

admired the Japanese, judging them “the most dashing fighters in the world,” but he did not want Japan to become too strong in Asia.

When good relations with Japan were jeopardized by California’s blatant racism manifested in segregated public schools for Asians, Roosevelt smoothed over the incident and negotiated the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” in 1907, which allowed the Japanese to save face by voluntarily restricting immigration to the United States. To demonstrate America’s naval power and to counter Japan’s growing bellicosity, Roosevelt dispatched the Great White Fleet, sixteen of the navy’s most up-to-date battleships, on a “goodwill mission” around the world. U.S. relations with Japan improved, and in the 1908 Root-Takahira agreement the two nations pledged to maintain the Open Door and support the status quo in the Pacific. Roosevelt’s show of American force constituted a classic example of his dictum, “Speak softly but carry a big stick.”



The Troubled Presidency of William Howard Taft

Roosevelt promised on the eve of his election in 1904 that he would not seek another term. In 1909, at the age of fifty, he retired from the presidency and removed himself from the political scene by going on safari in Africa. Roosevelt

turned the White House over to his handpicked successor, William Howard Taft, a lawyer who had served as governor-general of the Philippines. Affectionately known as “Big Bill,” Taft had served as Roosevelt’s right-hand man in the cabinet. In the presidential election of 1908, Taft soundly defeated the perennial Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan.

A genial man with a talent for law, Taft had no experience in elective office, no feel for politics, and no nerve for controversy. His ambitious wife coveted the office and urged him to seek it. He would have been better off listening to his mother, who warned, “Roosevelt is a good fighter and enjoys it, but the malice of politics would make you miserable.” Sadly for Taft, his wife suffered a stroke in his first months in office, leaving him grieving and without his strongest ally.

Once in office, Taft proved a perfect tool in the hands of Republicans who yearned for a return to the days of a less active executive. A lawyer by training and instinct, Taft believed that it was up to the courts, not the president, to arbitrate social issues. Roosevelt had carried presidential power to a new level, often flouting the separation of powers and showing thinly veiled contempt for Congress and the courts. He believed that the president had the legal right to act as steward of the people, and to do anything

necessary “unless the Constitution or the laws explicitly forbid him to do it.” Taft found such presidential activism difficult to condone. Although he pursued the trusts vigorously, he acted more as a judge than a steward. Wary of the progressive insurgents in Congress, Taft relied increasingly on conservatives in the Republican Party. As a progressive senator lamented, “Taft is a ponderous and amiable man completely surrounded by men who know exactly what they want.”

Taft’s troubles began on the eve of his inaugural, when he called a special session of Congress to deal with the tariff. Roosevelt had been too politically astute to tackle the troublesome tariff issue, even though he knew that rates needed to be lowered. Taft blundered into the fray, hoping to use public opinion to get a tariff reduction. But by the time Congress finished tinkering with the rate schedule, the Payne-Aldrich bill that emerged actually raised the tariff, benefiting big business and the trusts at the expense of consumers.

As if paralyzed, Taft neither fought for changes nor vetoed the measure. On a tour of the Midwest in 1909, he was greeted with jeers when he claimed, “I think the Payne bill is the best bill that the Republican Party ever passed.” In the eyes of a growing number of Americans, Taft’s praise of the tariff made him either a fool or a liar.

Taft's legalism soon got him into hot water in the area of conservation. He undid Roosevelt's work to preserve hydroelectric power sites when he learned that they had been improperly designated as ranger stations. And when Gifford Pinchot publicly denounced Taft's secretary of the interior as a tool of western land-grabbers, Taft fired Pinchot, touching off a storm of controversy that damaged Taft and alienated Roosevelt. When Roosevelt returned from Africa, Pinchot was among the first to greet him with a half dozen letters from progressives complaining about Taft's leadership.

Roosevelt returned to the United States in June 1910, where he received a hero's welcome and attracted a stream of visitors and reporters seeking his advice and opinions. Hurt, Taft kept his distance. By late summer, Roosevelt had taken sides with the progressive insurgents in his party. "Taft is utterly hopeless as a leader," Roosevelt confided to his son as he set out on a speaking tour of the West. Reading the mood of the country, Roosevelt began to sound more and more like a candidate.

