

**Focus on U.S. History:**

# **The Era of Modernization Through the 1930s**

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## United States



## UNIT 1



## TEACHER GUIDE

# The Progressive Era

The objective of this unit is to help students understand the ways in which the Progressive movement and Progressive reformers addressed the political, social, and economic problems in the United States in the early twentieth century. These problems had developed in the decades after the Civil War, and reforms of the late 1800s had only begun to tackle them. Progressive reformers set out to fix problems at the local, state, and national levels. They cleaned up corrupt, machine-dominated local and state politics. They worked for laws to regulate big business and protect workers and consumers. They developed programs to help assimilate the ongoing influx of immigrants. They inspired four constitutional amendments—income tax, direct election of sena-

tors, prohibition, and women's suffrage. Progressivism became part of national politics with reform-minded presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and, to a lesser extent, William H. Taft. Roosevelt firmly established conservation and wilderness preservation as national policy.

Progressivism had its limitations, however. Its primary proponents showed little interest in African Americans and other minorities, were antagonistic to radical labor movements, and limited their interest in women's rights almost entirely to suffrage. This unit's activities are designed to draw students into a better understanding of the many elements of the Progressive era.



## Student Activities

**Death of a President** gives students a dramatic description of the shooting of President McKinley in September 1901. Students are invited to follow the events of the following week via contemporary news accounts or investigate other notable U.S. assassinations.

**Reform Movements** provides a frame for students to identify elements of various Progressive-era reform movements.

**Reforming Government and Politics** has students identify important political reforms that Progressives achieved and explain why each improved government and politics.

**Upton Sinclair, Muckraker**, presents excerpts from Sinclair's 1906 novel *The Jungle* that describe the unsanitary conditions in Chicago's meat-packing industry and the reliance of the poor on adulterated

food and medicine. Students are asked to identify and learn more about the reforms that Congress passed in response to Sinclair's writing. The Extra Challenge asks students to find a current muckraking article and share it with classmates.

**Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism** presents portions of a 1910 speech in which Roosevelt described an element of his New Nationalism that is still a very current topic—reform of campaign financing and the role of special interests and corporations in politics. Students research today's debate on these questions and evaluate current reform proposals as well as Roosevelt's suggestions.

**Women and Work** presents the arguments made against women working outside the home as expressed in a 1901 periodical article. Students identify the main points made by the article's writer and then develop a rebuttal to each of the objections,



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writing as commentators of either the early twentieth century or today. Their rebuttals are framed as either a periodical article or radio/TV commentary. The Extra Challenge asks students to role-play a debate among supporters and opponents of working women in the early twentieth century.

**Presidential Elections** presents the results of the 1912 and 1916 presidential elections. From this, students create sets of pie charts and contrasting state-by-state election maps and compare these sets by year. The Challenge Question asks students to consider how results of the 1912 election might have been different if Theodore Roosevelt had not run as the candidate of a third party.

**TR Talks** personalizes the always interesting Theodore Roosevelt by presenting some of

Roosevelt's colorful and revealing comments. Students take turns explaining what Roosevelt is referring to in each comment.

**National Lands** introduces students to the policy established by President Roosevelt of setting aside land in many parts of the country for national parks, monuments, and wildlife preserves. Students locate and label the listed national lands (protected between 1872 and 1910) on their map of the United States.

**Progressive Era Time Line** lists significant milestones in the Progressive era and asks students to create a time line with dates and descriptions of the events.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**UNIT 1**  
**STUDENT BACKGROUND SHEET**

## The Progressive Era

### Progressives and Progressivism

The last third of the nineteenth century had been a period of great growth in the United States. It was an era of big business and big industry. Politics were corrupt. Monopolies kept prices high and exploited workers. Immigrants and other workers crowded into packed cities. Poor urban dwellers needed many social services. But city governments were not able to provide these services. Some reforms to fix these problems were passed in the late 1800s. But much remained to be done.

A new movement grew across the nation in the early 1900s. It was called **Progressivism**. Progressives wanted the reforms of the late 1800s to continue and expand. They wanted to make people's lives better. They denounced corporate greed.

