

US History since 1877

By:

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C O N N E X I O N S

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Chapter 1

Progressive Era (Part I)¹

Dakota Territory was booming in 1881 when John Henry and Emma Smith DeVoe moved from their home in Washington, Illinois, in large measure due to the extension of the railroad. The railroad brought settlers, many of whom were Civil War veterans, widows, or orphans, to the region to make their fortunes in gold, while others came on the promise of free, fertile land in central Dakota. The DeVoes came because John Henry had accepted a position with the railroad.

The young couple settled in the newly established town of Huron. Gambling dens and saloons thrived in the town, and men frequently discharged their weapons in the city limits and engaged in drunken scuffles. Women filed complaints against men who had seduced them with promises of marriage, but then—after illicit love affairs—refused to marry them. Houses of prostitution openly operated on the main thoroughfares, which were nothing but wide dirt paths dotted with animal waste and human refuse.

Given their interest in prohibition as well as their affiliation with the Baptists, ties between the Dakota Baptist Convention and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) were solid, and so over the next few years, the DeVoes served as Christian soldiers working to create a city dedicated to the social mores they subscribed to: prohibition and the elimination of gambling halls, saloons, and brothels in town. Troubled by the lack of morals in their new community, Emma and John Henry helped to establish many of Huron's voluntary groups, including Huron's literary association. Volunteerism was all the rage out West in the decades following the Civil War.

Likeminded reformers joined the organization such as Edwin G. Wheeler, the owner of a drug store and deacon of the First Baptist Church. They and other Huronites established the association for the purpose of keeping "young people away from the haunts whose influence destroys mind, body, and soul," in other words working class forms of leisure—bars, billiard rooms, and gambling dens. The Dakota Huronite, whose editors supported prohibition, praised the organizations for their efforts saying, "It will at least remove the excuse of those who spend their time in places of ill repute, that there is no place else to go."

These Gilded Age moral reform efforts, although more aligned in philosophy with American reform movements of the early nineteenth century, opened the door and paved the way for Emma to become involved with other, broader political campaigns in Dakota Territory and eventually as a major organizer for the National American Woman's Suffrage Association and a central figure in western states passing legislation that allowed women the right to vote. The story of the DeVoes demonstrates a turning point in U.S history when Americans' focus on moral reform takes a new approach and a new focus that we call today Progressivism.

No time period in American history is possibly as misunderstood, convoluted, and nebulous, yet important to clearly understand to better appreciate the economic, political, and social liberties of American society in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as the Progressive Era. Neither a national movement, nor a singular ideology, or a coherent time frame, the Progressive Era usually falls under the umbrella Gilded Age at its earliest roots by the rise of agrarian reform measures in the 1870s and, at its demise, the end of

¹This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m19717/1.3/>>.

the Woodrow Wilson administration shortly after “the war to make the world safe for democracy.” Yet the Progressive seeds will bloom in the 1940s and again in the 1960s under the presidencies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Baines Johnson.

As with other “modern” periods, ages, or times, the Progressive Era traces its roots back to the rough and tumble alleys of thoroughfares of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York where, before the Civil War, burgeoning American factories and ever-increasing immigration created an entrenched working class and a major gang problem (especially in New York). In the first half of the nineteenth century, morally-charged, upper class women silently protested in front of saloons or created urban political parties with the hopes of codifying what they considered anti-social behaviors (not unlike the efforts of the DeVoes in the 1880s). They demanded changes to public and private morality that tended to smack more of social control and less of progressive assistance to the newly arrived immigrants. Nonetheless, what makes the Progressive Era different from previous periods of U.S. history where moral reformers demanded changes to public behavior, was the inherent belief in the use of evangelism, education, and native-born American political, economic, and social ideals to both identify problems as well as to divine solutions. In a word, while earlier reformers used the rod of morality to control behavior, Progressive reformers used academia and their belief in the inherent superiority of American strategies as the fulcrum from which all meaningful change will turn.

Progressive reformers also tended to see the United States on an evolutionary path. Charles Darwin’s ideas on biological change over time began to be applied to society. Known as Social Darwinism, learned Americans tried to figure out why some people failed in life while others succeeded. Why were some poor while others rich? Why were some sickly while others healthy? What caused sin, vice, and malfeasance? The answer was evolution: some groups of people were more evolved than others. The highest stage of evolution on a nation scale was the United States: American religious ideas, American economic theory, American political theory, and American culture were all evolved beyond those of European, African, Asian, and Latin American politics, cultures, religions, and societies.

In the late nineteenth century, some Americans will conclude that Americans had a special, God-given mission to spread American social, political, economic, and religious ideas to those who were not as advanced, even in the face of physical hardship. This became known as the “White Man’s Burden,” from a poem written by an English proponent of the duty of civilized peoples to help those who are less civilized.

