

Chapter 29- Progressivism and the Republican Roosevelt

1901-1912

Progressive Roots

- There were nearly 76 million Americans in 1900; a reform movement right convulsed the ethnically and racially mixed American people after the twentieth century had dawned
- The roots of the new reformist wave went back the Green Labor party and Populists and to the mounting unrest as grasping industrialists concentrated more and more power in fewer hands
- Progressive theorists—society could no longer afford the luxury of laissez-faire policy
- Populists branded the “bloated trusts” with the stigma of corruption and wrongdoing
- Henry Lloyd charged into the Standard Oil Company with *Wealth Against Commonwealth*
- Thorstein Veblen assailed the new rich in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899, 1894 ↑)
- Jacob Riis shocked middle-class with *How the Other Half Lives*, an account of the NY slums
- Theodore Dreiser battered promoters and profiteers in *The Financier* and *The Titan*
- Socialists began to register appreciable strength at the ballot box
- Messengers of the social gospel promoted a brand of progressivism (using religious doctrine)
- Feminists added social justice to suffrage on list of needed reforms (Jane Addams, Lillian Wald)

Raking Muck with the Muckrakers

- By 1902 the exposing of evil became a flourishing industry among American publishers
- A group of aggressive ten- and fifteen-cent magazines surged to the front; editors financed extensive research and encouraged writing by reports branded “muckrakers” by Roosevelt
- Lincoln Steffens unmasked the corrupt alliance between big business and municipal government and Ida Tarbell published a devastating factual expose of the Standard Oil Company
- Muckrakers roasted the beef trust, the “money trust,” the railroad barons, and corrupt fortunes
- Thomas Lawson, a speculator, laid bare the practices of his accomplices in “Frenzied Finance”
- David G. Phillips wrote *The Treason of the Senate*—senators represented companies not people
- The most effective fire of the muckrakers was directed at social evils—prostitution, slums, industrial accidents, subjugation of American blacks, and abuses of child labor

- The muckrakers signified much about the nature of the progressive reform movement
- To right social wrongs, they counted on publicity and an aroused public conscience

Political Progressivism

- Progressive reformers were mainly middle-class men and women felt pressure from new giant corporations, restless immigrant hordes, and the aggressive labor unions
- The progressives sought two goals: to use state power to curb the trusts and to stem the socialist threat by generally improving the common person's conditions of life and labor
- Progressivism was less a minority movement and more a majority mood
- An objective was to regain the power that had slipped from the people into those "interests"
- They favored the "initiative" so that voters could directly propose legislation themselves, "referendum," which would place laws on the ballot for final approval by the people, and "recall," which would enable voters to remove faithless elected officials
- Rooting out graft became a prime goal of earnest progressives—the secret Australian ballot was being introduced more widely in the states to counteract boss rule
- Direct election of U.S. senators became a favorite goal of progressives—"Millionaires' Club"
- Partly as a result of such pressures from state legislatures, the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution (1913) established the direct election of United States senators
- Woman suffrage received powerful new support from the progressives early in the 1900s
- Political reforms believed that women's votes would elevate the political tone
- Many states, especially the liberal ones in the West, gradually extended the vote to women

Progressivism in the Cities and States

- Frustrated by inefficiency and corruption of government many localities followed example of Galveston, Texas—in 1901 it had appointed expert-staffed commissions to manage urban affairs
- Urban reforms likewise attacked "slumlords," juvenile delinquency, and wide-open prostitution
- Progressivism bubbled up to the state level, notably in Wisconsin, which tested new reform
- Governor Robert La Follette wrested considerable control from the crooked corporations and returned it to the people—he perfected a scheme for regulating public utilities
- States marched steadily toward the progressive camp, as they undertook to regulate railroads and trusts, chiefly through public utilities commissions—Oregon and California followed

Progressive Women

- A crucial focus for women's activism was the settlement house movement—door to public life
- They exposed middle-class women to problems in cities: poverty, corruption, and conditions
- The women's club movement provided a broader civic entryway for many middle-class women
- Literary clubs set aside literature for social issues and current events (moral and maternal issues)
- Nineteenth-century notions of "separate spheres" dictated that a woman's place was at home
- Most female progressives defended their new activities as an extension of traditional roles
- Female activists agitated through organizations like the Women's Trade Union League, the National Consumers League, and federal agencies—Children's Bureau and Women's Bureau
- Campaigns for factory reform and temperance particularly attracted women (unsafe)
- *Muller v. Oregon*—Supreme Court accepted constitutionality of laws protecting women workers
- Reformist progressive wave finally washed up into the judiciary and in 1917 the Court upheld a ten-hour law for factory workers—laws regulating factories were worthless if not enforced
- Fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in NYC forced stricter legislation on factory work
- Corner saloons attracted the ire and fire of progressives—link between alcohol and prostitution
- Antiliquor campaigners received support from the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) founded by Frances E. Williard, who allied with the Anti-Saloon League
- Some states passed "dry" laws, which controlled, restricted, or abolished alcohol
- Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 floored, temporarily, demon rum and alcohol

