

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: CREATING A DEMOCRATIC PARADISE: THE PROGRESSIVE ERA, 1895–1915

READING AND STUDY GUIDE

- I. The Progressive Impulse
 - A. The Angst of the Middle Class
 - B. The Progressive Vision

- II. Reigning in Big Business
 - A. Roosevelt's Trust-busting
 - B. Taft and Wilson: Competing Progressive Visions
 - C. Preservation versus Conservation

- III. Competing Views on Transforming the Workplace
 - A. Capitalist Visions of Industrial Harmony
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 - A. Containing Socialism
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Female employees of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, many recently arrived from Italy and eastern Europe, worked on sewing machines six days a week, twelve hours a day, making blouses. On March 25, 1911, a fire engulfed the top floors of the new Asch Building that housed the factory in New York City's Lower East Side, killing 146 women and men. As bundles began falling onto the street, onlookers below assumed that workers were throwing their best cloth out the window to save it. They soon realized their mistake. Female workers were jumping by twos and threes to escape the flames.

Americans' expectations of their government had radically changed. This new vision took hold during the Progressive Era, partially in response to events like the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. In Gatto's painting, the immense stone buildings tower above the lifeless workers, the artist's way of representing the complete domination of big business over labor at the beginning of the twentieth century. Previous attempts to unionize the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory had failed, leaving these women at the mercy of their employers, who had locked the workshop doors from the outside to prevent them from stealing materials or leaving early. With the doors bolted

and flimsy fire escapes collapsing under the weight of fleeing workers, the windows offered the only means of escape from the fire for the rest.

To many Progressive Era reformers, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire illustrated the tragic consequences of capitalist exploitation and the government's lack of interest in the plight of workers. Middle-class activists championed an array of reforms that envisioned using local, state, and federal governments to protect Americans from the greed and indifference of big business. Their agenda aroused considerable criticism. Progressives, aided by three reform-minded presidents, proved remarkably adept at negotiating this difficult political terrain. They found enough common ground to construct cross-class alliances that sought to end exploitive business practices and class conflict, and curtail the growth of monopolies. Progressive-led coalitions also tackled pressing political and social issues. From the mid-1890s to mid-1900s, Progressives transformed the role of government in American society and laid the foundation for liberal reform movements of the twentieth century.

Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 18, students should be able to do the following:

1. Discuss the philosophy of the Social Gospel movement and identify the major thinkers who originated the movement.
2. Explain the liberalization of American religion during the early twentieth century. Explain how social scientists reinforced and supported the Social Gospel movement.
3. Define the term *muckraker* and explain the importance of this form of journalism to the progressive movement. Identify some of the major writers associated with this genre of journalism.
4. Identify the major national labor unions of the Progressive Era.
5. Describe the major changes in the role and status of women during the Progressive Era. Identify the clubs and organizations that helped to politically organize women during the Progressive Era.
6. Identify the major sources of opposition to the progressive movement.
7. Define the term *settlement house* and connect the settlement movement to the role of women in the progressive movement. Explain the impact of the settlement movement on traditional American ideas regarding poverty.
8. Identify the challenges that faced those attempting to gain effective child labor legislation during the Progressive Era.
9. Discuss the philosophical dilemma facing feminists and lawmakers who were attempting to pass women's labor reform legislation during the Progressive Era.

10. Identify some key legislative initiatives of the Progressive Era that can be identified with the origins of the welfare state.
11. Identify the key improvements in public education during the Progressive Era. Explain how racial segregation impacted the quality of southern public education.
12. Identify Margaret Sanger and explain her role in challenging gender restrictions.
13. Explain the impact of the progressive movement on life in rural America.
14. Explain the provisions of the Eighteenth Amendment and discuss the reasons for progressive support of prohibition.
15. Discuss African American interest in progressive urban reform. Identify W. E. B. DuBois and discuss his contributions to civil rights reform during the early twentieth century.
16. Explain the provisions of the Nineteenth Amendment and discuss the moderation of the woman's suffrage argument at the turn of the century.
17. Identify Robert La Follette and describe his contributions to progressive political reform.
18. Identify three ways in which Theodore Roosevelt modernized the role of the president.
19. Explain the role played by Theodore Roosevelt in settling the coal strike of 1902.
20. Discuss Theodore Roosevelt's program for conservation of natural resources. Identify the sources of opposition to this program.
21. Explain Theodore Roosevelt's theory regarding "trustbusting." Identify three laws passed during his administration that effectively expanded the police power of the federal government.
22. Identify the major political problems that confronted William Taft during his presidential administration. Explain the impact of these problems on the presidential election of 1912.
23. Discuss the political background of Woodrow Wilson. Explain the philosophical contest between New Nationalism and New Freedom in the 1912 presidential campaign.
24. List the major pieces of reform legislation coming out of the Wilson administration that addressed tariff, banking, business, farming, and labor reform.