With the Republican Party divided, the Democrats swept the congressional elections of 1910. Branding the Payne-Aldrich tariff "the mother of trusts," they captured a majority in the House of Representatives and won several key governorships. The revitalized Democratic Party could look

to new leaders, among them the progressive governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson.

The new Democratic majority in the House, working with progressive Republicans in the Senate, achieved a number of key reforms, including legislation to regulate railroad safety, to create the Children's Bureau in the Department of Labor, and to establish an eight-hour day for federal workers and miners. Two significant constitutional amendments — the Sixteenth Amendment, which provided for a modest graduated income tax, and the Seventeenth Amendment, which called for the direct election of senators (formerly chosen by state legislatures) — went to the states, where they would win ratification in 1913. While Congress rode the high tide of progressive reform, Taft sat on the sidelines.

In foreign policy, Taft continued Roosevelt's policy of extending U.S. influence abroad, but here, too, Taft had a difficult time following Roosevelt. Taft's "dollar diplomacy" championed commercial goals, rather than the strategic aims Roosevelt had pursued. Taft naively assumed he could substitute "dollars for bullets." In the Caribbean, he provoked anti-American feeling by dispatching U.S. Marines to Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic in 1912 pursuant to the Roosevelt Corollary. In Asia, he openly avowed his intent to promote "active intervention to secure for ... our capitalists opportunity for profitable investment." Lacking

Roosevelt's understanding of power politics, Taft failed to recognize that an aggressive commercial policy could not exist without the willingness to use military might to back it up.

Taft faced the limits of dollar diplomacy when revolution broke out in Mexico in 1911. Under pressure to protect American investments, he mobilized troops along the border. In the end, however, with no popular support for a war with Mexico, he had to fall back on diplomatic pressure to salvage American interests.

Taft's greatest dream was to encourage world peace through the use of a world court and arbitration. He unsuccessfully sponsored a series of arbitration treaties that Roosevelt, who prized national honor more than international law, vehemently opposed as weak and cowardly. By 1910, Roosevelt had become a vocal critic of Taft's foreign policy.

The final breach between Taft and Roosevelt came in 1911, when Taft's attorney general filed an antitrust suit against U.S. Steel. In its brief against the corporation, the government cited Roosevelt's agreement with the Morgan interests in the 1907 acquisition of Tennessee Coal and Iron. The incident greatly embarrassed Roosevelt. Either he had been hoodwinked or he had colluded with Morgan. Neither

idea pleased him. Thoroughly enraged, he lambasted Taft's "archaic" antitrust policy and hinted that he might be persuaded to run for president again.

REVIEW

What advances in the progressive agenda were made at the federal level between 1901 and 1913?

How did progressivism evolve during Woodrow Wilson's first term?

Disillusionment with Taft resulted in a split in the Republican Party and the creation of a new Progressive Party that rallied to Theodore Roosevelt. In the election of 1912, four candidates styled themselves “progressives,” but it was Democrat Woodrow Wilson, with a minority of the popular vote, who won the presidency. He would continue Roosevelt's presidential power and help enact progressive legislation.



Library of Congress/Getty Images.

Woodrow Wilson Woodrow Wilson, the Democrats' presidential nominee in 1912, speaks to an outdoor campaign rally in New York City. Note the absence of a microphone. Wilson, a former professor of political science and president of Princeton University and recently elected governor of New Jersey, gave carefully phrased, logical, and clear speeches in a somewhat professorial style that contrasted with the charisma of the Bull Moose candidate, Theodore Roosevelt.

Progressive Insurgency and the Election of 1912

Convinced that Taft was inept, in February 1912 Roosevelt declared his candidacy for the Republican nomination, announcing, "My hat is in the ring." Taft, with

uncharacteristic strength, refused to step aside. As he bitterly told a journalist, “Even a rat in a corner will fight.” Roosevelt took advantage of newly passed primary election laws and ran in thirteen states, winning 278 delegates to Taft’s 48. But at the Chicago convention, Taft’s bosses refused to seat the Roosevelt delegates. Fistfights broke out on the convention floor as Taft steamrolled the convention to win nomination on the first ballot. Crying robbery, Roosevelt’s supporters bolted the party.