### The Muckrakers

Most Progressives were members of the middle class. They were also mostly well-educated. Some were journalists. That is, they wrote articles for newspapers and magazines. These reform-minded writers began looking into and writing about specific problems. (This is called "investigative journalism." It's still very popular today, in all types of media.)

- ◆ Ida Tarbell exposed Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company in McClure's in 1902.
- ◆ Lincoln Steffens exposed local political corruption in "Shame of the Cities" in 1904.
- ◆ Nellie Bly had herself committed to a mental hospital to expose shocking treatment there.



**Nellie Bly**

President Theodore Roosevelt didn't like these writers. He said they were like the man with the muckrake in an old Christian book. The man raked up all the filth of society but didn't see the good. Roosevelt's comment gave the crusading writers their famous nickname: **muckrakers**. The muckrakers had a great impact on public opinion.

**Upton Sinclair** published a widely read novel titled *The Jungle* in 1906. In it, Sinclair sickened Americans with his graphic and stomach-turning descriptions of the conditions in Chicago's meat-packing houses. Within that same year, Congress passed the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act.

(continued)



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**UNIT 1**  
**STUDENT BACKGROUND SHEET**

## The Progressive Era *(continued)*

### Progressive Reforms

The Progressive movement made many reforms. Progressives took over and cleaned up many city governments. They broke the power of state political machines as well. Wisconsin led the way. Governor Robert La Follette was a Progressive. He directed a sweeping set of reforms called the "Wisconsin idea." Some laws checked campaign finances and lobbying. Others set up direct primary votes. Groups of experts were formed to help run the state. Other states soon adopted these reforms, too.

Progressives also pushed through state social reforms. Children younger than a stated age could not have jobs. Limits were set on working hours for women and children. Laws mandated job safety and minimum wages.

In the late 1800s, Jane Addams spearheaded the **settlement house** movement. Her Hull House in Chicago was a community center. It offered immigrants and poor workers who lived nearby a wide range of services. Clients of a settlement house could get English lessons, cooking and nutrition lessons, child care, sports activities, and much more.



Jane Addams

became president. Roosevelt said he would give the American people a "**Square Deal.**" The government would stop unfair ways of doing business.

McKinley adviser Mark Hanna hadn't wanted Roosevelt on the ticket in 1900. When McKinley died, Hanna exclaimed, "Now look—that damned cowboy is president of the United States!"



Theodore Roosevelt

Roosevelt did as he promised. He broke up trusts. He got big businesses to accept more federal rules. He forced mine owners to come to terms with striking coal miners in 1902. He had a great love of the outdoors. So he made conservation of natural resources a key federal policy. As president, he set aside 150 million acres of land. They became national parks, forests, monuments, and wildlife preserves.

William Howard Taft became president in 1908. He kept some Progressive reform going. But his lack of good political sense cost him friends. One of these was Roosevelt. TR decided he wanted to take back the reins in 1912. The Republicans chose Taft to run for president that year, though. So Roosevelt ran as head of the new Progressive party. This split Republican voters. The Democrats' candidate won by a wide margin.

When the Progressive party nominated him, TR declared, "I'm feeling like a bull moose!" His party instantly became known as the Bull Moose party.

*(continued)*

### Progressive Presidents

The Progressive era at the White House started with a tragedy. President William McKinley was shot to death in 1901. Progressive Vice President Theodore Roosevelt suddenly

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**UNIT 1**  
**STUDENT BACKGROUND SHEET**

## The Progressive Era *(continued)*

The new Democratic president was Woodrow Wilson. He was also a Progressive. He called his federal reform program the “**New Freedom**.” Wilson got Congress to lower tariffs. This helped farmers and consumers. He also got a law passed to set up a national banking system. Other laws put brakes on unfair ways of doing business.

### **The Progressive Amendments**

Four amendments to the U.S. Constitution were passed during the Progressive era. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Amendments were both ratified in 1913. The Sixteenth Amendment allowed a federal income tax. The Sixteenth mandated direct election of U.S. senators. The Eighteenth Amendment was ratified in 1919. It forbade making or selling alcoholic beverages. The Nineteenth Amendment, ratified in 1920, ended a long struggle. It gave American women the vote.

