

# The Origins of Progressivism

## MAIN IDEA

Political, economic, and social change in late 19th century America led to broad progressive reforms.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Progressive reforms in areas such as labor and voting rights reinforced democratic principles that continue to exist today.

## Terms & Names

- progressive movement
- Florence Kelley
- prohibition
- muckraker
- scientific management
- Robert M. La Follette
- initiative
- referendum
- recall
- Seventeenth Amendment

## CALIFORNIA STANDARDS

**11.2.4** Analyze the effect of urban political machines and responses to them by immigrants and middle-class reformers.

**11.2.7** Analyze the similarities and differences between the ideologies of Social Darwinism and Social Gospel (e.g., using biographies of William Graham Sumner, Billy Sunday, Dwight L. Moody).

**11.2.9** Understand the effect of political programs and activities of the Progressives (e.g., federal regulation of railroad transport, Children's Bureau, the Sixteenth Amendment, Theodore Roosevelt, Hiram Johnson).

**11.3.2** Analyze the great religious revivals and the leaders involved in them, including the First Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Civil War revivals, the Social Gospel Movement, the rise of Christian liberal theology in the nineteenth century, the impact of the Second Vatican Council, and the rise of Christian fundamentalism in current times.

**11.5.3** Examine the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the Volstead Act (Prohibition).

**HI 2** Students recognize the complexity of historical causes and effects, including the limitations on determining cause and effect.

## One American's Story

Camella Teoli was just 12 years old when she began working in a Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile mill to help support her family. Soon after she started, a machine used for twisting cotton into thread tore off part of her scalp. The young Italian immigrant spent seven months in the hospital and was scarred for life.

Three years later, when 20,000 Lawrence mill workers went on strike for higher wages, Camella was selected to testify before a congressional committee investigating labor conditions such as workplace safety and underage workers. When asked why she had gone on strike, Camella answered simply, "Because I didn't get enough to eat at home." She explained how she had gone to work before reaching the legal age of 14.



▲ Mill workers on strike in 1912.

## A PERSONAL VOICE CAMELLA TEOLI

"I used to go to school, and then a man came up to my house and asked my father why I didn't go to work, so my father says I don't know whether she is 13 or 14 years old. So, the man say You give me \$4 and I will make the papers come from the old country [Italy] saying [that] you are 14. So, my father gave him the \$4, and in one month came the papers that I was 14. I went to work, and about two weeks [later] got hurt in my head."

—at congressional hearings, March 1912

## VIDEO

### A CHILD ON STRIKE

The Testimony of Camella Teoli, Mill Girl

After nine weeks of striking, the mill workers won the sympathy of the nation as well as five to ten percent pay raises. Stories like Camella's set off a national investigation of labor conditions, and reformers across the country organized to address the problems of industrialization.

## Four Goals of Progressivism

At the dawn of the new century, middle-class reformers addressed many of the problems that had contributed to the social upheavals of the 1890s. Journalists and writers exposed the unsafe conditions often faced by factory workers, including

women and children. Intellectuals questioned the dominant role of large corporations in American society. Political reformers struggled to make government more responsive to the people. Together, these reform efforts formed the **progressive movement**, which aimed to restore economic opportunities and correct injustices in American life.

Even though reformers never completely agreed on the problems or the solutions, each of their progressive efforts shared at least one of the following goals:

- protecting social welfare
- promoting moral improvement
- creating economic reform
- fostering efficiency

**PROTECTING SOCIAL WELFARE** Many social welfare reformers worked to soften some of the harsh conditions of industrialization. The Social Gospel and settlement house movements of the late 1800s, which aimed to help the poor through community centers, churches, and social services, continued during the Progressive Era and inspired even more reform activities.

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), for example, opened libraries, sponsored classes, and built swimming pools and handball courts. The Salvation Army fed poor people in soup kitchens, cared for children in nurseries, and sent "slum brigades" to instruct poor immigrants in middle-class values of hard work and temperance.

In addition, many women were inspired by the settlement houses to take action. **Florence Kelley** became an advocate for improving the lives of women and children. She was appointed chief inspector of factories for Illinois after she had helped to win passage of the Illinois Factory Act in 1893. The act, which prohibited child labor and limited women's working hours, soon became a model for other states.