Seven weeks later, in the same Chicago auditorium, the hastily organized Progressive Party met to nominate Roosevelt. Full of reforming zeal, the delegates chose Roosevelt and Hiram Johnson to head the new party. Jane Addams seconded Roosevelt’s nomination. “I have been fighting for progressive principles for thirty years,” she told the enthusiastic crowd. “This is the first time there has been a chance to make them effective. This is the biggest day of my life.” The new party lustily approved the most ambitious platform since that of the Populists. Planks called for woman suffrage, presidential primaries, conservation of natural resources, an end to child labor, workers’ compensation, a living wage for both men and women workers, social security, health insurance, and a federal income tax.

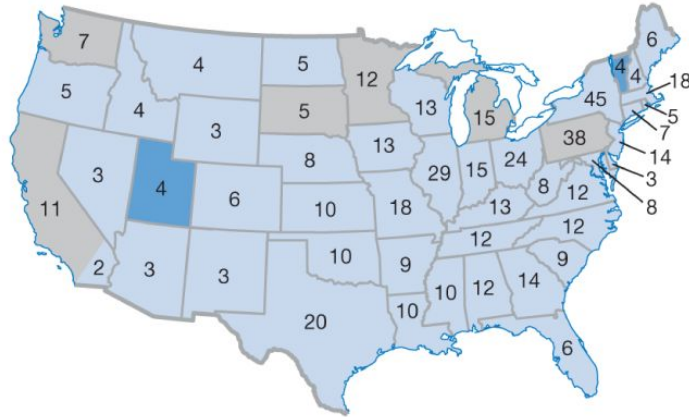
Roosevelt arrived in Chicago to accept the nomination and announced that he felt “as fit as a bull moose,” giving the

new party a nickname and a mascot. With characteristic vigor, he launched his campaign with the exhortation, "We stand at Armageddon and do battle for the Lord!" But for all the excitement and the cheering, the new Progressive Party was doomed, and the candidate knew it. Privately he confessed to a friend, "I am under no illusion about it. It is a forlorn hope." The people may have supported Roosevelt, but the politicians, even progressives like La Follette, refused to back the new party. The Democrats, delighted at the split in the Republican ranks, nominated Woodrow Wilson, the governor of New Jersey.

Voters in 1912 could choose among four candidates who claimed to be progressives. Taft, Roosevelt, and Wilson each embraced the label, and even the Socialist candidate, Eugene V. Debs, styled himself a progressive. That the term *progressive* could stretch to cover these diverse candidates underscored major disagreements in progressive thinking about the relationship between business and government. Taft, in spite of his trust-busting, was generally viewed as the candidate of the Republican Old Guard. Debs urged voters to support the Socialist Party as the true spirit of the working class. The real contest for the presidency came down to a fight between Roosevelt and Wilson and the two political philosophies summed up in their respective campaign slogans: "[The New Nationalism](#)" and "[The New Freedom](#)."

The New Nationalism expressed Roosevelt's belief in federal planning and regulation. He accepted the inevitability of big business but demanded that government act as "a steward of the people" to regulate the giant corporations. Wilson, schooled in the Democratic principles of limited government and states' rights, set a markedly different course with his New Freedom. He promised to use antitrust legislation to get rid of big corporations and to give small businesses and farmers better opportunities in the marketplace.

The energy and enthusiasm of the Bull Moosers made the race seem closer than it was. In the end, the Republican vote split, while the Democrats remained united. No candidate claimed a majority in the race. Wilson captured a bare 42 percent of the popular vote. Roosevelt and his Bull Moose Party won 27 percent, an unprecedented tally for a new party. Taft came in third with 23 percent. The Socialist Party, led by Debs, captured a surprising 6 percent ([Map 21.3](#)). The Republican Party moved in a conservative direction, while the Progressive Party essentially collapsed after Roosevelt's defeat. It had always been, in the words of one astute observer, "a house divided against itself and already mortgaged."



Candidate	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	Percent of Popular Vote
Woodrow Wilson (Democrat)	435	6,293,454	41.9
Theodore Roosevelt (Progressive)	88	4,119,538	27.4
William H. Taft (Republican)	8	3,484,980	23.2
Eugene V. Debs (Socialist)	0	900,672	6.1

Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 8e, Value Edition
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MAP 21.3 The Election of 1912

Description

"The data are as follows:

Woodrow Wilson (Democrat) won a total of 435 electoral votes with 5 in Oregon; 4 in Idaho and Montana; 3 in Nevada; 2 in Arizona; 3 in Arizona, New Mexico, and Wyoming, 6 in Colorado; 5 in North Dakota; 8 in Nebraska; 10 each in Kansas and Oklahoma; 20 in Texas; 13 in Iowa; 18 in Missouri; 9 in Arkansas; 10 each in Louisiana and Mississippi; 12 each in Alabama and Tennessee; 14 in Georgia; 6 in Florida; 9 in South Carolina; 12 in North Carolina and Virginia; 13 in Kentucky; 8 in West Virginia; 29 Illinois; 13 in Wisconsin; 15 in Indiana; 24 in Ohio; 45 in New York; 4 in New Hampshire; 6 in Maine; 18 in Massachusetts; 5 in Rhode Island; 7 in Connecticut; 14 in New Jersey; 3 in Delaware; and 8 in Maryland. He won 6,293,454 popular votes with the percentage of 41.9 percent.

Theodore Roosevelt (Progressive): Of the total 88 electoral votes he won, 38 were in Pennsylvania; 15 in Michigan; 12 in Minnesota; 5 in South Dakota; 11 in California; and 7 in Washington. He won 4,119,538 popular votes with the percentage being 27.4 percent.

William H. Taft (Republican): He won 8 electoral votes, with 4 each in Utah and Vermont. He won 3,484,980 popular votes with the percentage being 23.2 percent.

Eugene V. Debs (Socialist): He did not win any electoral votes though he got 900,672 popular votes with the percentage of 6.1 percent.”

Wilson's Reforms: Tariff, Banking, and the Trusts

Born in Virginia and raised in Georgia, Woodrow Wilson became the first southerner elected president since 1844 and only the second Democrat to occupy the White House since Reconstruction. A believer in states' rights, Wilson nevertheless promised legislation to break the hold of the trusts. This lean, ascetic scholar was, as one biographer conceded, a man whose “political convictions were never as fixed as his ambition.” Building on the base built by Roosevelt in strengthening presidential power, Wilson exerted leadership to achieve banking reform and worked through his party in Congress to accomplish the Democratic agenda. Before he was finished, Wilson lent his support to many of the Progressive Party's social reforms.

With the Democrats thoroughly in control of Congress, Wilson immediately called for tariff reform. “The object of the tariff,” Wilson told Congress, “must be effective competition.” The Democratic House of Representatives hastily passed the Underwood tariff, which lowered rates by 15 percent. To compensate for lost revenue, the House approved a moderate federal income tax made possible by the ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment a month earlier. In the Senate, lobbyists for industries quietly went to work to get the tariff raised, but Wilson rallied public opinion by attacking the “industrious and insidious lobby.” In the harsh glare of publicity, the Senate passed the Underwood tariff.

Wilson next turned his attention to banking. The panic of 1907 led the government to turn once again to J. P. Morgan to avoid economic catastrophe. For years Morgan had acted virtually as a fourth branch of the government, called in to keep the country’s finances afloat in times of panic.

But by the time Wilson came to office, Morgan’s legendary power had come under close scrutiny. In 1913, a Senate committee investigated the “money trust,” calling Morgan himself to testify. The committee uncovered an alarming concentration of banking power. J. P. Morgan and Company and its affiliates held 341 directorships in 112 corporations, controlling assets of more than \$22 million (billions in today’s dollars). On the witness stand Morgan adamantly

refused to discuss his private financial transactions, insisting his power resulted from character, not cash. But Morgan's days as Wall Street's Jupiter were fading. Three months after testifying before the Pujo committee, Morgan died. His estate, valued at \$68 million, led Andrew Carnegie to joke, "And to think, he was not a rich man!" Surely not compared to Carnegie, who had pocketed \$225 million in the U.S. Steel merger Morgan orchestrated. Carnegie's jibe, however, missed the mark. Morgan's power came not from the millions he owned, but from the many more millions he controlled. His death signaled the end of the "money trust" and the end of an era.

The Federal Reserve Act of 1913 marked the most significant piece of domestic legislation of Wilson's presidency. It established a national banking system composed of twelve regional banks, privately controlled but regulated and supervised by the Federal Reserve Board, appointed by the president. It gave the United States its first efficient banking and currency system and, at the same time, provided for a greater degree of government control over banking. The new system made currency more elastic and credit adequate for the needs of business and agriculture.

