By 1900 the United States was a world power; its aggressive foreign policy and dynamic domestic growth were powered by enormous industrial production and the federal government’s more assertive domestic and international policies. At the turn of the century, the United States had unprecedented prestige and power. Its seemingly ever-expanding economic opportunities and basic democratic rights were a magnet for millions around the world who had few of these things. For America’s large businesses, corporations, and the upper class, life was good. For the most part, they operated with little government interference other than measures that facilitated the concentration of capital. Approximately half of the nation’s wealth was in the hands of 1 percent of the population.

Yet under the surface were serious problems. In some cases, not much had changed since the Gilded Age in the 1870s and 1880s when a small percentage of the nation’s population was enormously wealthy while millions suffered in abject poverty, scratching out an existence in America’s bustling, overcrowded, and filthy cities. Industrialization made the American worker simply a cog in the production process. Some laborers were mere children, compelled to work so that their families did not sink deeper into poverty. Throughout most of the late nineteenth century, America’s farmers also experienced hardship, as farm prices fluctuated and farmers in increasing numbers lost their property and their livelihood. As for black Americans, decades earlier they had been relegated to a second-class status. Women were still disenfranchised; they could not vote or run for political office. What is more, they continued to languish as subordinates to men economically and socially.

While industrialization brought despair to millions of urban workers, it was the impetus for the emergence of a middle class of
professionals, office workers, social workers, educators, and government employees. As in the antebellum period, the middle class was willing and had the time to take up the challenge of addressing America’s social ills. Their motives were sometimes altruistic but often simply personal, as these problems affected their class as well. Because of reform-minded public officials and private citizens and organizations, a concerted effort was made to address the maladies that undermined American democracy. This period in U.S. history, 1900–1920, is referred to as the progressive era, and it was the first manifestation of liberalism in the twentieth century.

**KEY CONCEPTS**

- The progressive movement was one major phase of liberalism in the twentieth century.
- Grassroots and government reformers attempted to address the abuses and deficiencies in American life at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Important reforms were enacted by Congress to address abuses in business, the economy, and the environment.
- Women and African Americans organized to improve their condition and status, but despite major economic and political reforms, they continued to experience hard times.

The progressive era is discussed in depth in *The American Pageant*, 14th and 15th eds., Chapters 28–29.

**LIBERALISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: HISTORIANS’ PERSPECTIVE**

To place the progressive era in perspective, it is important to view it as one phase in the ongoing struggle to reform American society, the economy, and government. In the twentieth century alone, there have been five major reform periods:

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<td>T. Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson</td>
<td>Franklin D. Roosevelt</td>
<td>Harry S Truman</td>
<td>John F. Kennedy</td>
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Before exploring the details and dimensions of the progressive movement, you will need a working knowledge of the term “liberalism”—it is often considered synonymous with reform and progressivism, but it is not. On this topic there is little consensus among social and political scientists. Some historians, for example, view liberalism this way:

- Liberalism is the true expression of American democracy and represents the traditions established by Jefferson and Jackson and further developed by twentieth-century presidents (see above).
Liberalism represents an alliance between the public and the government to guard against and correct the abuses of capital. In the process, equilibrium is established between the interests of the public and the interests of corporations.

Reforms and reform movements have two fundamental objectives:
- to alleviate immediate short-term economic, political, and social problems
- to bring about significant fundamental change within existing economic, political, and social relationships and institutions

**Reforms**

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<td>reforms that seek to control corporate behavior and check the abuses practiced by large corporations</td>
<td>reforms that 1) extend or protect the political rights of previously disenfranchised groups, 2) are intended to make public officials more accountable to the public, 3) attack corruption and abuses of power by political officials</td>
<td>reforms that seek to protect and promote the human and social rights of deprived groups in society</td>
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Other historians do not agree that liberalism is an expression of American democracy. They hold that liberalism represents an alliance between the government and corporations designed to preserve and enhance the following conditions and relationships:
- maintaining power in the hands of a small elite class
- maintaining this class’s hegemony over other classes in American society
- preserving the status quo, a goal of both the liberal elite and the conservative elite, who differ only in their methods

**The Early Twentieth-Century Progressives**

The progressives were a composite of a variety of groups, individuals, and movements. Like reformers before and since, they held to the view that humanity and the institutions created by humans could be improved. To this end, progress and advancement of U.S. society and culture were the foundations of progressive thought and actions. In the vanguard were professionals, both men and women, who represented the middle class. Rather than rely exclusively on traditional sources of reform—the church, private benefactors, and municipal government—they approached societal problems systematically and pragmatically. Progressives rejected both laissez-
The Progressive Era: 1900–1920

faire capitalism and a radical approach to the crises—recessions and depressions, for example—inherent in the capitalist system:

- They viewed government as a potentially positive force for change and reform, one that could be used to combat monopolies and corruption in government.
- They maintained that government could neutralize special-interest groups that had long been a drain on the nation’s governmental resources.
- A long-term objective of the progressives was to instill order and stability to the institutions and relations of American life.
- Some progressives combined the Protestant religion and humanitarian work, a synthesis that became known as the social gospel movement. Operating predominantly in urban areas, those belonging to this movement believed it was their Christian duty to be concerned about the plight of the poor and the immigrant and to take steps to improve their lives.
  - The Salvation Army is an excellent example of the social gospel movement at work. It provided material and spiritual assistance to the urban poor.
  - One of the leaders of the movement, Walter Rauschenbusch, distinctively combined socialist thought with religious principles to bring salvation through Christianity and reform ideals.
  - Settlement houses served as centers for the urban poor and immigrants; they provided the needy with educational services, child care, technical skills, and recreational activities. The most famous American social settlement house was Jane Addams’s Hull House, situated in one of Chicago’s most distressed wards.

The muckrakers were investigative reporters and journalists who wrote about the abuses that were prevalent in American society. (They received this unflattering label from President Theodore Roosevelt, who believed they were sensationalizing their stories to attract readership.) The graphic and hard-biting exposés inspired a public uproar against those causing the abuses. Examples include
  - Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) is one of the earliest examples of muckraking. Riis’s photos of urban poverty evoked an emotional response from the public, especially his photographs of forlorn young street orphans.
  - Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) exposed gruesome working conditions and the tainted meat that emerged from Chicago’s meatpacking plants. Although it did not generate support for socialism, which was Sinclair’s intention, it did lead to legislation to correct the abuses: the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act.
  - Ida Tarbell’s *History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904) targeted the company’s abuses so effectively that it was successfully prosecuted in 1911.
  - Frank Norris’s novel *The Octopus* (1901) exposed corrupt politicians conspiring with the powerful Southern Pacific Railroad to exploit California farmers.
Lincoln Steffens’s *The Shame of the Cities* (1904) exposed municipal corruption.

David Graham Phillips’ *The Treason of the Senate* (1906) targeted the undue influence corporations held over the national legislature.

**REFORMING LOCAL AND STATE POLITICAL SYSTEMS**

Political machines are organizations that manage, sometimes illegally, the administration of local and state governments. Favoritism, sordid dealings, and nepotism are features of the political machines. They often work in conjunction with municipal governments but have often come to dominate the city in which they operate. Most machines have been corrupt, financially and politically. After the Civil War and well into the twentieth century, in return for performing favors for residents, especially new immigrants, the recipient was expected to be politically loyal to the machine. The most famous machine was “Boss” Tweed’s “Ring,” which dominated New York City’s government during and after the Civil War. As boss of Tammany Hall, the nickname of New York’s political machine, the Tweed Ring essentially ran the city, in the process bilking it of millions of dollars. The famous cartoonist Thomas Nast (who also introduced the elephant and donkey as symbols for the Republicans and Democrats) exposed the corruption and abuses of the Tweed machine in a series of startling political cartoons. Tweed went to prison, but other cities had their machines as well. Years later, in Kansas City, Tom Pendergast ran a powerful Democratic Party machine. One of his protégés—Harry S Truman—eventually became president.

To many progressives, political corruption, disenfranchisement, and unequal political influence prevented substantial changes in all realms of American society. To this end, a number of initiatives were taken at all levels of government. Reforms at the local and city levels of government include the following:

- **Home-rule charters** gave cities greater flexibility and autonomy by taking away many powers from the state governments and allowing local governments to draw up their own plan of government. In the process, local areas were freed from corruption on the state level that affected their communities.
- **The National Municipal League** was formed to carry out fact-finding investigations related to government’s role in urban problems and to make recommendations in the hope of producing a model government.
- **The city-manager system** and the commission system placed executive and legislative powers in the hands of a small elected commission that would manage a city much like a business enterprise—with great emphasis on efficiency. Thus, the management of local municipalities would be taken out of politics and operated on a nonpartisan basis.
- **In some urban areas reformers** pressed for public ownership of utilities. Referred to as “gas and water socialism,” it was an idea that came to fruition. Today, most municipalities own their utilities.
Minimum wage and maximum working hours were established for city employees in various municipalities. Some municipalities funded recreational and day-care facilities.