An example of American display in this belief that nations evolve was evidenced in a major theme of the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis: classification. William McGee, one of the directors of the fair, created an exhibit that was a literal walk through national evolution. Beginning with the most uncivilized society, as McGee defined “civilization,” and ending at the most advanced of societies (spoiler alert – the U.S.), McGee strove “to represent human progress from the dark prime to the highest enlightenment, from savagery to civic organization, from egoism to altruism.”

The tour began with a walk through the Igorot Village. The Igorots were scantily clad peoples living in the Philippines who were head hunters and ate dogs. Fair directors supplied dogs to the people, although there were rumors that the Igorot snuck off the fair grounds and procured dogs from the near-by neighborhoods. Then came European civilization but the most highly advanced, evolved, and perfected society was the United States, which was the last stop of the exhibit. The exhibit also included a few freshly painted, steel battleships that were moored in an artificial lake created specifically to demonstrate the new American naval power initially proposed by Teddy Roosevelt when he worked in the Department of the Navy. The Igorot, American Indians, Africans, and other peoples were hired to live, work, and be on display throughout the fair’s run. This exhibit was a physical example of the “truth” that societies evolve—maybe not progressive as we use the word today but certainly progressive for the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Americans.

What did it mean to be a “Progressive”?

The Progressives shared some common traits. First, they tended to have Evangelical backgrounds or experiences. Following the Civil War there developed a swell among Protestants that they were the true leaders of this country (politically, socially, and economically) and thus only they could speak in the best interests of this country, as they professed those best interests to be. This idea led to action, specifically young men (and sometimes women) being sent out around the country and around the world to spread

American ideas on politics, society, and the economy through what they believed to be the driving force behind the success of the United States, which of course was Protestantism. Unlike pre-Civil War forms of evangelism that focused on traditional religious preaching (Mark 16:15 “Go ye into all into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”), Progressive Era evangelism included political, social, and economic evangelism.

Many Progressive reforms had backgrounds in religious evangelicalism. Today, many American religious groups send out their own to profess their particular versions of “Truth” with the hopes of converting others to their belief system. Mormons might spend two years evangelizing, so too do Jehovah Witnesses knock of their neighbors’ doors. Some evangelize through the media, such as Rick Warren and his wildly popular book *The Purpose Driven Life*. Possibly this nation’s most-known evangelical preacher is Billy Graham.

Domestic and foreign missionaries published magazines, such as *The Heathen Women’s Friend*; they established offices throughout the American West, Asia, the Ottoman Empire, and Latin America. And, even claimed the United States on behalf of God such as William Booth (founder of the Salvation Army) when in the early spring of 1880 Booth established a missionary outpost in New York where his followers began preaching to the homeless of the largest city in this country. Evangeline Booth, a daughter of the founder, became an American citizen and led the Salvation Army in the United States for three decades (1904-1934). The Salvation Army had the twin tenets of religious salvation through Jesus Christ with a combination of Methodism and a whiff of millennialism and social salvation in which the group tried to rid the world of poverty. It is the second of these goals that this English organization will affect American Progressive reformers and ideas, such as Jane Addams and the Settlement House Movement (see below).

Interestingly enough, the rise of evangelism paralleled the dramatic increase in the number of Roman Catholics in this country. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, Roman Catholics doubled in numbers causing more than mere concern among the native-born Protestants. Some of this nation’s most popular evangelicals included Dwight Moody who preached an exceptionally pessimistic view of human history and Washington Gladden who, out of step with most Americans in the late nineteenth century, called for the federal government to take an increasingly active role in protecting unions and the working class.

A second trait common among those who hoisted the Progressive banner was a grounding in social sciences. Before the Civil War, academic pursuits were exceptionally limited in both the numbers of Americans who could afford to attend colleges as well as the curriculum offered at those institutions. Many universities offered students what they considered to be a well-rounded education grounded in the classics such as Latin, Ancient history, and Renaissance art. After the Civil War, more universities began allowing women to attend and so too did their curricula change to include classes in “new” disciplines such as anthropology, political science, sociology, psychology. The need for people with educational backgrounds in engineering became evident as this nation’s railroad system spread further west and connected more communities than ever before. As more family-owned, mom-and-pop shops or general stores became gobbled up by national corporations such as the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco), International Business Machines (IBM), or Standard Oil, industrial leaders such as John Rockefeller, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and Andrew Carnegie increasingly demanded employees who had educational backgrounds in business, as opposed to Medieval art, for example.

With the sheer lack of anything resembling a business program, Rockefeller used his own money to create an institution tasked with training business leaders. His school, the University of Chicago, also created a new, advanced program for the study of business called the Masters in Business Administration, or MBA. Before the Civil War, the only school that offered degrees in engineering was the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

These new fields of study had one thing in common: they all examined human behavior (sociology) or overcoming obstacles (such as in engineering). The study of human behavior usually focuses on the negative or abhorrent thus once you study the rules to how societies are ordered, you begin to identify problems and then you get to apply your knowledge gained in university study on how to solve those problems. The spread of both engineering schools, as well as institutions that offered programs in business, resulted in the idea that the world (or at least the United States) could be categorized, evaluated, assessed, and proper measures applied to fix problems or to surmount obstacles.