Wilson, flush with success, tackled the trust issue next. When Congress reconvened in January 1914, he supported

the introduction and passage of the Clayton Antitrust Act to outlaw “unfair competition” — practices such as price discrimination and interlocking directorates (directors from one corporation sitting on the board of another). In the midst of the successful fight for the Clayton Act, Wilson changed course and threw his support behind the creation of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), precisely the kind of federal regulatory agency that Roosevelt had advocated in his New Nationalism. The FTC, created in 1914, had not only wide investigatory powers but also the authority to prosecute corporations for “unfair trade practices” and to enforce its judgments by issuing “cease and desist” orders. Despite his campaign promises, Wilson’s antitrust program worked to regulate rather than to break up big business.

Wilson, Reluctant Progressive

By the fall of 1914, Wilson declared that the progressive movement had fulfilled its mission and that the country needed “a time of healing.” Progressives watched in dismay as Wilson repeatedly obstructed or obstinately refused to endorse further reforms. He failed to support labor’s demand for an end to court injunctions against labor unions. He refused to support child labor legislation or woman suffrage. Wilson used the rhetoric of the New Freedom to justify his actions, claiming that his administration would

condone “special privileges to none.” But in fact, his stance often reflected the interests of his small-business constituency.

In the face of Wilson’s obstinacy, reform might have ended in 1913 had not politics intruded. In the congressional elections of 1914, the Republican Party, no longer split by Roosevelt’s Bull Moose faction, won substantial gains. Democratic strategists recognized that Wilson needed to pick up support in the Midwest and the West by capturing votes from former Bull Moose progressives. Wilson responded belatedly by lending his support to reform in the months leading up to the election of 1916.

In a sharp about-face, he cultivated union labor, farmers, and social reformers. To please labor, he appointed progressive Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court. To woo farmers, he threw his support behind legislation to obtain rural credits. And he won praise from labor by supporting workers’ compensation and the Keating-Owen child labor law (1916), which outlawed the regular employment of children younger than sixteen. When a railroad strike threatened in the months before the election, Wilson ordered Congress to establish an eight-hour day on the railroads. He had moved a long way from his New Freedom of 1912, and, as Wilson noted, the Democrats had “come very near to carrying out the platform of the Progressive

Party.” Wilson’s shift toward reform, along with his claim that he had kept the United States out of the war in Europe (discussed in [chapter 22](#)), helped him win reelection in 1916.

REVIEW

How did party politics change between 1912 and 1916, and what impact did this change have on progressivism?

What were the limits of progressive reform?

While progressivism called for a more active role for the liberal state, at heart it was a movement that sought reforms designed to preserve American institutions and stem the tide of more radical change. Its basic conservatism can be seen by comparing it with the more radical movements of socialism, radical labor, and birth control — and by looking at the groups progressive reform left out, including women, Asians, and African Americans.

Radical Alternatives

The year 1900 marked the birth of the Social Democratic Party in America, later called simply the [Socialist Party](#). Like the progressives, the socialists were middle-class and native-born. They had broken with the older, more militant Socialist Labor Party precisely because of its dogmatic approach and immigrant constituency. The new group of socialists proved eager to appeal to a broad mass of disaffected Americans.

The Socialist Party chose as its presidential standard-bearer Eugene V. Debs, whose experience in the Pullman strike of 1894 (see [chapter 20](#)) convinced him that “there is no hope for the toiling masses of my countrymen, except by the

pathways mapped out by Socialism.” Debs would run for president five times, in every election (except 1916) from 1900 to 1920. The socialism Debs advocated preached cooperation over competition and urged men and women to liberate themselves from “the barbarism of private ownership and wage slavery.” In the 1912 election, Debs indicted both old parties as each dedicated to the preservation of capitalism and the continuation of the wage system. Styling the Socialist Party the “revolutionary party of the working class,” he urged voters to rally to his standard. Debs’s best showing came in 1912, when his 6 percent of the popular vote totaled more than 900,000 votes.

