

AS3238/HY3238
The Political History of the U.S.

Week 7 (The Age of Reform)

28 February 2023

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Agenda for Today

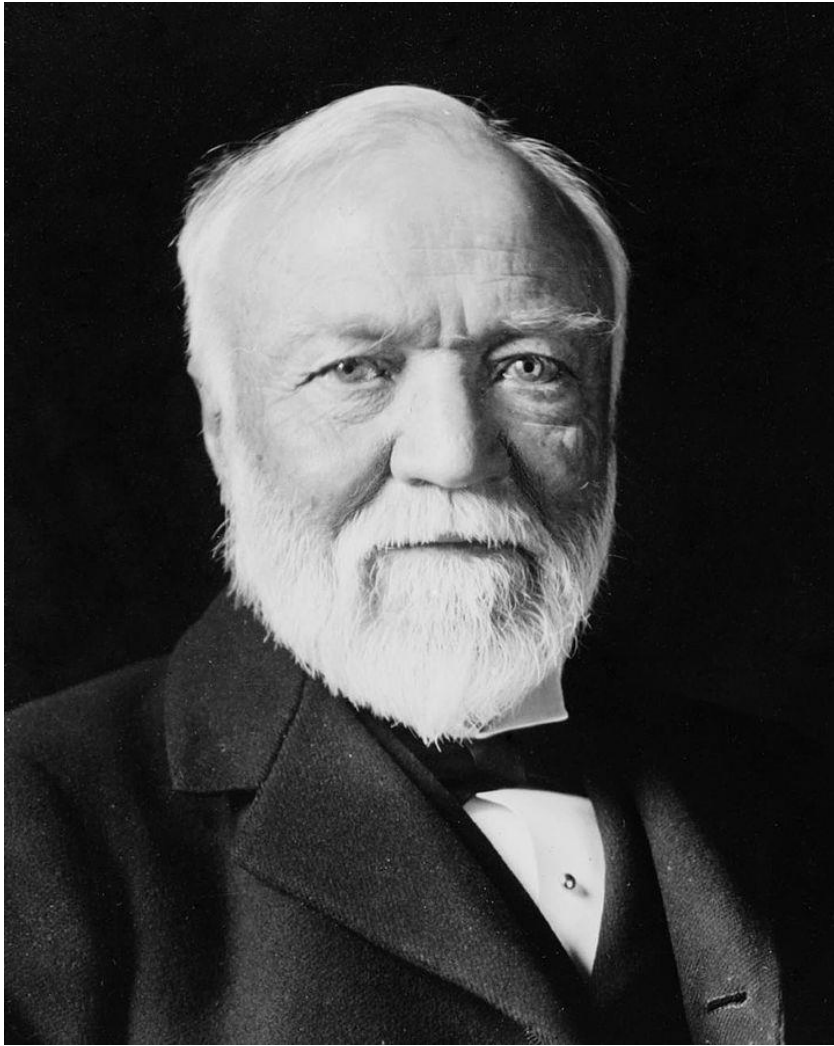
- ▶ The Gilded Age and the Progressive Era
- ▶ The Progressive Presidents: TR and Wilson
- ▶ World War I and American Politics

How Did the Presidency Change in the Early Twentieth Century?