In other words, the development of social sciences and engineering programs and their application to society was strikingly similar to the Enlightenment, which hit the British colonies in North America during the first half of the eighteenth century just before the American War for Independence. And not unlike the Enlightenment that produced physical spaces to showcase “modern” ideas and inventions (such as universities, libraries, and even fairs), Progressive era accomplishments too were celebrated in public spaces.

Colossal, year-long extravaganzas to publicize and draw attention to accomplishments, shine light on new ideas, and demonstrate American technological advances was evidenced in the world fairs that were iconic glimpses of everything new, bright, right, and wrong in the Progressive era. At the Chicago fair in 1893, which drew an estimated crowd of over 27 million people, visitors marveled at the scientific and technological advances to include a massive lighted tower supplied to the fair by a fledging company calling itself General Electric (GE).

Visitors experienced many products for the first time that we take for granted today such as movies (courtesy of Thomas Edison), pancake-in-a-box kit (the retro house-slave-inspired look of “Aunt Jemima”), the automatic dishwasher (invented by Josephine Cochrane), and two flavors of a new kind of candy (Juicy Fruit and Spearmint) called gum unveiled by a Chicago candy maker, William Wrigley, Jr. Visitors also tasted for the first time shredded wheat and diet soda. They rode the first ferris wheel (invented by a fellow aptly named Ferris). They marveled at the vertical file (a business necessity), and they conserved their calories by riding on moveable sidewalks, as opposed to having to use the old fashioned form of locomotion—walking. American progress was showcased indeed!

Once the principles of science and technology were understood, then those principles could be applied to solve society’s problems. In the case of GE, the problem was human beings tended to have difficulties seeing in the dark, and candle, oil, or gas lights were not terribly efficient nor overtly powerful, hence the development of electric light (thanks in large measure to the work of Thomas Edison). Many of the inventions and products demonstrated at the Chicago fair suggested that the American pace of life was speeding up (you no longer had time to mix flour, salt, sugar, and baking powder hence the invention of Aunt Jemima) and that American pockets were getting deeper (buying “store bought” food products were not as cost effective as making the food yourself).

Nevertheless, although newly minted college graduates characterize the Progressive era, a college education was something that most Americans could not afford to pursue and was not necessary to obtain meaningful work. By 1900, only about 4 percent of Americans of traditional college ages were attending college. Those who could afford the cost and were accepted (most universities refused to matriculate women) tended to put their college educations to work for their communities through progressive reform such as Jane Addams and other social Progressives.

These Progressives were true-blue believers in the American society, politics, religion, and especially American capitalism. They were not Marxists, Communists, or anarchists. They were people who had an opportunity to gain formal education beyond the scope of what would pass today for a high school education, and that education tended to emphasize new intellectual fields. Those new intellectual fields tended to focus on society’s problems and how to fix those problems.

For example, after decades of dawn to dusk work on his Wisconsin farm, Hamlin Garland decided that college was the way through which he would elevate his life. He became a famous novelist using his own background as the basis for his publications, thus shedding light on the backbreaking, hand-to-mouth life style of American farmers, who Thomas Jefferson called “God’s chosen people.” A free-born black woman, Lucie Stanton Day, wanted to enlighten the plight of her people while also working to help them get off the farms so she obtained a college degree and moved to Mississippi where she spent the rest of her life teaching freed slaves. A young Sioux named Ohiyesa earned a medical degree from Boston University, changed his name to Dr. Charles Eastman, and married a white reformer named Elaine Goodale. The couple moved to Pine Ridge where they worked for the Sioux and fought for Indian rights.

What these Progressives had in common was the belief in the elevating power of education as well as their interest to give back to their communities. Most of the Progressive era reformers were not as involved with education as these examples might suggest, nonetheless the Progressive Era is characterized as identifying problems, using certain tools to address those problems, and applying corrective actions to put an end to

those problems.

There were two basic, and sometimes opposing, views on how Progressive reform should take place: reform from within or reform from without. In the former, Progressives tended to believe that problems were local, and thus solutions (and actors) needed to be local. This grassroots, volunteer mentality was exceptionally widespread in wake of massive westward migration following the Civil War. An example of this type of Progressive reform was the Settlement House movement, led by a young college graduate, Jane Addams. Other Progressive reformers believed that problems could be best identified when viewed from above and thus solutions tended to be thorough when applied by those on high. An example of this top-down approach was President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt did not necessarily disagree with the problems that folks such as Addams identified; he just believed that he, as president, was in the best place and at the right time to fix those problems. There were various types of Progressive reform to include reforming the ills of society (such as tackling issues of poverty, immorality, or disease), addressing human foibles (such as alcoholism, gambling, or drug addiction), addressing inequalities in American life (such as women's right to vote or own property), and altering American foreign policy (which was addressed in the previous chapter). This chapter examines domestic Progressive reform.