TR's Square Deal

- Theodore Roosevelt feared that the "public interest" was being submerged in indifference
- Roosevelt demanded a "Square Deal" for capital, labor, and the public—his program embraced three C's: control of corporations, consumer protection, and conservation of natural resources
- In 1902, a crippling strike broke out in the anthracite coal mines of Pennsylvania
- Long exploited, the workers demanded a 20 percent increase in pay and a nine-hour workday
- Mine owners, confident the public would react against the miners, refused to negotiate
- As coal supplies dwindled, Roosevelt summoned representatives of striking miners and owners
- Roosevelt threatened to seize the mines and operate them with federal troops

- Faced with the first-time-ever threat to use federal bayonets against capital, the owners consented and a compromise decision ultimately gave mines a 10% increase and 9 hour day
- Roosevelt urged Congress to create the new Department of Commerce and Labor (1903)
- An important arm was the Bureau of Corporations, which was authorized to probe businesses engaged in interstate commerce—highly useful in helping break stranglehold of monopoly

TR Corrals the Corporations

- The Interstate Commerce Commission (1887) proved woefully inadequate
- Spurred by Roosevelt, Congress passed effective railroad legislation—Elkins Act of 1903
- This curb was aimed at the rebate evil and heavy fines could now be imposed both on the railroads that gave rebates and on the shippers that accepted rebates
- The Hepburn Act of 1906 severely restricted free passes, with the hint of bribery—the Interstate Commerce Commission was expanded to include express, sleeping car, and pipeline companies
- Roosevelt concluded that there were “good” trusts, with public consciences, and “bad” trusts, which lusted for power—he was determined to respond to the popular outcry against trusts
- As a trustbuster, he burst into headlines with an attack on the Northern Securities Company
- In the *Northern Securities* decision, the Northern Securities Company had to be dissolved
- Roosevelt’s big stick crashed down on other giant monopolies (beef, sugar, fertilizer, harvest)
- TR believed the hallmarks of the age to be combination and integration; by assaulting industry was symbolic: to prove conclusively that the government, not private business, ruled the country
- Roosevelt felt that the threat of dissolution would allow for easier federal regulation (Roosevelt’s successor, William Howard Taft, actually “Busted” more trusts than TR did)

Caring for the Consumer

- American big meatpackers were being shut out of European markets because of tainted meat
- Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle*, helped bring in reform concerning slaughterhouses
- Backed by the public, Roosevelt induced Congress to pass the Meat Inspection Act of 1906, which decreed that preparation of meat shipped over states was subject to federal inspection
- The largest packers accepted it as an opportunity to drive out fly-by-night competitors and at the same time, they could receive the government’s seal of approval on their exports
- The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 was designed to prevent mislabeling of foods/drugs

Earth Control

- Western ranchers and timbermen were especially eager to accelerate the destructive process
- A first step toward conservation was the Desert Land Act of 1877, under which the federal gov't sold arid land cheaply on the condition that the purchaser irrigate the soil in three years
- The Forest Reserve Act of 1891 authorized the president to set aside public forests as national parks and reserves; the Carey Act of 1894 distributed federal land to states to be settled/irrigated
- A naturalist, Roosevelt seized the banner of leadership and charged into the fray with his prestige
- Congress responded to whip of the Rough Rider by passing the landmark Newlands Act of 1902
- Washington was authorized to collect money from the sale of public lands in the western states and then use these funds for the development of irrigation projects (Roosevelt Dam, Salt River)
- Roosevelt pined to preserve the nation's shrinking forest—only about 25% of timber remained
- He set aside in federal reserves 125 million acres, earmarked millions of acres of coal deposits
- Roosevelt's conservation was buoyed by a concern about the disappearance of the frontier
- Jack London's *Call of the Wild* and other books about nature (Boy Scouts of America)
- The Sierra Club dedicated itself to preserving the wildness of the western landscape
- Preservationists lost a major battle in 1913 when the federal government allowed SF to build a dam for its municipal water supply in the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park
- Pinchot, Roosevelt's chief forester, and Roosevelt wanted to use the nation's natural endowment intelligently—against greedy commercial interests and against romantic preservationists
- Under TR, professional foresters developed a policy of "multiple-use resource management"
- They sought to combine recreation, sustained-yield logging, watershed protection, stock grazing
- Many westerners at first resisted the federal management of natural resources but soon adapted

The "Roosevelt Panic" of 1907

- Roosevelt entered his new term in 1904 buoyed by his enormous personal popularity

- Conservative Republican bosses considered him as dangerous and unpredictable as a rattlesnake His second term called for regulating corporations, taxing incomes, and protecting workers
- After his election in 1904, Roosevelt declared that he would run for a third term—lost influence
- Panic in 1907 featured frightened “runs” on banks, suicides, and indictments against speculators
- The financial world blamed Roosevelt for the storm—branded the “Roosevelt panic”—Roosevelt accused wealthy of engineering the monetary crisis to force gov’t to relax assaults on trusts
- The panic of 1907 laid need for fiscal reforms—Congress formed the Aldrich-Vreeland Act, which authorized national banks to issue emergency currency backed up by collateral
- The path was thus smoothed for the momentous Federal Reserve Act of 1913