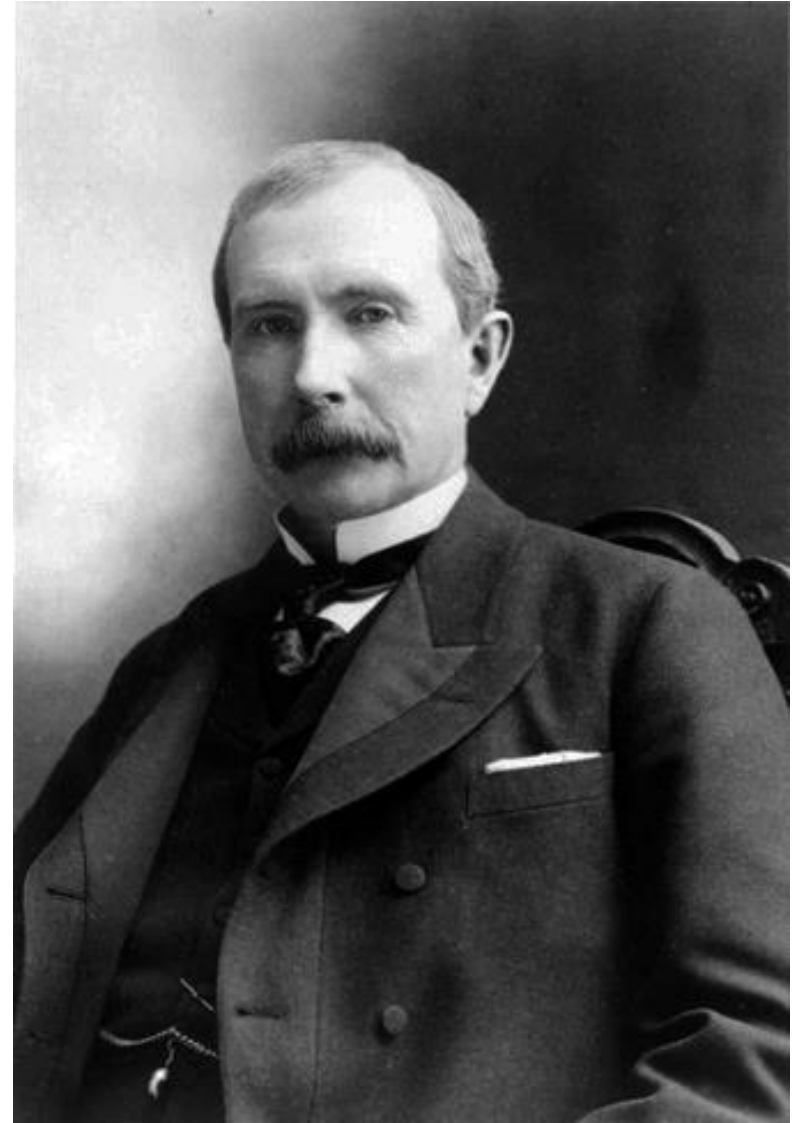
The Gilded Age (ca. 1870s-1890s)

- ▶ A derogatory name (after the title of an 1873 novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner)
- ▶ Economic gap + political corruption
 - by 1890, the top 1 percent of Americans received the same total income as the bottom half of the population.

The Rise of Industrial Giants



Andrew Carnegie (steel)



John D. Rockefeller (oil)



Equality? A nation of farmers?



Palo Alto Spring (1878): railroad magnate Leland Stanford & family

The “new immigrants” and poverty



- ▶ 1890s: 3.5 million people entered the U.S.
- ▶ Many European immigrants arrived from southern and eastern Europe (←→Northern Europe)



- ▶ “Emigrants [i.e. immigrants] landing at Ellis Island” (1903)
- ▶ <https://www.loc.gov/item/00694367>