SOCIAL PROGRESSIVES

Women, more so than men, were typically the leaders of social reform activities during the Progressive Era. Many Americans considered women to be inherently more moral than men. Also women were seen as the domestic leaders of their households. Thus, women would use their God-given moral superiority as well as their inherent abilities in domesticity to clean up, reform, and fix their cities. Women used such domestic phraseology as "municipal housekeeping" to justify their new roles in the public arena. Women simply applied their inherent abilities of caring for their families against the backdrop of sin and corruption in cities.

A good example of municipal housekeeping was the work of the National Housewives Alliance (NHA). The NHA called upon Americans to boycott all meat until the federal government agreed to inspect and certify the safety of the American meat industry. "Eat no meat. Buy no meat. Eat fresh vegetables" read one banner in a 1906 NHA protest in Maryland. As women were the ones in each home that made and served delicious, nutritious, and safe food, then women's involvement in cleaning up the unsanitary conditions of the meat packing industry (evidenced by the 1906 Upton Sinclair novel entitled *The Jungle*) seemed to be a natural extension of their womanly duties. Interestingly enough, Sinclair's message in his novel was lost on most Americans who came away from the book believing that government needed to clean up the meat industry. Instead, Sinclair's main point was to shed light on the plight of immigrant laborers who were frequently abused, taken advantage of, and generally treated unequally in the meat packing industry.

Overwhelmingly, the mechanism through which women sought reform was federal, state, and local legislation. Thus, one characteristic of the Progressive era was a change in American ideals on the relationship between the government and the governed. Gone were the days of the early Gilded Age in which the federal government ran rough shot, uncontested, over Americans by sending out federal troops to put an end to strikes, consistently looked the other way when corporations gobbled up competition usually through violence, or allowed medicine based on opiates to be openly distributed. In other words, the problems of the Gilded Age, in the eyes of these Progressive reformers, were too unyielding for anyone but a government to tackle.

An example of success in getting the federal government to tackle these issues by regulating the industries that had, until the early twentieth century, been self-regulating was the Pure Food and Drug Act. Initially passed to assure American consumers about the ingredients advertised in their favorite medicines, this act led American consumer groups, political activists, and federal legislators to widen the scope to include outlawing ingredients and food handling practices that the federal government deemed as unsafe for human consumption.

Of course this change in the idea of the responsibilities of the federal government might not have happened through external pressures alone. Harvey Wiley, a chemist in the Bureau of Agriculture, published reports on adulterated food and medicine. Nonetheless, Wiley's work inside the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt was not acted upon until women's groups and publications (such as the *Ladies Home Journal* and

Collier's) picked up the baton of change by reporting how narcotics are typically used as the main active ingredient in so-called natural medicinal products, such as the wildly popular Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

Wiley believed that some chemical preservatives were safe and even necessary to ensure a healthy food supply. Thus, in 1902 he initiated an experiment called the "Hygienic Table" in which young male volunteers would knowingly eat small amounts of preservatives to prove their safety. Dubbed the "Poison Squad" by the press, these experiments went on for five years. As a true Progressive, Wiley believed that the producers of chemically altered food must prove the safety of their products and that all products must be clearly labeled so that American consumers could make fully knowledgeable choices. Wiley's ideas would eventually become law in the United States.

Ultimately, one of the changes to American society that resulted from the popular press's disclosures of unsafe, unsanitary food handling practices, the struggle within and without the federal government to get the Pure Food and Drug Act passed, and the push to enhance the scope of the act in the years leading up to World War I was that Americans began to see themselves as active consumers. Prior to the Progressive Era, many Americans upheld the Jeffersonian twin tenets of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility. You grew your own food, you made your own clothes and what you could not grow and what you could not make, you simply did without. Also, Americans viewed government action as a negative thing, which meant that many Americans opposed the establishment of professional, public police forces in their cities, as those police forces were of course armed representatives of "the government." There was no federal or state agency to ensure the safety of anything Americans consumed, put on their bodies, or used in every day life. There were no tough, smart lawyers waiting to sue the pants of your employer when you became injured on the job or sue the drug manufacturers when your child died of consuming medicine laced with opiates. If you succeeded in life, you had yourself to thank. If you failed in life, you had yourself to blame.

However, the Progressive Era forced Americans to begin to look differently at their relationship to government, as well as their expectations from government. At stake were American ideals on liberty. No longer was it apparent that success or failure was necessarily in your own hands or of your own making. The playing field was horribly askew, and thus Americans, more than ever and in increasingly larger numbers, turned to their state and federal governments for assurances that their food and medicines were safe.

Of course, not all American politicians supported this new role for the federal government. Senator Albert Beveridge (R-IN), a supporter of the U.S. war in the Philippines on the grounds that the United States must advance all of America's blessings to those poor, tired, huddled masses, feared that unless we helped them in their county, they would simply come to the United States seeking help. He declared the Pure Food and Drug Act to be "the most pronounced extension of federal power in every direction ever enacted."

