

Progressivism and the Age of Reform

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources

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Introduction

Primary sources are the building blocks of history. Using these sources to introduce students to historical periods offers students the opportunity to become historians themselves—to analyze the evidence, form hypotheses, and learn how to support arguments based on evidence. They learn what it means to interpret the past in ways that provide meaning for the present. Textual primary sources can often be difficult for students to engage with because they are often couched in unfamiliar language from a different historical era. Visual primary sources can prove more appealing and accessible to students, and they also involve different types of “reading” skills.

How to Use This Product

This PowerPoint® presentation is designed to walk students through the process of primary source interpretation. Slides help to focus students’ attention and train them how to “read” visual primary sources. Targeted questions and enlarged insets from images help to train students to see deeper into the historical record, to uncover evidence that, though plainly before their eyes, is not always obvious at first glance.

The posters provide visual reinforcement for the images analyzed in the presentation. Use them before or after the PowerPoint® analysis for either pre- or post-reading activities. In addition, we have provided extra images on each disc so that once the students are trained in the skills of analyzing visual primary sources they can further hone their skills. You can print them out and distribute as handouts for in-class or independent study, or you can import the images into PowerPoint® for students to analyze individually or with the class as a whole.

Let Us Know What You Think

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We look forward to hearing from you.

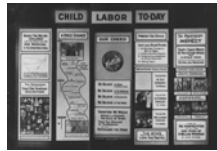
Dr. Aaron Willis
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Progressivism and the Age of Reform

The “Progressive Era” (sometimes also called the “Age of Reform”) lasted roughly from the 1880s until World War I. “Progressivism” was not really a single concept or movement, but instead took several different forms. Some Progressives sought to expand the democratic process, taking power away from urban political machines and giving it to voters through reforms such as the direct primary, initiative, referendum, and recall. Others fought problems in the workplace such as child labor, low wages, and unfair business practices. Others saw moral reform as a primary goal: some worked for the prohibition of alcohol, while others felt that only by improving conditions in city slums and tenements could real reform take place.

Progressivism and the Age of Reform



- Tenement Reform
- Child Labor
- Trusts
- Political Reform • Anti-Lynching Crusade
- The Election of 1912

Tenement Reform

- Tenements
- Jacob Riis: Danish immigrant, journalist
- One of the first to use flash photography
- *How the Other Half Lives* (1890)
- Reform

During the Progressive era, crusading journalists known as “muckrakers” wrote about social, political, and economic problems in America, hoping to draw attention to them in order to achieve reform. A prime target for reform in the late 1800s were apartment buildings called tenements that housed many immigrant families. Tenements were usually shoddily constructed by unscrupulous speculators hoping to make an easy buck. Poor families often squeezed far more people into the tiny apartments than they could hold. Owners of the tenements almost never performed any maintenance on the buildings, and they consequently became dirty, hazardous, and disease-ridden.

Jacob Riis, a Danish immigrant who became a New York reporter and photographer, documented life in the city’s tenements and slums. For several years, he wrote and gave public lectures, hoping to inspire the well-off to do something to improve living conditions for the poor. However, it was not until the invention of flash photography in 1887 that Riis was truly able to make his message hit home with the public. His photos of life inside the tenements deeply shocked and moved the largely middle-class audiences at his lectures. He later compiled his photos into a book titled *How the Other Half Lives*; it became a major success. Riis’s efforts eventually helped lead not only to tenement reform, but also to the creation of public parks and playgrounds.



Tenement Reform

Give students about one minute to look at this image, then proceed to the following slides.

This is a photo Jacob Riis took of immigrants in a New York City tenement in 1890.



- How many people can you make out in this picture?
- How big does the room appear to be?

There appear to be at least five people in the photo. The room appears to be quite small, probably no more than a couple hundred square feet.



- Do you see any windows in the room?
- Where does the lighting for the photo appear to be coming from?

The room does not appear to have any windows. Though we can't tell for sure, it appears that the lighting is coming from the photographer's flash.