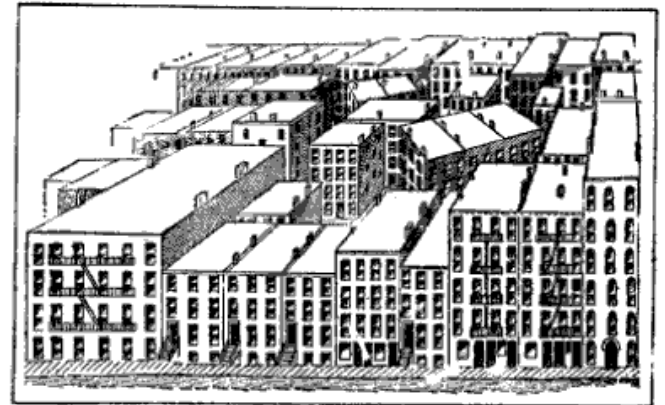
Little Italy, NYC, ca. 1900



- ▶ 1890 : Jacob Riis(1849-1914), *How the Other Half Lives*



How the Other Half Lives



By
Jacob A. Riis



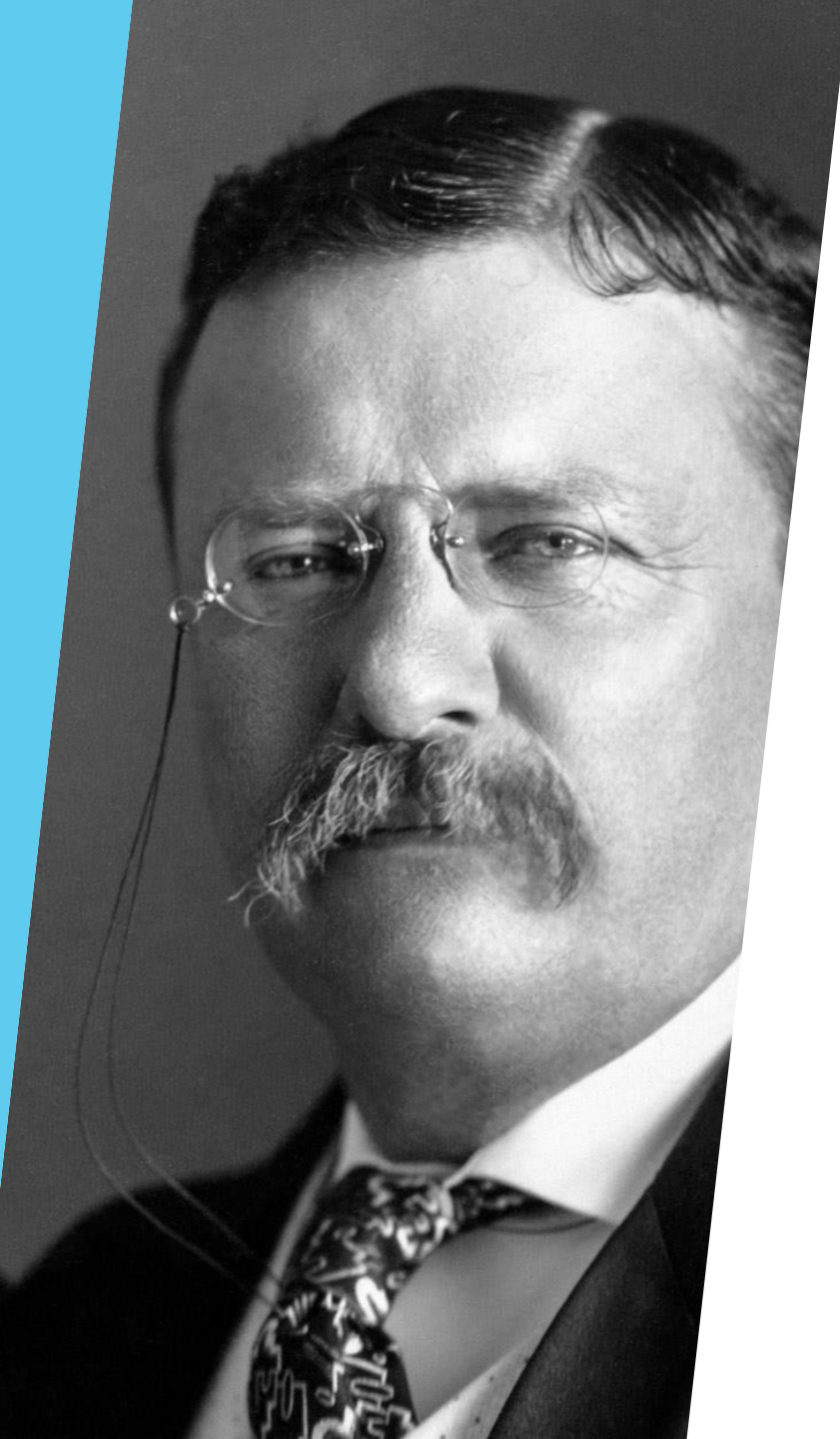
- ▶ Social Darwinism, lack of public relief, lack of governmental regulations (limited government + free market, no personal/corporate income tax)