Further to the left and more radical than the socialists stood the [Industrial Workers of the World \(IWW\)](#), nicknamed the Wobblies. In 1905, Debs, along with Western Federation of Miners leader William Dudley “Big Bill” Haywood, created the IWW, “one big union” dedicated to organizing the most destitute segment of the workforce, the unskilled workers disdained by Samuel Gompers’s AFL: western miners, migrant farmworkers, lumbermen, and immigrant textile workers. Haywood, a craggy-faced miner with one eye (he had lost the other in a childhood accident), was a charismatic leader and a proletarian intellectual. Seeing workers on the lowest rung of the social ladder as the victims of violent repression, the IWW advocated direct

action, sabotage, and the general strike — tactics designed to trigger a workers' uprising and overthrow the capitalist state. The IWW claimed it had as many as 100,000 members. Although membership fluctuated greatly, the influence of the IWW extended far beyond its numbers (as discussed in [chapter 22](#)).

In contrast to political radicals like Debs and Haywood, Margaret Sanger promoted the [birth control movement](#) as a means of social change. Sanger, a nurse who had worked among the poor on New York's Lower East Side, coined the term *birth control* in 1915 and launched a movement with broad social implications. Sanger and her followers saw birth control not only as a sexual and medical reform but also as a means to alter social and political power relationships and to alleviate human misery. By having fewer babies, the working class could constrict the size of the workforce and make possible higher wages and at the same time refuse to provide "cannon fodder" for the world's armies.

The desire for family limitation was widespread, and in this sense, birth control was nothing new. The birthrate in the United States had been falling consistently throughout the nineteenth century. The average number of children per family dropped from 7.0 in 1800 to 3.6 by 1900. But the open advocacy of contraception, the use of artificial means

to prevent pregnancy, struck many people as both new and shocking, and it was illegal. Anthony Comstock, New York City's commissioner of vice, promoted laws in the 1870s making it a felony not only to sell contraceptive devices like condoms and cervical caps but also to publish information on how to prevent pregnancy.

When Sanger used her militant feminist paper, the *Woman Rebel*, to promote birth control, the Post Office confiscated Sanger's publication and brought charges of obscenity against her. Facing arrest, she fled to Europe, only to return in 1916 as something of a national celebrity. In her absence, birth control had become linked with free speech and had been taken up as a liberal cause. Under public pressure, the government dropped the charges against Sanger, who undertook a nationwide tour to publicize the birth control cause.

Sanger then took direct action, opening the nation's first birth control clinic in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn in October 1916. Located in the heart of a Jewish and Italian immigrant neighborhood, the clinic attracted 464 clients. On the tenth day, police shut down the clinic and threw Sanger in jail. By then, she had become a national figure, and the cause she championed had gained legitimacy, if not legality. Sanger soon reopened her clinic. After World War I, the birth control movement would become much less radical. Altering

her tactics to suit the conservative temper of the times, Sanger sought support from medical doctors and eugenicists. But in its infancy, birth control was part of a radical vision for reforming the world that made common cause with the socialists and the IWW in challenging the limits of progressive reform.

Progressivism for White Men Only

The day before President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration in March 1913, the largest mass march to that date in the nation's history took place as more than five thousand demonstrators took to the streets in Washington to demand the vote for women. A rowdy crowd on hand to celebrate the Democrats' triumph attacked the marchers. Men spat at the suffragists and threw lighted cigarettes and matches at their clothing. "If my wife were where you are," a burly cop told one suffragist, "I'd break her head." But for all the marching, Wilson pointedly ignored woman suffrage in his inaugural address the next day.

The march served as a reminder that the political gains of progressivism were not spread equally throughout the population. As the twentieth century dawned, women still could not vote in most states, although they had won major

victories in the West. Increasingly, however, woman suffrage had become an international movement.

Alice Paul, a Quaker social worker who had visited England and participated in suffrage activism there, returned to the United States in 1910 in time to plan the mass march on the eve of Wilson's inauguration and to lobby for a federal amendment to give women the vote. Paul's dramatic tactics alienated many in the National American Woman Suffrage Association. In 1916, Paul founded the militant National Woman's Party, which became the radical voice of the suffrage movement.

Women weren't the only group left out in progressive reform. Progressivism, as it was practiced in the West and South, was tainted with racism by seeking to limit the rights of Asians and African Americans. Anti-Asian bigotry in the West led to a renewal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1902. At first, California governor Hiram Johnson stood against the strong anti-Asian prejudice of his state. But in 1913, he caved in to popular pressure and signed the Alien Land Law, which barred Japanese immigrants from purchasing land in California.