**PROMOTING MORAL IMPROVEMENT** Other reformers felt that morality, not the workplace, held the key to improving the lives of poor people. These reformers wanted immigrants and poor city dwellers to uplift themselves by improving their personal behavior. **Prohibition**, the banning of alcoholic beverages, was one such program.

Prohibitionist groups feared that alcohol was undermining American morals. Founded in Cleveland in 1874, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) spearheaded the crusade for prohibition. Members advanced their cause by entering saloons, singing, praying, and urging saloonkeepers to stop selling alcohol. As momentum grew, the Union was transformed by Frances Willard from a small midwestern religious group in 1879 to a national organization. Boasting 245,000 members by 1911, the WCTU became the largest women's group in the nation's history. **A**

WCTU members followed Willard's "do everything" slogan and began opening kindergartens for immigrants, visiting

KEY PLAYER



FLORENCE KELLEY  
1859–1932

The daughter of an antislavery Republican congressman from Pennsylvania, Florence Kelley became a social reformer whose sympathies lay with the powerless, especially working women and children. During a long career, Kelley pushed the government to solve America's social problems.

In 1899, Kelley became general secretary of the National Consumers' League, where she lobbied to improve factory conditions. "Why," Kelley pointedly asked while campaigning for a federal child-labor law, "are seals, bears, reindeer, fish, wild game in the national parks, buffalo, [and] migratory birds all found suitable for federal protection, but not children?"

### Vocabulary

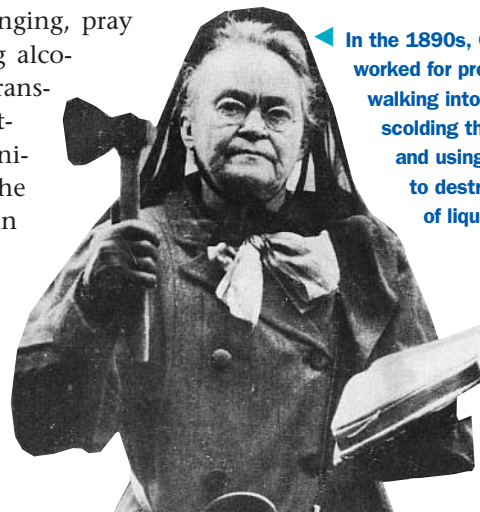
#### temperance:

refraining from alcohol consumption

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Motives

**A** Why did the prohibition movement appeal to so many women?



◀ In the 1890s, Caryl Nation worked for prohibition by walking into saloons, scolding the customers, and using her hatchet to destroy bottles of liquor.

## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

### ANTI-SALOON LEAGUE

Quietly founded by progressive women in 1895, the Anti-Saloon League called itself “the Church in action against the saloon.” Whereas early temperance efforts had asked individuals to change their ways, the Anti-Saloon League worked to pass laws to force people to change and to punish those who drank.

The Anti-Saloon League endorsed politicians who opposed “Demon Rum,” no matter which party they belonged to or where they stood on other issues. It also organized statewide referendums to ban alcohol. Between 1900 and 1917, voters in nearly half of the states—mostly in the South and the West—prohibited the sale, production, and use of alcohol. Individual towns, city wards, and rural areas also voted themselves “dry.”

inmates in prisons and asylums, and working for suffrage. The WCTU reform activities, like those of the settlement-house movement, provided women with expanded public roles, which they used to justify giving women voting rights.

Sometimes efforts at prohibition led to trouble with immigrant groups. Such was the case with the Anti-Saloon League, founded in 1895. As members sought to close saloons to cure society’s problems, tension arose between them and many immigrants, whose customs often included the consumption of alcohol. Additionally, saloons filled a number of roles within the immigrant community such as cashing paychecks and serving meals.

**CREATING ECONOMIC REFORM** As moral reformers sought to change individual behavior, a severe economic panic in 1893 prompted some Americans to question the capitalist economic system. As a result, some Americans, especially workers, embraced socialism. Labor leader Eugene V. Debs, who helped organize the American Socialist Party in 1901, commented on the uneven balance among big business, government, and ordinary people under the free-market system of capitalism.