Photograph by Lewis Hine, 1908 <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2015/07/child-labor-in-america-100-years-ago/397478/>

The Progressive Era (late 19c-WWI)

- ▶ A period of social and political reform led largely by middle-class men and women
- ▶ “Progressivism”— “a broad effort to impose order and justice on a society that seemed to be approaching chaos” (Alan Brinkley), “a broad, loosely defined political movement of individuals and groups who hoped to bring about significant change in American social and political life” (Eric Foner)
- ▶ Hard to define (social efficiency/top-down? democracy/bottom-up?) but they shared the belief in progress, knowledge and expertise, and the role of government in social reform
- ▶ Addressed wide-ranging issues (local→national): economic regulations, workers’ rights, child labor, women’s rights
- ▶ The presidency became the most important vehicle of national reform→the rise of the national state/modern presidency (nationalization in American society)



Theodore Roosevelt (26th President: (1901-1909))

- ▶ Born into an affluent, upper-class family: shared some values with others in his class (disdain for radicalism), yet he also split with them (thought politics was a noble enterprise)
- ▶ Became the youngest US president at the age of 42.
- ▶ Became a model for 20th century presidents (an official actively engaged in domestic and foreign affairs)

TR and the Making of a Modern Presidency

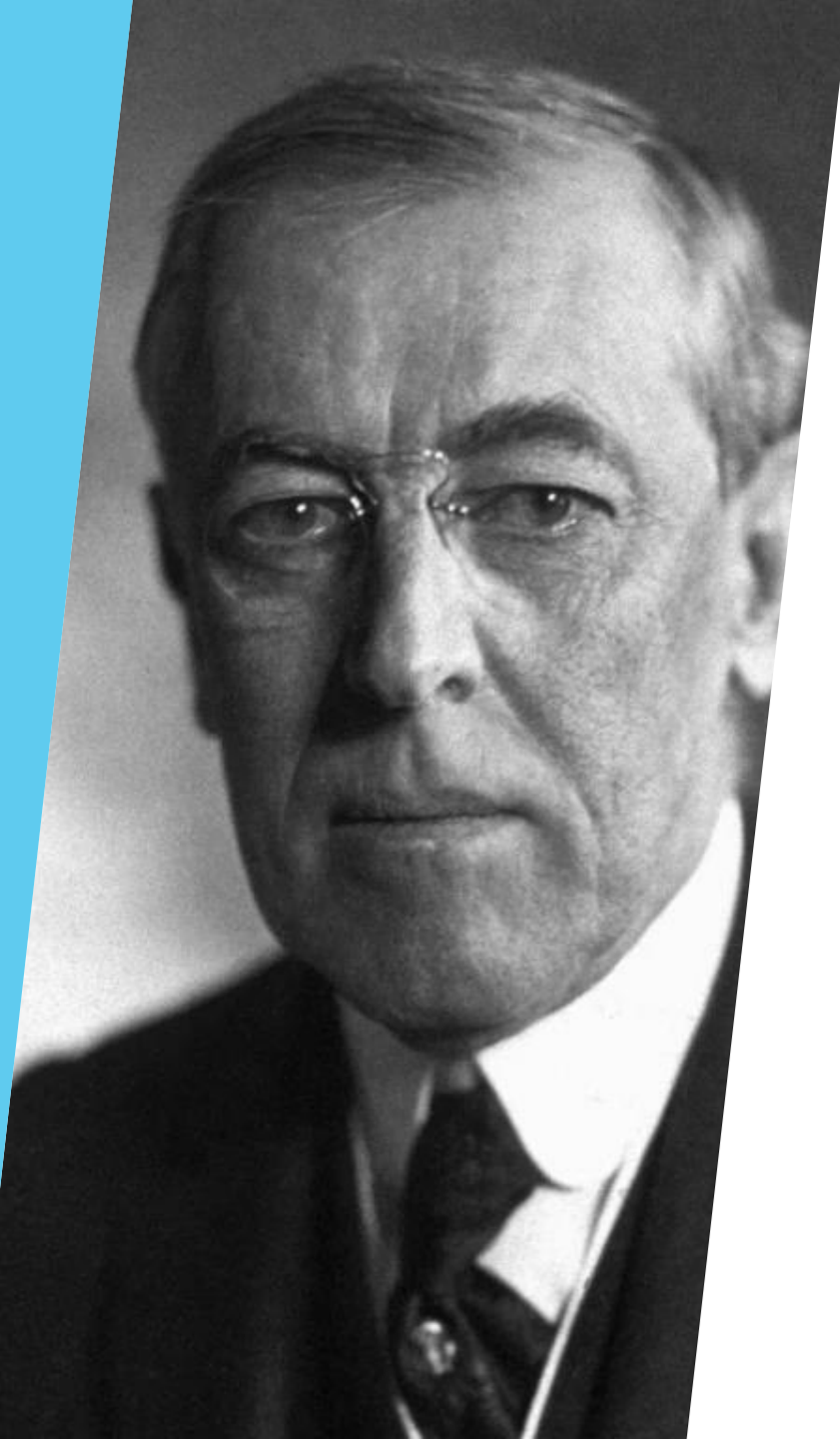
- ① President as the “steward of the people” (↔partisanship): considered that P should take whatever necessary action for the interest of the public, unless prohibited by law or the Constitution.