South of the Mason-Dixon line, the progressives' racism targeted African Americans. Progressives preached the disfranchisement of black voters as a reform. During the

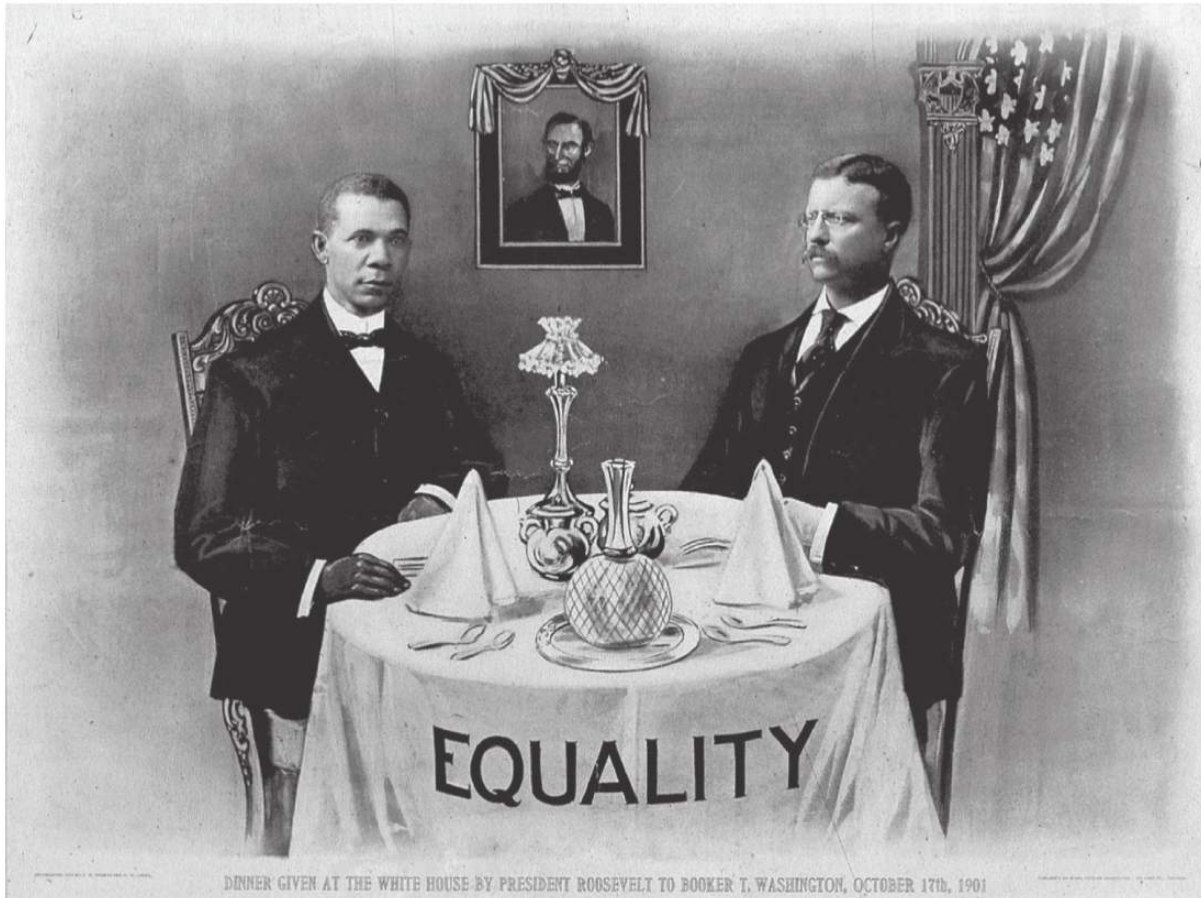
bitter electoral fights that had pitted Populists against Democrats in the 1890s, the party of white supremacy held its power by votes purchased or coerced from African Americans. Southern progressives proposed to reform the electoral system by eliminating black voters. Beginning in 1890 in Mississippi, southern states curtailed the African American vote through devices such as poll taxes (fees required for voting) and literacy tests.

The Progressive Era also witnessed the rise of Jim Crow laws to segregate public facilities. The new railroads precipitated segregation in the South where it had rarely existed before, at least on paper. Soon, separate railcars, separate waiting rooms, separate bathrooms, and separate dining facilities for blacks sprang up across the South. In courtrooms in Mississippi, blacks were required to swear on a separate Bible.