### **The Limitations of Progressivism**

Progressives favored all kinds of reform. But they did have their blind and prejudiced sides. Many, but not all, Progressives favored women’s suffrage. (A common idea was that women had “refined sensibilities.” Therefore, they would “purify” politics.) But, the Progressive movement had little interest in any other questions of equal rights for women.

African Americans and other minorities were largely left out of this reform movement.

Some things even got worse. Black rights in the South eroded further. President Wilson segregated federal workers. More and more, African Americans responded to leaders like W. E. B. DuBois. He urged his fellow blacks to

be proud of their color and their African background.

Theodore Roosevelt expressed a common view of women’s rights in 1910: “We hear much about women’s rights. Well, as to that, decent men should be thinking about women’s rights all the time, and while the men are doing that—the women should be attending to their duties.”

Native Americans did not make gains during the Progressive era either. Most Progressives viewed Indians as second-class citizens destined to remain that way. This second-class view also applied to immigrants. Large numbers of people were coming to the United States from Asia. Many more were immigrating from southern and eastern Europe. Narrow-minded nativists were alarmed. So were many middle-class reformers.

Some workers didn’t think Progressive reforms went far enough. They turned to more radical answers. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded in 1905. The IWW wanted to end capitalism. Workers around the world would unite and take over the means of production. Other people who favored more radical politics turned to the Socialist party. It called for government ownership of businesses and industries. This would give the people more control.

Eugene V. Debs was the Socialist candidate for U.S. president five times. In his first run in 1900, he polled fewer than 100,000 votes. In his last run in 1920, he got over 900,000 votes—even though he was in jail at the time for speaking out against the World War I draft.



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**UNIT 1**  
**WORKSHEET 1**

## Death of a President

On September 6, 1901, an assassin shot President William McKinley at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. Here is part of a news account describing the shooting.

### ***The New York Times, September 6, 1901***

A vast crowd had assembled long before the arrival of Mr. McKinley. . . . The President, though well guarded by United States Secret Service detectives, was fully exposed to such an attack as occurred. He stood at the edge of the raised dais, and throngs of people crowded in at the various entrances to see their Chief Executive, perchance to clasp his hand, and then fight their way out in the good-natured mob that every minute swelled and multiplied at the points of ingress and egress to the building.

The President was in a cheerful mood and was enjoying the hearty evidences of goodwill which everywhere met his gaze. . . .

It was shortly after 4 o'clock when one of the throng which surrounded the Presidential party, a medium-sized man of ordinary appearance and plainly dressed in black, approached as if to greet the President. . . . President McKinley smiled, bowed, and extended his hand in that spirit of geniality the American people so well know, when suddenly the man raised his hand and two sharp reports of a revolver rang out loud and clear above the hum of voices and the shuffling of myriad feet. . . .

There was an instant of almost complete silence, like the hush that follows a clap of thunder. The President stood stock still, a look of hesitancy, almost of bewilderment,

on his face. Then he retreated a step while a pallor began to steal over his features. . . .

Then came a commotion. With the leap of a tiger three men threw themselves forward as with one impulse and sprang toward the would-be assassin. . . . In a twinkling the assassin was borne to the ground, his weapon was wrested from his grasp, and strong arms pinioned him down.

Then the vast multitude which thronged the edifice began to come to a realizing sense of the awfulness of the scene of which they had been witnesses. A murmur arose, spread, and swelled to a hum of confusion, then grew to a babel of sounds, and later to a pandemonium of noises. . . .

Inside on the slightly raised dais was enacted within those few feverish moments a tragedy, so dramatic in character, so thrilling in its intensity, that few who looked on will ever be able to give a succinct account of what really did transpire. Even the actors who were playing the principal roles came out of it with blanched faces, trembling limbs, and beating hearts, while their brains throbbed with a tumult of conflicting emotions which left behind only a chaotic jumble of impressions which could not be clarified into a lucid narrative of the events as they really transpired.

*(continued)*