

The Rise of Progressivism: 1900-1925

Main Idea: Many of the leaders of the United States between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the 20th century were focused upon the settlement of the continent, the expansion of American interests, and the accumulation of vast sums of money. Their children and grandchildren, however, began to look upon the work of their fathers as flawed, and in some cases evil. Many saw the survival of American democracy intimately linked to social justice. Their efforts to create this improved system have become known as the Progressive Era.

1. What did the Progressives Want?

- a. Make politics more democratic
 - i. **George Washington Plunkett – Honest Graft**
- b. Make industry less exploitive
 - i. **Ida Tarbell – The Case Against Standard Oil**
- c. Break unfair business practices like trusts and monopolies
- d. Enhance conservation efforts

2. What Distinguished Progressives from Earlier Reformers?

- a. Looked to a better future instead of a golden past as their inspiration. They looked with optimism at a better future to be created within their generation.
 - i. **Lincoln Steffens – Shame of the Cities (1902)**
 - ii. **Frank Kelley – The Octopus**
 - iii. **Tom Johnson – The City Beautiful**
- b. Believed strongly in an active government as a mechanism to rectify social, economic, and legal inequities within American society.
 - i. **The Panic of 1893**
 - ii. **Political bossism**
 - iii. **Class inequity**

3. Political Bosses and the Trusts

- a. Political power must remain with the people, not with well-connected bosses
- b. Attempted to break the exploitive prices, tariffs, and low wages
 - i. Initiated secret ballots and direct primaries
- c. Believed that only the corrupt relationship between businessmen and government officials had led to the power and wealth of industrialists.
 - i. **Ida Tarbell – The Case Against Standard Oil (1904)**
 - ii. **Gov. Robert LaFollette – Regulation of railroads and utilities in Wisconsin**
 - iii. **Gov. Hiram Johnson – regulation of California railroads**

- iv. Pres. Theodore Roosevelt – broke the railroad trust by declaring the National Securities Company was in violation of the Sherman Act. (1902)

4. A More Active Government

- a. **The Anthracite Coal Strike (1902)** – Pennsylvania United Mine Workers went on strike for shorter hours, higher pay, and union recognition. Roosevelt acted as mediator in a White House conference between mine owners and union representatives.
- b. **The Elkins Act (1903)** – Allowed ICC to prevent railroads from giving rebates
- c. **The Hepburn Act (1906)** – Allowed federal government to set maximum rates and force railroads to comply after 30 days
- d. **The Federal Trade Commission Act (1914)** – Established a federal, bipartisan commission to police private business.
- e. **The Clayton Act (1914)** – Allowed government to break up monopolies and trusts; exempted unions from Sherman Act limitations.