Success and failure are relative terms. Nonetheless, one reason why many of the Progressive ideas failed to achieve lasting results was because of the simplistic beliefs held by Progressives. For example, if women had the right to vote then they, as being more moral than men, would clean up politics. And, if they got rid of alcohol then gambling, divorce, and other social problems would necessarily disappear, as the Progressives believed that alcohol consumption was the root cause of so many problems in American society. In other words, maybe the Progressives tendency of embracing a single-villain theory was out of step with the complexities of humanity.

Temperance

One of the most iconic Progressive era reforms was the temperance movement. Like so many other reforms based on Gilded Age/Victorian morality, temperance roots had been firmly planted in the Washington Societies of the early nineteenth century. What makes these Progressive reformers different from earlier progressive reformers was those who supported a ban on alcohol created and maintained an effective, national organization. "Temperance is moderation in the things that are good and total abstinence from the things that are foul," is what Frances Willard believed.

Created, in part, by Francis Willard in 1874 who held its presidency from 1879 until her premature death in 1898, the Women Christian's Temperance Union (WCTU) urged state and federal politicians to ban the sale of alcohol. Like many other Progressive reformers, Willard was an educated person. She was a past president of Northwestern Female College, later accepting academic administrative positions at Northwestern

University. She also worked for the *Chicago Daily Post*.

The WCTU spurred the creation of like organizations, such as the Anti-Saloon League, as well as strong-headed individuals such as the axe-wielding Carrie Nation. Protestant ministers used their pulpits on Sundays to preach the evils of alcohol. The antebellum novel, *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, by Timothy Shay Arthur became a national hit in the 1880s. The book examined how alcohol affected a small town family (as well as the small town). No big surprise here: drunk family members kill each other, a little girl pleads with her father to stop drinking (which he eventually does, but only on his daughter's death bed; she dies after getting hit in the head by a thrown glass when she entered the saloon to plead with her father to come home) and in the end the whole town votes to close the saloon and outlaw liquor forever! The book's popularity led to a silent film in 1913, a remake in 1922, and a talkie in 1931. The 1913 version was produced in part by the WCTU and was an early example of the effects of that new medium called motion pictures.

By 1916, twenty-one states had gone dry. Three years later, Americans altered the U.S. Constitution by adding the Eighteenth Amendment, which prohibited "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof." There were major problems with the amendment, such as: What does "intoxicating" mean? What does "liquor" mean? Who will be in charge of enforcing this amendment? And, while the WCTU fought for decades to make it illegal for Americans to consume alcohol, the Eighteenth Amendment did not make it illegal to drink—only to make it, sell it, or transport it.

Shortly after Congress adopted the Eighteenth Amendment, the ambiguity of the amendment became apparent. Thus, Congress passed the National Prohibition Act (popularly referred to as the Volstead Act after one of its supporters, Andrew Volstead). This act defined alcohol, placed jurisdiction for the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment squarely on the shoulders of the federal government and although it was still not against the law to consume alcohol, it was illegal to "possess" alcohol.

The fight over prohibition is a microcosm of a shift in American culture. Alcohol consumption had been viewed as more than merely socially unacceptable throughout the late nineteenth century, regardless of the fact that for Americans, alcohol was the safest beverage (unlike water or milk, no know pathogens can exist in alcohol). Native-born Americans saw alcohol has a moral evil that was becoming further entrenched in American life as a result of the American immigrant culture of those "new immigrants" (Catholics and Jews from eastern, southern, and central Europe). Likewise, alcohol was the root of all evil propelling American families on the road to financial and moral ruin.

The Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act failed to end alcoholism, the break up of families, and the disintegration of American souls. Will Rogers summed it up nicely when he said, "Why don't they pass a constitutional amendment prohibiting anybody from learning anything? If it works as well as prohibition did, in five years Americans would be the smartest race of people on Earth."

Prohibition of alcohol is a good example at how the Progressives were not always progressive: prohibition was an old idea and the Progressives were unable to surmise the potential effect of their actions: organized crime figures, bootleggers, and corrupt politicians fought each other for control of liquor distribution. Unscrupulous amateur brewers and distillers added methanol, ethanol, and other chemicals designed to quicken the fermentation process as well as to raise the alcohol level. Of course such chemicals were toxic and had been used as an alternative fuel sources since 1900. Prohibition wrought the same pain and suffering that the Progressive reformers were trying to remove by prohibiting the consumption of alcohol.

Labor Legislation

In 1912, Congress created the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations (CIR) with grudgingly acceptance from President William Taft. Taft was unable to get the Democratic-controlled Congress to allow his appointments, thus the real work of the CIR did not begin in earnest until the election of President Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat. Tasked with enquiring "into the general condition of labor in the principal industries of the United States, including agriculture, and especially in those which are carried on in corporate forms . . . into the growth of associations of employers and of wage earners and the effect of such associations upon the relations between employers and employees," and chaired by Frank Walsh, the committee held hearings for over five months. The CIR consisted of members from labor, agriculture, and industry.