The Rough Rider Thunders Out

- Still popular in 1908, Roosevelt could have almost certainly won the election but was bound
- The departing president choose William Howard Taft, secretary of war and mild progressive
- As the successor who would carry out his policies (control of party machinery—steamroller)
- William Jennings Bryan was chosen again for the Democrats and the majority of voters chose stability with Roosevelt-endorsed Taft—Eugene Debs amassed half a million votes for Socialists
- Roosevelt’s adversaries branded him as a radical—TR’s enthusiasm and youthfulness appealed
- He served to protect capitalists against popular indignation and against socialism
- Roosevelt enlarged the power and prestige of the presidential office, he helped shape the progressive movement, his Square Deal was the precedent of the New Deal of FDR, and TR opened the eyes of Americans to the fact that they shared the world with other nations

Taft: A Round Peg in a Square Hole

- William Howard Taft, the biggest of Presidents, was personally popular and inspired confidence
- Roosevelt had led conflicting elements of Republican party by sheer force of his personality but Taft generally adopted an attitude of passivity toward Congress—poor judge of public opinion
- “Peaceful Bill” was a mild progressive but he was more wedded to the status quo than to change

The Dollar Goes Abroad as a Diplomat

- Taft used the level of American investments to boost American political interest abroad, an approach to foreign policy that his critics denounced as “dollar diplomacy”
- Washington encouraged bankers to use surplus dollars into foreign areas of strategic concern
- By preempting investors from rival powers, bankers would strengthen American defenses and foreign polices, while bringing further prosperity to their homeland—dollar supplanted big stick
- China’s Manchuria was object of Taft’s most spectacular effort to inject the dollar into Far East
- Taft saw Manchurian railway as a possible strangulation of Chinese economic interest but when Secretary of State Knox proposed that US buy Manchurian railroads, Japan and Russia declined
- Another trouble spot was the revolution-riddled Caribbean—the US under the Monroe Doctrine would not permit foreign nations to intervene, and felt obligated to put money in the Caribbean
- Sporadic disorders in Cuba, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic brought American forces to these countries to restore order and protect American investment—upheaval in Nicaragua

Taft the Trustbuster

- Taft managed to gain some fame as a smasher of monopolies—he actually brought on more suits
- The most sensational judicial actions during the Taft regime came in 1911 when the Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of the Standard Oil Company, which was judged to be a combination in restraint of trade in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890
- The Court also handed down its famous “rule of reason,” a doctrine which held that only combinations that “unreasonably” restrained trade were illegal—hole in gov’t antitrust net
- In 1911 Taft decided to press an antitrust suit against the U.S. Steel Corporation—infuriated Roosevelt who had been involved in one of the mergers that prompted the suit (used be protégé)

Taft Splits the Republican Party

- Lowering the barriers of the protective tariff was high on the agenda of the progressive members of the Republican party—at first they thought they had a friend and ally in Taft
- The House passed a moderately reductive bill but senatorial reactionaries tacked on upward tariff revisions (Taft had promised to reduce tariffs and approached Congress in 1909)
- Taft signed the Payne-Aldrich Bill betraying his campaign promises and outraging the progressive wing of his party, heavily drawn from the Midwest (Taft’s poor conservation)

- He established the Bureau of Mines to control mineral resources, rescued millions of acres of coal lands, and protected waterpowers sites from private development
- Ballinger-Pinchot quarrel erupted in 1910 and erased his accomplishments from the public mind
- Secretary of the Interior Ballinger opened public lands in Wyoming, Montana, and Alaska to corporate development and was criticized by Pinchot, chief of Agriculture Department's Forestry
- Taft dismissed Pinchot on insubordination and protest arose from conservationists and Roosevelt
- The reformist wing of the Republican party was now up and Taft was being pushed into the embrace of the Old Guard—in 1910, the Grand Old Party was split wide open
- Roosevelt returned and proclaimed his new doctrine of "New Nationalist," which urged the national government to increase its power to remedy economic and social abuses
- Weakened by internal divisions, Republicans lost badly in the congressional elections of 1910

The Taft-Roosevelt Rupture

- In 1911, the National Progressive Republican League was formed with Senator La Follette of Wisconsin its leading candidate for Republican presidential nomination but Roosevelt seized the Progressive banner and the Rough Rider came clattering into the presidential primaries
- A Taft-Roosevelt explosion was near in 1912 when Republican convention met in Chicago
- The Roosevelt supporters were about 100 delegates short of winning the nomination
- Most of these contests were arbitrarily settled in favor of Taft (challenging right of seats)
- The Roosevelt adherents in the end refused to vote and Taft triumphed
- Roosevelt refused to quit the game and was on fire to lead a third-party crusade