### A PERSONAL VOICE EUGENE V. DEBS

“Competition was natural enough at one time, but do you think you are competing today? Many of you think you are competing. Against whom? Against [oil magnate John D.] Rockefeller? About as I would if I had a wheelbarrow and competed with the Santa Fe [railroad] from here to Kansas City.”

—Debs: *His Life, Writings and Speeches*

Though most progressives distanced themselves from socialism, they saw the truth of many of Debs’s criticisms. Big business often received favorable treatment from government officials and politicians and could use its economic power to limit competition.

Journalists who wrote about the corrupt side of business and public life in mass circulation magazines during the early 20th century became known as **muckrakers** (mŭk’rāk’r). (The term refers to John Bunyan’s “Pilgrim’s Progress,” in which a character is so busy using a rake to clean up the muck of this world that he does not raise his eyes to heaven.) In her “History of the Standard Oil Company,” a monthly serial in *McClure’s Magazine*, the writer Ida M. Tarbell described the company’s cutthroat methods of eliminating competition. “Mr. Rockefeller has systematically played with loaded dice,” Tarbell charged, “and it is doubtful if there has been a time since 1872 when he has run a race with a competitor and started fair.” **B**

**FOSTERING EFFICIENCY** Many progressive leaders put their faith in experts and scientific principles to make society and the workplace more efficient. In defending an Oregon law that limited women factory and laundry workers to a ten-hour day, lawyer Louis D. Brandeis paid little attention to legal argument. Instead, he focused on data produced by social scientists documenting the high costs of long working hours for both the individual and society. This type of argument—the “Brandeis brief”—would become a model for later reform litigation.

Within industry, Frederick Winslow Taylor began using time and motion studies to improve efficiency by breaking manufacturing tasks into simpler parts. “Taylorism” became a management fad, as industry reformers applied these **scientific management** studies to see just how quickly each task could be performed.

### Background

See *capitalism* and *socialism* on pages R38 and R44 in the Economics Handbook.

### MAIN IDEA

### Evaluating

**B** What contribution did muckrakers make to the reform movement?





◀ Workers at the Ford flywheel factory cope with the demanding pace of the assembly line to earn five dollars a day—a good wage in 1914.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Contrasting

🕒 Contrast the goals of scientific management with other progressive reforms.

However, not all workers could work at the same rate, and although the introduction of the assembly lines did speed up production, the system required people to work like machines. This caused a high worker turnover, often due to injuries suffered by fatigued workers. To keep automobile workers happy and to prevent strikes, Henry Ford reduced the workday to eight hours and paid workers five dollars a day. This incentive attracted thousands of workers, but they exhausted themselves. As one homemaker complained in a letter to Henry Ford in 1914, “That \$5 is a blessing—a bigger one than you know but oh they earn it.”

Such efforts at improving efficiency, an important part of progressivism, targeted not only industry, but government as well. 🕒

*“Everybody will be able to afford [a car], and about everyone will have one.”*

HENRY FORD, 1909

## Cleaning Up Local Government

Cities faced some of the most obvious social problems of the new industrial age. In many large cities, political bosses rewarded their supporters with jobs and kickbacks and openly bought votes with favors and bribes. Efforts to reform city politics stemmed in part from the desire to make government more efficient and more responsive to its constituents. But those efforts also grew from distrust of immigrants’ participation in politics.

**REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT** Natural disasters sometimes played an important role in prompting reform of city governments. In 1900, a hurricane and tidal wave almost demolished Galveston, Texas. The politicians on the city council botched the huge relief and rebuilding job so badly that the Texas legislature appointed a five-member commission of experts to take over. Each expert took charge of a different city department, and soon Galveston was rebuilt. This success prompted the city to adopt the commission idea as a form of government, and by 1917, 500 cities had followed Galveston’s example.

Another natural disaster—a flood in Dayton, Ohio, in 1913—led to the widespread adoption of the council-manager form of government. Staunton, Virginia, had already pioneered this system, in which people elected a city council to make laws. The council in turn appointed a manager, typically a person with training and experience in public administration, to run the city’s departments. By 1925, managers were administering nearly 250 cities.

**REFORM MAYORS** In some cities, mayors such as Hazen Pingree of Detroit, Michigan (1890–1897), and Tom Johnson of Cleveland, Ohio (1901–1909), introduced progressive reforms without changing how government was organized.