Unable to speak with one voice, the commission ultimately issued three separate reports, reflecting the

three divergent positions of the committee members. Nonetheless, the reports were certainly neither shocking nor did they issue anything new or unknown to American labor. For decades American workers were routinely underpaid, fined for breaking a wide assortment of rules (such as laughing while at work), and shot by private armies, state militias, or even federal troops when workers went on strike. These matters were well known to American workers and were reported in the numerous papers that resulted from the commission's work. It would have taken the twin punch of a massive domestic economic crisis paralleled by an unprecedented international crisis to push federal decision-makers to protect American workers against abuse they had been experiencing since the creation of the first mill in the 1780s.

If any one group benefited from the Progressive era reforms, it possibly could have been children. Americans during the Gilded Age looked upon children rather differently than Americans view children today. Throughout most of U.S. history, children were simply short, young, adults. Children were an integral part of the household income regardless if the family lived on a farm or worked in a factory. In fact, in some career fields children were typically hired over adults, such as in mining, where their smaller, more nimble hands were beneficial. Children were also paid less than their adult counterparts and thus many factories tended to hire children as a way of increasing their profits.

We even look upon children differently today in regards to sex. The age of consent in many states was 12, and some even as low as 10, during the Gilded Age. Having consensual sex with a twelve-year-old today is not only socially repulsive but criminal as well.

Thus, not surprisingly, some reform revolved around the health and welfare of children. Women such as Florence Kelley (graduated from Cornell University) worked with state legislatures to enact policies that would prohibit children from working in dangerous settings, such as in mines. She helped launch the National Consumer League—an organization dedicated to socially responsible consumerism and alleviating the plight of overworked and underpaid factory workers. Yet, her first success was in regards to child labor in factories.

Due in part to her work with Addams as well as her work with the future Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis in persuading the Supreme Court to support legislation curbing the number of hours women were allowed to work outside of the home, Kelley fought to both legally define a “child” and then to prohibit children from working the same hours and under the same conditions as adults. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Illinois state legislature passed the nation's first child labor law prohibiting children (defined as under 14) from working in factories. Illinois' Progressive governor, John Altgeld, appointed Kelley as the state's first female factory inspector, ensuring that all state laws were indeed being applied in Illinois' factories.

In the legal system, children and adults tended to be treated as equals. Children, upon being found guilty of committing crimes, would be sentenced to serve their penalties in the same institutions that housed adult criminals. Thus came the juvenile court system in which social workers, lawyers and judges would be trained in and work with only juveniles. Children got their own jails. These reforms spread from the local, to the state, and eventually to the federal government.

During the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, the role of the federal government expanded to include protecting children as evidenced by the creation of the Children's Bureau in 1912 within the Department of Labor. Reports from the Children's Bureau, helped push through the Keating-Owen Act in 1916. This act prohibited the interstate commerce of commercial goods made by children. The act defined a child as a person no older than thirteen. Two years later the U.S. Supreme Court struck down this early attempt to define and protect children thus ending effective legislation until the administration of Franklin Roosevelt.

Settlement House Movement

So much of the Progressive Era reform was intimately connected to the massive waves of new immigrants and thus in one way the Progressive Era may be examined through the lens of fear: Native-born Americans feared the influx of European immigrants who came to this country without any history of democratic tradition, without any history of capitalism, with religious affiliations that caused many Americans to question the loyalty of these new immigrants, and with entrenched ideas of the acceptance of alcohol at a time when many Americans began to succeed in passing laws and changing minds regarding the consumption of alcohol. According to the census of 1900, 25 percent of the people living in the United States were foreign-born (in the early twenty-first century, the percentage of foreign-born is closer to 5 percent). Thus, you might wonder

just how much of this reform was truly “progressive” to help these immigrants and how much of this reform was about controlling this ever-increasing influx of tired, poor, huddled masses?

One reform that was clearly connected to the new immigrants was the Settlement House Movement. One of the latest and greatest paths of study after the Civil War was that of Social Work. As many Americans viewed women as naturally more moral than men, as many Americans believed that women’s God-given roles revolved around care-giving, and because women successfully entered the public arena in the years following the Civil War by using domestic housekeeping phraseology, it is not surprising that more women than men entered the field of Social work. Graduate students in social work at Smith College located in Northampton, Massachusetts (established in 1871) identified what they believed to be a problem in their part of the state: homelessness. In 1886 students rounded up homeless women, almost all of whom were foreign-born, and housed them in property bought by the college. They then put their social work training to the test. This fieldwork was so wildly popular that it spread from college campus to college campus and shortly was known as the College Settlement Movement.