- ② Reached out directly to the public: assumed office as a celebrity, offered journalists a permanent spot in the White House→expanded the press corps and the role of the media in politics.
- ③ The 1st P wholly committed to using his power to solve social issues: championed antitrust laws and federal economic regulation (→the P as a legislative leader)

- ▶ Why is he ranked so highly among US presidents despite his active participation in US imperialism?

→ academic bias (US political history as a white men's field, domestic policy > foreign policy, imperialism as a temporary departure from the norm) + TR's accomplishments in modernizing the Presidency

The Election of 1912

- ▶ TR (Progressive Party), Taft (Republican Party), Wilson (Democratic Party), Eugene V. Debs (Socialist Party)
 - ▶ New Nationalism: recognized economic concentration and called for the use of government to regulate and control it.
 - ▶ New Freedom: held the view that big business was unjust/inefficient and should be destroyed.
- two competing strands of progressivism (but both believed that the gov had a role to play in the economy).



Woodrow Wilson (28th President: (1913-1921))

- ▶ Born in VA, son of a Presbyterian minister (which accounts for his stern character), 1st and only P with a PhD
- ▶ Served as president of Princeton and governor of NJ before becoming P.
- ▶ Activist presidency (built on TR's precedent): promoted domestic reform (including economic policies that appeared to be in line with New Nationalism), held regular press conferences, sought a larger role for the US in intl affairs.