In order to correct urban problems, it was first necessary to correct the abuses at the state level. Various reform-minded governors focused on the abuses that weakened their state. For example, in New Jersey, Governor Woodrow Wilson brought about reforms to regulate public utilities and address corrupt business practices. California’s Hiram Johnson sought railroad regulations, and New York’s Theodore Roosevelt addressed urban living conditions. Other major state reforms adopted in some states in the period include the following:

- Attempts were made to ban child labor.
- Minimum wage and maximum hour laws to protect women laborers were established.
- Workers’ compensation was set up to protect workers against on-the-job accidents.
- Pensions were provided for widows and children when the husband/father was killed on the job.
- Building codes and state inspections acts were passed. Designed to protect workers against hazardous working conditions, the catalyst for this reform was the Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire in New York (1911), which killed almost 150 young women textile workers.
- Businesses such as railroads and insurance companies and the food industry were regulated. A graduated income tax was imposed on businesses, replacing the inequitable fixed income tax.

The most far-reaching state reforms, however, occurred under the tutelage of Wisconsin’s Senator Robert La Follette. In what became known as the “Wisconsin Idea,” La Follette brought about a series of reforms geared to address a variety of problems and abuses. So extensive was his program in bringing about social and political reforms that Wisconsin became the model of a progressive state. They included the following:

- A direct primary system was adopted to nominate presidential candidates, in the process removing this power from the hands of political machines, which were a phenomenon of city politics.
- La Follette was instrumental in the passage of the Corrupt Practices Act, which made political figures liable to prosecution for wrongdoing.
- The state of Wisconsin passed laws limiting campaign expenditures (a precursor to today’s campaign finance reforms) and lobbying activities.
- Utilizing professionals, intellectuals, and experts, La Follette created special commissions and agencies to investigate problems in conservation, taxes, education, highway construction, and politics.
- Progressives also advocated for political reforms including referendum, initiative, and recall, giving the voters a greater say in state and local governments and taking power away from political machines.
REFORM UNDER PROGRESSIVE PRESIDENTS

Piecemeal state and city reforms, while important, did not solve the problems of society and the increasing complexity of the economy. Federal policies and legislation were needed to address the problems associated with industrialization and urbanization. Three presidents are associated with the progressive era: Theodore Roosevelt (1901–1908), William Howard Taft (1909–1912), and Woodrow Wilson (1913–1920). All three supported progressive reform.

Theodore Roosevelt, a Republican, had campaigned on the promise of a square, or fair, deal for citizens while reconciling this with the needs of business. This promise resonated with many Americans. As president, he was amenable to legislation that monitored and regulated big business. Unlike his predecessors, he believed a president should take an active role as an arbiter between the demands of laborers and profit-driven businesses.

In 1902 the United Mine Workers (UMW) in Pennsylvania, led by John Mitchell, went out on strike. They demanded 20 percent higher wages, a reduction from a ten- to nine-hour workday, and recognition for their union by the coal companies. The mine operators had raised wages a few years earlier but now refused to budge on any of the union’s demands. Since most homes and businesses were heated by coal, Roosevelt was so concerned that the strike would last into the winter that he invited the coal operators and UMW representatives to the White House to negotiate an end to the strike. When the mine company heads stubbornly refused to negotiate with the UMW, a frustrated Roosevelt threatened to send the U.S. Army to occupy and run the mines. Frightened that he might actually seize their property, the operators agreed to have an arbitration committee settle the dispute. The strike ended in the fall; the workers received a 10 percent wage increase, their workday was shortened to nine hours, but the operators refused to recognize the union as a legitimate bargaining agent of the workers. Some historians are quick to point out that Roosevelt’s actions were driven less by his support for labor than by his concerns about the effect of the strike on the economy and, indeed, capitalism itself. He challenged individual corporate giants when their actions endangered the interests and viability of capitalism as a whole. To them, Roosevelt was adamantly opposed to recognizing unions as a collective bargaining agent for labor, and his antipathy prevailed in this conflict. It remains significant, though, that this was the first time in American history that the government supported the workers over the owners.

Often viewed as an opponent of monopolies and other unfair business practices, Roosevelt was considered a “trust buster.” However, his successor, William Howard Taft, actually dismantled more trusts than he did. During Roosevelt’s time in office, Congress passed key legislation integral to regulating business. Many of these reforms had Roosevelt’s support.