Key Terms & Definitions:

Social Gospel The belief that Christians had a responsibility to create an ethically sound and morally upright society. (534)

trust-busting Governmental action to dissolve monopolies. (536)

Sixteenth Amendment (1913) The constitutional amendment authorizing federal income taxes. (538)

Federal Reserve Act (1913) The act creating a federally run Federal Reserve to serve as a “banker’s bank” that held a portion of bank funds in reserve to help member banks in time of crisis, set rates for business loans, and issued a new national paper currency. (539)

Clayton Anti-Trust Act (1914) The act prohibited interlocking company directories—the practice of setting up shadow companies that appeared to compete but were actually run by the same board of directors—and exempted trade unions from prosecution under the 1890 Sherman Anti-Trust Act. (539)

Federal Trade Commission (1914) A federal agency with the power to order companies to cease unfair trading practices whose decisions were subject to court review. (539)

preservationist An environmentalist who championed preserving nature in its unspoiled state. (539)

conservationist An environmentalist who wanted to meet present economic needs and conserve natural resources for future generations. (540)

welfare capitalism The notion of using benefits to gain workers’ loyalty, improve worker morale, and weaken interest in unions. (541)

scientific management The effort to use scientific knowledge to secure maximum output and profit. (543)

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) This group envisioned “one big union” that welcomed all workers regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, or skill, which would one day take over all means of production in the United States. (543)

Lochner v. New York (1905) A Supreme Court ruling that unless long work hours directly jeopardized workers’ health, the government could not abridge an employee’s freedom to negotiate his own work schedule with his employer. (544)

Ludlow Massacre (1914) Colorado state troops set a striking miners’ camp ablaze, killing thirteen women and children, an act that outraged laborers throughout the nation. (544)

Muller v. Oregon (1908) The Supreme Court upheld maximum hour laws for female workers because protecting women’s reproductive health served the public good. (546)

Meat Inspection Act (1906) Law gave federal inspectors the authority to condemn meat unfit for consumption and established federal sanitary standards for meatpacking plants. (552)

Pure Food and Drug Act (1906) Law levied federal fines for mislabeling food or medicine. (552)

initiative Provided a way, usually by gathering signatures on petitions, for the electorate to introduce legislation before state legislatures. (553)

referendum Put legislative proposals on the ballot, letting the voting public decide whether a measure became law. (553)

recall Used special elections to remove un-popular officials from office before their term expired. (553)

muckrakers Progressive Era term for investigative journalists who wrote exposés on government and business corruption. (553)

Seventeenth Amendment (1913) A constitutional amendment that allowed voters, rather than state legislatures, elect federal senators. (553)

Study Questions:

What interpretation did this painting offer of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire? (530)

What economic challenges did the nation face at the end of the nineteenth century? (532)

How did a mix of sympathy and fear spur middle-class interest in reform? (533)

How did the Progressive vision take shape? (534)

Why did Roosevelt's personality and behavior captivate the public? (535)

What competing visions did Roosevelt, the Supreme Court and leading industrialists offer on the trust issue? (536)

How did exposes and caricatures in the popular media shape public views of Standard Oil? (537)

What clear philosophical differences separated the four candidates in the 1912 presidential election? (538)

How did Wilson's economic vision and policies differ from the ones pursued by the Roosevelt and Taft administrations? (539)

Compare Progressive-Era debates over the environment with attitudes about disappearing Indian cultures. (540)

What different ways did industrialists try to end labor conflict? (541)

How much did Ford's innovations and paternalism benefit workers? (542)

What conflicting visions divided working-class union activists? (543)

How effective were the different strategies that Progressive and unions employed to reform the workplace? (544)

What competing views existed concerning a state's right to regulate the workplace? (545)

Why did the campaign for maximum work hour laws succeed for women, but fail for men? (546)

What diverse concerns about alcohol helped the temperance movement gain momentum? (547)

What does this advertisement reveal about middle-class ideas of childhood? (548)

What obstacles did reformers face while trying to eliminate child labor? (549)

How did the composition of this photograph reinforce Hine's message about child labor? (550)

Did these images offer similar or different reasons to oppose child labor? (551)

What importance did the socialist movement have during the Progressive Era? (552)

What reforms did Progressives introduce to improve the democratic process? (553)

How does this photograph convey the Hampton Institute's Educational philosophy? (554)

What alternatives did critics of Booker T. Washington offer to improve life for African Americans? (555)

Was Washington a sell-out, as Du Bois implies, or a master strategist? (556)