WWI and US Politics

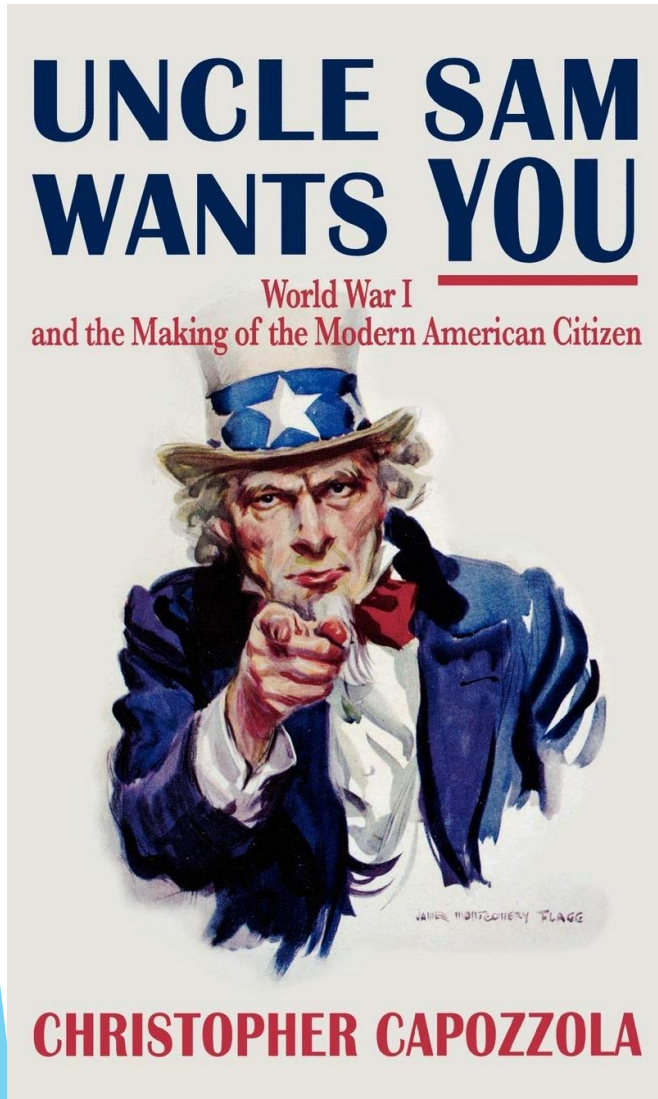
- ▶ 1914: W declares US neutrality
- ▶ The rise of the “preparedness” movement
- ▶ March 1917: the “Zimmermann Telegram,” the Russian revolution (overthrow of the czar, WWI as despotism vs democracy) → April 1917: declaration of war



Military training at the University of Connecticut

<https://blogs.lib.uconn.edu/archives/2016/03/28/rotc-turns-100-uconn-and-military-training-part-one-the-early-years-1893-1920/>

Selective Service



- ▶ The Selective Service Act of 1917: established the first universal conscription system in U.S. history (universal registration + selective induction)
- ▶ 72% of US servicepeople were draftees (a drastic departure from the US tradition of relying on volunteers)

WWI as a Golden Opportunity for Reform?

- ▶ Many progressives saw WWI as a chance to realize their vision of economic rationalization, economic justice, and national unity. E.g. war as a “plastic juncture” in history (John Dewey)
- ▶ Votes for women (the ratification of the 19th Amendment, 1920)
- ▶ The restriction of the freedom of speech, the coercion of patriotism (“hamburger” → “liberty sandwich”), the “Americanization” of white immigrants, the indifference of progressives to the issue of race.

The Wilsonian Moment

- ▶ The global impact of the Fourteen Points → Manela
- ▶ Wilson's fight over the Treaty of Versailles:
- ▶ 1) Paris Peace Conference (1919): the Allied powers were more concerned with maintaining their empires and ensuring that Germany would never again be a military threat to the rest of Europe (reparations + military power restrictions).
- ▶ 2) U.S. Senate: worried that the League would limit the US's freedom of action (some senators would have approved the treaty if guaranteed that the collective security commitment as a League member would not exceed the ability of Congress to declare war, but Wilson refused to negotiate). → treaty rejected.

The Lasting Legacy of Wilson

- ▶ Wilson's coupling of idealism (the preaching of democracy, open markets, a world of free people) + power politics (intervention abroad, often militarily, to advance US interests and values) → followed by succeeding US presidents.



Mid-term essay:

Due: March 7