- In 1903 the Department of Commerce and Labor was created.
- Passage of the Elkins Act (1903) strengthened the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 by requiring railroad companies to charge only the published rate and made illegal secret rebates. The railroad
companies generally favored the act because it minimized the effects of a rate war between railroad companies that was driving down profits.

- Also in 1903 the Bureau of Corporations was created to investigate antitrust violations. By this time, 1 percent of corporations produced nearly 40 percent of the nation’s manufactured goods. A key example in attacking monopolies that were clearly in restraint of trade was the Northern Securities Company, a railroad holding company that controlled nearly all long-distance railroads west of Chicago. In *Northern Securities v. United States* (1904), the Court ordered the company to be dissolved.

- The Hepburn Act (1906) further empowered the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to set maximum railroad rates and established other standards and regulations. The large railroad companies did not welcome government intervention, but they did welcome the establishment of fair rules of competition.

- In 1906 the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act barred the sale of adulterated foods involved in interstate commerce. All meatpacking facilities engaged in interstate commerce were to be federally inspected.

- An avid sportsman, Roosevelt took an active role in conservation policies. In so doing, he confronted the business sector, which wanted unfettered opportunities to harvest natural resources wherever they could be found. Over time, many corporate leaders did come to recognize the need for a rational policy for the nation’s resources. By no means was Roosevelt antibusiness, but his administration sought a balance between the needs of America’s environment and the needs of America’s businesses. To preserve the environment, Roosevelt’s administration was active in the following:
  - enactment of the Newlands Reclamation Act Bill, by which a further 150 million acres were added to the national forest reserve
  - establishment of the Conservation Congress to address national conservation efforts
  - appointment of Gifford Pinchot, a strong conservationist, to head the Department of Agriculture’s Division of Forestry

When Roosevelt’s second term ended, he designated his confidant William Howard Taft as his successor. In Taft’s four years in the White House, the following initiatives were taken:

- Passage of the Mann-Elkins Act (1910) strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission (as had the Elkins Act and the Hepburn Act) by giving to it the power to regulate the new communications industry. In addition, the ICC was given more authority to regulate railroad companies’ short- and long-haul rates. (Often railroad companies charged more for transportation of passengers and commodities between two points on a railway line than for a longer journey on the same line.)

- Taft “busted” twice as many trusts in four years as Roosevelt did in eight, including one, U.S. Steel, that had been approved by Roosevelt. This was one factor in a split between Roosevelt and Taft
that eventually divided the Republican Party. During Taft’s one
term, the Supreme Court dissolved two major corporations:
American Tobacco Company and the Standard Oil Company.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY SPLITS

As Roosevelt’s handpicked successor, Taft proved to be a
disappointment, both to Roosevelt and to progressives in general.
During his presidency, Taft moved closer to the conservative wing of
his party, alienating his political base in the process. Four major issues
eventually divided the Republican Party:

- **The Payne-Aldrich Tariff (1909)** was a high protective tariff (up to
  40 percent tax on imports) that was supported by conservatives but
  opposed by progressives. Taft decided to support the conservative
  wing on this issue.

- **The Ballinger-Pinchot controversy (1910)** grew out of western
  opposition to conservation measures because they inhibited the
  development of the West. Ballinger, secretary of the interior, was
  identified with those westerners and conservatives who opposed
  conservation measures. Pinchot represented the progressive (and
  eastern) wing that favored conservation measures. Once again, Taft
  threw his weight behind the conservatives and sided with Ballinger,
  who proceeded to open over 1 million acres of land that Roosevelt
  had reserved. (Taft did, however, set aside some of that reserved
  land for public use.)

- **The Speaker of the House controversy** erupted over Joseph
  Cannon. Few Speakers of the House of Representatives have been
  as powerful as Cannon, nor as conservative. Cannon opposed
  nearly all social-welfare programs. As chairman of the Rules
  Committee, he decided which bills would be discussed in the
  House. The progressives wished to curtail the Speaker’s power by,
  for instance, making membership on the Rules Committee an
  elected rather than appointed position. The conservatives opposed
  any erosion of the Speaker’s power. Taft further alienated the
  progressive wing by supporting the conservatives.

- **Taft’s antitrust suit against U.S. Steel (1911)** dated back to 1908,
  when U.S. Steel purchased the bankrupt Tennessee Coal and Iron
  Company. The combination seemed to be in violation of the
  Sherman Anti-Trust Act. Roosevelt’s position had been that U.S.
  Steel had provided a public service to the nation by acquiring a
  company that, if it defaulted on its loans, could have dire
  consequences for the economy. Roosevelt assured U.S. Steel that
  the Justice Department would not prosecute the company, but
  under Taft that is exactly what happened. Roosevelt felt as if Taft
  had undermined his integrity. The enmity that had developed
  between the two former friends split the party.

