation’s 2 million working children, the new law established a minimum standard of protection, and put the power of federal authority behind the principle of regulating child labor.

***Answer the following questions from Out of Many Chapter 21:***

**1. Unifying Themes:** What were the themes of progressivism at the state and national level? What were the sources of inspiration for the progressive movement?

**2. The Urban Machine:** What services did the urban political machines offer and how did they respond to the Progressives? What were the views of George W. Plunkitt and Timothy Sullivan? How powerful was machine politics? What machine politicians ally themselves with Progressives and on what types of reforms?

**3. Progressivism in the Statehouse:** How did progressivism fare at the state level? What states and individual leaders were significant and what types of reforms did they enact? What was their record on racism and “Jim Crow” laws?

**4. New Journalism—Muckraking:** What was new about journalism and what was the muckraking element in it? Who were the significant muckrakers and what were their writings? What problems did they draw attention to and what effect did they have?

**5. The Prohibition Movement:** What was the focus of the various temperance groups like the WCTU and the Anti-Saloon League? What groups were likely to support prohibition and what groups were likely to oppose it? What was the pietist vs. ritualist issue? Overall how successful was the movement at the state and then federal level?

**6. Standardizing Education:** What goals did Progressives set for educating children? How was one of the goals expressed by Elwood Cubberley? How rapidly did education grow from 1890 to 1918? What were the main principles of education as expressed in the National Education Association report of 1918?

**7. Urban Ghettos:** What was the immigrant experience in the urban ghettos? How was New York City an example of this? How did progressive reformers enter the union picture? What was the uprising of the 20,000 and what power did it illustrate?

**8. The AFL:** Unions, Pure and Simple: Why was the AFL termed a “union, pure and simple?” How successful was Gompers and the AFL? What weakness was there to their exclusive policy?

**9. The IWW:** One Big Union: What was the “one big union” concept of the IWW? Where was the IWW most popular and why? What was their overall success?

**10**. **Theodore Roosevelt and Presidential Activism:** How did Roosevelt view the office of president and how did he proceed to make the most of his view? How did Roosevelt’s style encourage progressivism? How did he view his responsibility and how did he think problems could be solved?

**11**. **Trust-Busting and Regulation:** What trust-busting and business regulation did Roosevelt undertake? How successful was he? What was he trying to assert and what was his view about breaking up all large corporations? What three measures did he get passed in Congress and what was the basic belief behind all three of them? Why did some large businesses support regulation?

**12**. **Conservation, Preservation, and the Environment:** What position did Roosevelt take on preservation versus conservation? What view did Pinchot take? Who was John Muir and what view did he represent? What actions had Muir taken to try and publicize his view as well as save specific areas? How did the Hetch Hetchy Valley issue illustrate the differences between Muir and Pinchot? What was the outcome?

**13**. **Republican Split:** Why did Roosevelt’s view of reform split the Republican Party? What happened to the split when Taft took office? How did Taft compare to Roosevelt? Why did Roosevelt return to politics and form the Progressive Party? What was his “New Nationalism” program?

**14**. **The Election of 1912:** Who were the candidates and what were the issues in the election of 1912? On what basis did Wilson claim the Democratic Party to be the true Progressives? What was his “New Freedom” program? What effect did Socialist candidate Eugene V. Debs have on the campaigns of Wilson and Roosevelt? What was the outcome of the election? How well did the Socialists do? Why was this the first “modern” presidential race?

**15**. **Woodrow Wilson’s First Term:** What did Wilson do in his first term and what program did his actions resemble? What social issues did Wilson champion and what were his notations?