Concentrating on economics, Pingree instituted a fairer tax structure, lowered fares for public transportation, rooted out corruption, and set up a system of work relief for the unemployed. Detroit city workers built schools, parks, and a municipal lighting plant.

Johnson was only one of 19 socialist mayors who worked to institute progressive reforms in America's cities. In general, these mayors focused on dismissing corrupt and greedy private owners of utilities—such as gasworks, waterworks, and transit lines—and converting the utilities to publicly owned enterprises. Johnson believed that citizens should play a more active role in city government. He held meetings in a large circus tent and invited them to question officials about how the city was managed. **D**

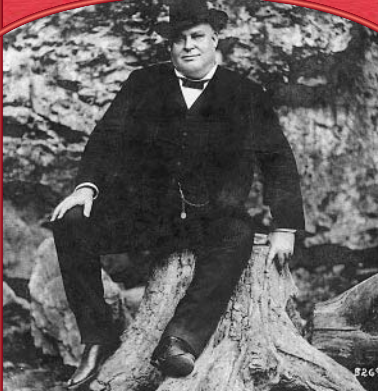
**MAIN IDEA**
**Summarizing**

**D** How did city government change during the Progressive Era?

## Reform at the State Level

Local reforms coincided with progressive efforts at the state level. Spurred by progressive governors, many states passed laws to regulate railroads, mines, mills, telephone companies, and other large businesses.

### HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT



#### JAMES S. HOGG, TEXAS GOVERNOR (1891–1895)

Among the most colorful of the reform governors was James S. Hogg of Texas. Hogg helped to drive illegal insurance companies from the state and championed antitrust legislation. His chief interest, however, was in regulating the railroads. He pointed out abuses in rates—noting, for example, that it cost more to ship lumber from East Texas to Dallas than to ship it all the way to Nebraska. A railroad commission, established largely as a result of his efforts, helped increase milling and manufacturing in Texas by lowering freight rates.

**REFORM GOVERNORS** Under the progressive Republican leadership of **Robert M. La Follette**, Wisconsin led the way in regulating big business. “Fighting Bob” La Follette served three terms as governor before he entered the U.S. Senate in 1906. He explained that, as governor, he did not mean to “smash corporations, but merely to drive them out of politics, and then to treat them exactly the same as other people are treated.”

La Follette's major target was the railroad industry. He taxed railroad property at the same rate as other business property, set up a commission to regulate rates, and forbade railroads to issue free passes to state officials. Other reform governors who attacked big business interests included Charles B. Aycock of North Carolina and James S. Hogg of Texas.

**PROTECTING WORKING CHILDREN** As the number of child workers rose dramatically, reformers worked to protect workers and to end child labor. Businesses hired children because they performed unskilled jobs for lower wages and because children's small hands made them more adept at handling small parts and tools. Immigrants and rural migrants often sent their children to work because they viewed their children as part of the family economy. Often wages were so low for adults that every family member needed to work to pull the family out of poverty.

In industrial settings, however, children were more prone to accidents caused by fatigue. Many developed serious health problems and suffered from stunted growth. **E**

Formed in 1904, the National Child Labor Committee sent investigators to gather evidence of children working in harsh conditions. They then organized exhibitions with photographs and statistics to dramatize the children's plight. They were joined by labor union members who argued that child labor lowered wages for all workers. These groups pressured

**MAIN IDEA**
**Analyzing Causes**

**E** Why did reformers seek to end child labor?



## History Through Photojournalism

### IMAGES OF CHILD LABOR

In 1908, Lewis Hine quit his teaching job to document child labor practices. Hine's photographs and descriptions of young laborers—some only three years old—were widely distributed and displayed in exhibits. His compelling images of exploitation helped to convince the public of the need for child labor regulations.

Hine devised a host of clever tactics to gain access to his subjects, such as learning shop managers' schedules and arriving during their lunch breaks. While talking casually with the children, he secretly scribbled notes on paper hidden in his pocket.



Because of their small size, spindle boys and girls (top) were forced to climb atop moving machinery to replace parts. For four-year-old Mary (left), shucking two pots of oysters was a typical day's work.



#### SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Visual Sources

1. Lewis Hine believed in the power of photography to move people to action. What elements of these photographs do you find most striking?
2. Why do you think Hine was a successful photographer?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R23.

national politicians to pass the Keating-Owen Act in 1916. The act prohibited the transportation across state lines of goods produced with child labor.

Two years later the Supreme Court declared the act unconstitutional due to interference with states' rights to regulate labor. Reformers did, however, succeed in nearly every state by effecting legislation that banned child labor and set maximum hours.

**EFFORTS TO LIMIT WORKING HOURS** The Supreme Court sometimes took a more sympathetic view of the plight of workers. In the 1908 case of *Muller v. Oregon*, Louis D. Brandeis—assisted by Florence Kelley and Josephine Goldmark—persuasively argued that poor working women were much more economically insecure than large corporations. Asserting that women required the state's protection against powerful employers, Brandeis convinced the Court to uphold an Oregon law limiting women to a ten-hour workday. Other states responded by enacting or strengthening laws to reduce women's hours of work. A similar Brandeis brief in *Bunting v. Oregon* in 1917 persuaded the Court to uphold a ten-hour workday for men.

Progressives also succeeded in winning workers' compensation to aid the families of workers who were hurt or killed on the job. Beginning with Maryland in 1902, one state after another passed legislation requiring employers to pay benefits in death cases.

**REFORMING ELECTIONS** In some cases, ordinary citizens won state reforms. William S. U'Ren prompted his state of Oregon to adopt the secret ballot (also called the Australian ballot), the initiative, the referendum, and the recall. The initiative and referendum gave citizens the power to create laws. Citizens could petition to place an **initiative**—a bill originated by the people rather than lawmakers—on the ballot. Then voters, instead of the legislature, accepted or rejected the initiative by **referendum**, a vote on the initiative. The **recall** enabled voters to remove public officials from elected positions by forcing them to face another election before the end of their term if enough voters asked for it. By 1920, 20 states had adopted at least one of these procedures. **F**

In 1899, Minnesota passed the first mandatory statewide primary system. This enabled voters, instead of political machines, to choose candidates for public office through a special popular election. About two-thirds of the states had adopted some form of direct primary by 1915.

**DIRECT ELECTION OF SENATORS** It was the success of the direct primary that paved the way for the **Seventeenth Amendment** to the Constitution. Before 1913, each state's legislature had chosen its own United States senators, which put even more power in the hands of party bosses and wealthy corporation heads. To force senators to be more responsive to the public, progressives pushed for the popular election of senators. At first, the Senate refused to go along with the idea, but gradually more and more states began allowing voters to nominate senatorial candidates in direct primaries. As a result, Congress approved the Seventeenth Amendment in 1912. Its ratification in 1913 made direct election of senators the law of the land.

Government reform—including efforts to give Americans more of a voice in electing their legislators and creating laws—drew increased numbers of women into public life. It also focused renewed attention on the issue of woman suffrage.

**MAIN IDEA****Summarizing**

**F** Summarize the impact of the direct election of senators.

**ASSESSMENT**

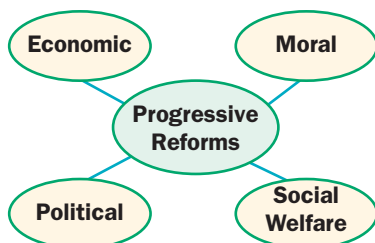
**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- progressive movement
- muckraker
- initiative
- recall
- Florence Kelley
- scientific management
- referendum
- Seventeenth Amendment
- prohibition
- Robert M. La Follette

**MAIN IDEA**

**2. TAKING NOTES** (11.2.9)

Copy the web below on your paper. Fill it in with examples of organizations that worked for reform in the areas named.



Which group was most successful and why?

**CRITICAL THINKING**

**3. FORMING GENERALIZATIONS** (11.2.9)

In what ways might Illinois, Wisconsin, and Oregon all be considered trailblazers in progressive reform? Support your answers. **Think About:**

- legislative and electoral reforms at the state level
- the leadership of William U'Ren and Robert La Follette
- Florence Kelley's appointment as chief inspector of factories for Illinois

**4. INTERPRETING VISUAL SOURCES** (11.5.3)

This cartoon shows Carry Nation inside a saloon that she has attacked. Do you think the cartoonist had a favorable or unfavorable opinion of this prohibitionist? Explain.

