

Chapter Summary

The Progressive Movement, 1890–1920

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Can politics fix social problems?

This chapter describes reforms that were initiated at the local level, eventually gained national momentum, and became known as the Progressive movement.

The Roots of Progressivism

- Laissez-faire economics and unregulated markets were thought to have led to social problems that the government would be able to fix.
- Progressives thought urbanization and industrialization had created many social problems.
- Progressives thought progress in science and knowledge could improve society.
- Muckrakers were journalists focused on social conditions and government corruption.
- Cities adopted commissions and city management forms of government.
- States adopted the direct primary system; allowed initiatives, referendums, and recall votes; and the Seventeenth Amendment, which provided for direct election of senators by popular vote, was passed.
- Many progressives joined the movement to win the right to vote for women, culminating in the Nineteenth Amendment.
- Zoning laws and building codes improved urban housing.
- Many progressives focused on social welfare programs, such as child labor laws and safer working conditions.
- The temperance movement began.

Roosevelt and Taft

- President Roosevelt, a Social Darwinist, took on big business with reform programs that became known as the Square Deal.
- The Interstate Commerce Commission was strengthened when Roosevelt pushed the Hepburn Act through Congress.
- Consumer protection acts, such as the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act were passed.
- Concerned about the exploitation of public lands, Roosevelt urged Americans to conserve the environment, including the nation's forests.
- President Taft called for a special session of Congress to lower tariffs.
- Taft brought more antitrust cases than Roosevelt, and was a dedicated conservationist.

The Wilson Years

- The election of 1912 was held between three major candidates, including President Taft, former president Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson.
- The Federal Reserve System was created to regulate the country's money supply.
- The Clayton Antitrust Act granted labor unions more rights.
- The progressives failed to address racial and religious discrimination.