In the face of this growing repression, Booker T. Washington, the preeminent black leader of the day, urged caution and restraint. A former slave, Washington opened the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1881 to teach vocational skills to African Americans. He emphasized education and economic progress for his race and urged African Americans to put aside issues of political and social equality. In an 1895 speech in Atlanta that came to be known as the Atlanta Compromise, he stated, "In all things that are purely social

we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” Washington’s accommodationist policy appealed to whites and elevated “the wizard of Tuskegee” to the role of national spokesman for African Americans.

The year after Washington proclaimed the Atlanta Compromise, the Supreme Court upheld the legality of racial segregation, affirming in [*Plessy v. Ferguson*](#) (1896) the constitutionality of the doctrine of “separate but equal.” Blacks could be segregated in separate schools, restrooms, and other facilities as long as the facilities were “equal” to those provided for whites. Of course, facilities for blacks rarely proved equal.



The Frent Collection/Getty Images.

Booker T. Washington and Theodore Roosevelt Dine at the White House Theodore Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to the White House in 1901, stirring up a hornet's nest of controversy that continued into the election of 1904. The Republican campaign piece pictured shows Roosevelt and a light-skinned Washington sitting under a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. Democrats' campaign buttons pictured Washington with darker skin and implied that Roosevelt had "painted the White House black" and favored "race mingling."

Woodrow Wilson brought to the White House southern attitudes toward race and racial segregation. He instituted segregation in the federal workforce, especially the Post Office, and approved segregated drinking fountains and

restrooms in the nation's capital. When critics attacked the policy, Wilson insisted that segregation was "in the interest of the Negro."

In 1906, a major race riot in Atlanta called into question Booker T. Washington's strategy of uplift and accommodation. For three days in September, the streets of Atlanta ran red with blood as angry white mobs chased and cornered any blacks they happened upon. An estimated 250 African Americans died in the riots — members of Atlanta's black middle class along with the poor and derelict. Professor William Crogman of Clark College noted the central irony of the riot: "Here we have worked and prayed and tried to make good men and women of our colored population," he observed, "and at our very doorstep the whites kill these good men." The riot caused many African Americans to question Washington's strategy of gradualism and accommodation.

Foremost among Washington's critics stood W. E. B. Du Bois, a Harvard graduate who urged African Americans to fight for civil rights and racial justice. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois attacked the "Tuskegee Machine," comparing Washington to a political boss who used his influence to silence his critics and reward his followers. Du Bois founded the Niagara movement in 1905, calling for universal male suffrage, civil rights, and leadership

composed of a black intellectual elite or “talented tenth.” The Atlanta riot only bolstered his resolve. In 1909, the Niagara movement helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a coalition of blacks and whites that sought legal and political rights for African Americans through the courts. In the decades that followed, the NAACP came to represent the future for African Americans, while Booker T. Washington, who died in 1915, represented the past.

REVIEW

How did race, class, and gender shape the limits of progressive reform?

Conclusion: How did the Progressive Era give rise to the liberal state?

Progressivism's goal was to reform the existing system — by government intervention if necessary — but without uprooting any of the traditional American political, economic, or social institutions. As Theodore Roosevelt, the bellwether of the movement, insisted, “The only true conservative is the man who resolutely sets his face toward the future.” Roosevelt was such a man, and progressivism was such a movement. But although progressivism was never radical, progressives' willingness to use the power of government to regulate business and achieve a measure of social justice redefined liberalism in the twentieth century, tying it to the expanded power of the state.

Progressivism contained many paradoxes. A diverse coalition of individuals and interests, the progressive movement began at the grass roots but left as its legacy a stronger presidency and unprecedented federal involvement in the economy and social welfare. A movement that believed in social justice, progressivism often promoted social control. And while progressives called for greater democracy, they fostered elitism with their worship of experts and efficiency, often failed to champion equality for

women, and adopted racist policies toward Asians and African Americans.

Whatever its inconsistencies and limitations, progressivism took action to deal with the problems posed by urban industrialism. Progressivism saw grassroots activists address social problems on the local and state levels and search for national solutions. By increasing the power of the presidency and expanding the power of the state, progressives worked to bring about greater social justice and to achieve a better balance between government and business. Jane Addams and Theodore Roosevelt could lay equal claim to the movement that redefined liberalism and launched the liberal state of the twentieth century. War on a global scale would provide progressivism with yet another challenge even before it had completed its ambitious agenda.