By 1910, more than 400 of these settlement homes existed. The largest and possibly the most well known of these operations was located on Hull Street in Chicago. Created by a Progressive reformer who worked with Florence Kelley and others to enact protective legislation for children, Jane Addams developed her simple idea into a massive structure that provided training, education, and career opportunities for homeless, single-women and their children. Known as Hull House, Adams provided for the immigrant homeless of Chicago to include dressing like an American, cooking like an American, and introducing them to American past times such as the relatively new game of basketball. These women’s children also received assistance in a new kind of educational opportunity called a kindergarten. “Kindergarten,” or in English “a garden of children,” was, ironically, imported to the U.S. by German immigrants. Possibly due to Adams connections with the WCTU, women at Hull House were also instructed on the evils of alcohol.

Again, the line between assistance and social control was fine and the type of assistance that poor, immigrant women and their children received at Hull House certainly smacked of control. Hull House, ostensibly, helped immigrants in their transition from foreign ways to American ways. The Progressive reformers introduced these poor, tired, huddled masses to American democracy, American capitalism, and of course English.

INFLUENCING CHANGE OR CONTROLLING SOCIETY?

By the early twentieth century, it seemed that these new immigrants were here to stay. Besides, factory owners seemed to need these laborers and thus a constant flow of immigrants might have been the lynchpin in transforming the America from an agricultural-based economy to an industrial-based economy in the decades between the failure of the Cook banking empire and the Great War. Paralleling the largest influx of immigration was the rise of another Progressive Era movement known as Americanization. Although the work of anti-immigration groups continued throughout the twentieth century (such as the American Protective Association, whose members attempted to prevent non-English speaking people from entering the United States), others sought to help immigrants succeed.

Better Movie Movement

Many of these immigrants enjoyed spending what little free time and extra money they might have accumulated on the new American cultural phenomenon known as the movies. There were no rating system, no rules, regulations, or policies that Hollywood was forced to follow. Instead, movie companies eventually developed and loosely adhered to their own list of dos and don’ts but not until after the Supreme Court ruling *Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio* (1915) declared that motion pictures were not covered by the First Amendment, which meant that communities could (and did) pass laws prohibiting certain films from being shown in their theaters. No formal self-censorship codes were in place until 1930 and then the Production Code, as it was called, was not enforced until 1934.

Possibly because movies were relatively inexpensive, many native-born working poor and immigrants were attracted to theaters. In reaction to the lack of regulation combined with the particular crowd of people to be found in movie theaters, Progressive reforms (who were typically middle and upper class professionals) tried to compel state and federal governments to develop and impose an external ratings system upon Hollywood.

This was one area in which reformers failed. Unable to rally governmental support, Progressive groups, such as the WCTU, simply made or produced their own movies. *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, *The Tobacco Plague*, and *Safeguarding the Nation* were all part of the “Better Movie Movement.” These films attempted to demonstrate how alcohol, smoking, and a weak military had an adverse affect upon this nation. What were really nothing more than long public service announcements, these movies, nonetheless, did not successfully make a change to American cultural ideas. Even in the 1930s “message movies” permeated American movie theaters. Films such as *Cocaine Fiends* and *Reefer Madness* are cult classics today but were serious attempts by a coalition of Hollywood and the federal government to curb American’s interest in opiates and marijuana.

Medicine

One of the successes of the Progressive era was the professionalization of the medical field. In the late nineteenth century, Americans successfully stopped the proliferation of patent medicines. Advertised as all natural, effective, and safe remedies for whatever ailed you, patent medicines were usually ineffective, dangerous, poisonous, or addictive drugs based on alcohol or opiates and if you consume enough of either, your troubles, albeit temporarily, just might be abated.

Still, in 1900 all you truly needed to be a medical doctor was a sign stating “the doctor is in.” And many of these doctors had no more medical training than did Lucy in the famous Charles Schultz Peanuts cartoons. While there were plenty of medical schools (such as the newly built Johns Hopkins or the 250-year-old Yale), you did not need a medical degree, or any degree, to work as a medical doctor.

One change to all of this quackery was the development of antiseptics by a British fellow named Lister. A result of external pressure from Progressive reforms and internal pressure from trained medical professionals, the American Medical Association (AMA) was formed in 1902 as a national organization. (The AMA traces its origins to the 1840s but does not become an effective, national organization until the Progressive Era.) In order to practice medicine in the United States you now had to belong to the AMA. In order to belong to the AMA you had to have obtained an undergraduate degree from an accredited institution and then successfully completed an approved medical degree.

In 1906 the AMA investigated 160 medical schools and rated them for their academic rigor. The report was published in 1910 and in 1912 the AMA began to undertake some of the report’s recommendations.

Not all Americans benefited from this professionalization of the medical corps. As most medical schools prohibited women and African Americans from attending, there were very few women and African American doctors after 1902. In addition, most poor and rural women tended to see untrained female medical practitioners while most black people sought medical assistance from black medical practitioners. Because these uncertified, unqualified, and untrained women and black doctors were prohibited from practicing medicine after 1902, many people in the United States lost access to even the most meager type of medical care upon the creation of the AMA.

Country Life Movement

The United States slowly transformed itself from a rural, agricultural society to an urban, industrial society. According to the census of 1900, for the first time in U.S. history the majority of Americans considered themselves to be urban dwellers rather than rural inhabitants. Throughout this transformation, so too developed the idea that an urban lifestyle was more economically viable than a rural lifestyle. And by the early twentieth century, some Americans equated rural America with poverty and decay and urban America with wealth and progress. A good example of this urban-rural split was evidenced in a 1908 report issued by outgoing president Theodore Roosevelt. A rural existence lacked modern necessities such as electricity, factory-made farm equipment (such as John Deere’s latest steel plow or Cyrus McCormick’s mechanical reaper), and a fully equipped kitchen. In regards to the later, Christine Frederick toured the rural South and West, introducing American women to modern conveniences such as dishwashers (introduced at the 1893 Chicago Fair), iceboxes, and new stoves. Frederick was not so much of a Progressive reformer who worked to bring rural women better management over their households, but rather Frederick worked for the big national corporations, such as Sears, J.C. Penny, and Montgomery Ward. She was a salesperson first and foremost but wrapped her sales pitches in the flag of Progressive reform.

Frederick did introduce “scientific management” to women all over this country both personally as well as through the pages of women’s magazines such as *The Ladies Home Journal*. In 1912 she wrote a four-part

article entitled “The New Housekeeping: How it Helps the Woman Who Does Her Own Work.” In it, she offered advice on how to set up the washboard, sink, and table to their optimal heights for women to most effectively complete their work. Scientific management of the kitchen meant not only a place for everything but also the best place for every kitchen gadget, tool, and utensil:

A young bride recently showed me her new kitchen. “Isn’t it a beauty?” she exclaimed. It certainly had modern appliances of every kind, but her stove was in a recess of the kitchen at one end and her pantry was twenty feet away at the opposite end. Every time she wanted to use a frying pan she had to walk twenty feet to get it, and after using it she had to walk twenty feet to put it away.

This question of arrangement and the placing of tables and tools must be considered if the worker is to obtain the highest efficiency.

Frederick was no “Dear Abby” or Julia Child. Rather, she furthered the use of modern inventions in their most meaningful manner in order to help women embrace their God-given role as a domestic. Her promotion and advertising of American consumer culture, although seemingly new in the early twentieth century, certainly foreshadowed the consumer craze of the post-World War II generations.

Prostitution

Progressive reformers connected physical illness with sin to push to end such diseases as syphilis. Syphilis was a rather common disease but by the late nineteenth century, many Americans saw the spread of this sexually transmitted disease as a morality issue: to have syphilis indicated a morally weak person. “Intolerable” was a common response to the widespread nature of this and similar diseases. Because this disease spread through sexual contact (unlike the popular misconceptions that syphilis is spread by shaking hands, using dirty toilet seats, or door knobs) many reformers began to attack what they believed to be the root of the syphilis epidemic: prostitutes.

Without wondering how prostitutes contracted the disease in order to spread it to their customers, Progressive reformers pushed local and state politicians to criminalize the sale of sex. Interestingly, it became illegal for women to work as prostitutes, but it was not illegal for men to engage prostitutes’ offerings, suggesting that the movement to stamp out sin and disease was based on the idea that women originated both the sin and thus the disease (a modern-day application of the Eve-Apple myth).

Jane Addams denounced the codification of prostitution, believing instead that government should examine the root causes of prostitution. Women only become prostitutes, Addams argued, because all respectable career options did not pay as much as prostitution. It was not unusual for immigrant women working in a New York City factory six days a week to make between \$4 and \$20 a month. Official government reports placed the average American woman’s wage at \$6.67 per week.

Prostitutes made in a few minutes what it would take her factory-colleague weeks to make. For example, streetwalkers earned between \$1 and \$5 dollars per trick. An early-twentieth century investigation authored by the 61st Congress (1909-1911) entitled *The Summary Report on the Condition of Women and Children Wage Earners in the United States*, concluded that prostitutes who worked in private homes or brothels typically earned \$20 a day while the owners of the brothels averaged \$50,000 a year. Thus, if women could secure careers that paid them as much as prostitution, no woman would ever elect to become a prostitute, Addams theorized. To successfully end prostitution, Addams suggested that working women be paid the equivalent of their prostitute colleagues. If a telephone operator made as much as a prostitute, then women would swell the telephone operator ranks, thus ending prostitution, thus ending the spread of syphilis.

Needless to say, there was never a meaningful attempt to elevate the pay of working women to the level earned by prostitutes. Ultimately, prostitution was driven underground where criminal elements increasingly controlled the trade.

Woman Suffrage

In the decades following the Civil War, American women sought two parallel tracks in their attempt to achieve political equality. Some sought to amend the Constitution, allowing all women across the country to engage their right to vote through the efforts of the National Women’s Suffrage Association. Others believed that changes to society must come from within the borders of states and worked among state legislatures to pass laws allowing women the right to vote within their state elections, such as the American Women’s Suffrage Association. Before the end of the nineteenth century, these two groups came together and formed

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