At the Republican Party Convention in 1912, the progressive wing, led
by “Battling Bob” La Follette, attempted to replace Taft as the party’s
candidate. Roosevelt refused to support either Taft’s renomination or
La Follette’s attempt to unseat Taft. Instead, he chose to run as a
candidate on a third-party ticket, the progressive party (more
commonly referred to as the “Bull Moose party,” named for an animal
that Roosevelt had admired for its strength and vigor). Roosevelt’s campaign program (the “New Nationalism”) advocated use of the federal government as a positive interventionist tool to advance democracy. The Democratic candidate, Woodrow Wilson, argued in his campaign program (the “New Freedom”) that government should intervene only when democracy was threatened by social, economic, and political privilege and unfair business practices.

There was yet another candidate in the race, Eugene Debs, of the Socialist party. Debs promoted public ownership of the nation’s natural resources and those industries vital to the nation’s economic health. Amazingly, he received nearly 1 million votes. As for the Republicans, the party’s division was a major factor in the election of Woodrow Wilson, only the second Democrat to win the presidency in over fifty years.

**REFORM UNDER WOODROW WILSON**

Before becoming president, Democrat Wilson had been a popular reform governor of New Jersey. He took this reform spirit with him to the White House, where he was bent on tackling the “triple wall of privilege”: the tariff, the trusts, and banking. Whereas Roosevelt regulated monopolies, Wilson regulated competition. His support for certain policies and his rejection of others were shaped by his general support for big business. In his two terms in office, he took an active role in seeing that the following domestic measures were taken:

- **The Underwood Tariff (1913)** was the first significant reduction in the tariff in fifty years. Wilson sided with consumers, who he believed were paying inflated prices because of the protection accorded businesses. Yet he believed that lowering tariffs and thereby increasing foreign competition would compel U.S. businesses to become more efficient, lower their prices, and make better products. The nation’s corporate leaders agreed, though the idea of lowering tariffs is often a hard pill for business to swallow.

- **The Clayton Anti-Trust Act (1914)** was the response to Wilson’s call for steps to be taken to break up monopolies. The new law modified the Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890) by now exempting unions from restraint of trade provisions, but only when pursuing legitimate aims. This provided the government an opportunity to limit labor’s power. For example, the Supreme Court, in *Duplex Printing Press Company v. Deering* (1921) upheld an injunction against a secondary boycott. The Clayton Act supplemented the Sherman Act by including new provisions prohibiting unfair and illegal business practices such as price fixing.

- **The Federal Trade Commission** was created in 1914 to regulate business by controlling trusts and monopolies, investigate misconduct, and issue cease and desist orders to intractable businesses.

- **The Federal Reserve Act (1913)** addressed glaring currency problems: the inability of the federal government to regulate the amount of money in the economy and to regulate banking practices. All national banks were required to join the Federal Reserve System.
The nation was divided into twelve regional Federal Reserve Banks. The Federal Reserve System served banks, not private citizens. The district banks extended credit and accepted deposits from member banks based on the needs of the specific district. The Federal Reserve regulated credit by either raising or lowering interest rates. The district banks issued national currency in the form of Federal Reserve notes. This currency could be expanded (more money in the system) or contracted (less money in the system) depending on the status of the economy. A board of directors composed of financial experts was to oversee the Federal Reserve System.

The Adamson Eight-Hour Act (1916), growing out of concern that a railroad strike would severely damage the economy, had Wilson’s support. The act also provided compensation for overtime work.

The Keating-Owen Child Labor Act (1916) prohibited interstate trade involving commodities produced by children under the age of fourteen. It was subsequently ruled unconstitutional in the 1918 Supreme Court case Hammer v. Dagenhart. In 1924 a constitutional amendment to abolish child labor failed to receive the approval of the required three-fourths of the states for ratification.

**AP® Tip**

During the progressive era four constitutional amendments were adopted. Keep them in mind for AP free-response essays.

- The Sixteenth Amendment (1913) provided for an income tax. As you recall, the Supreme Court had ruled in Pollock v. Farmers Loan and Trust Company (1895) that the Income Tax Act of 1893 was unconstitutional.
- The Seventeenth Amendment (1913) replaced the method of selecting U.S. senators as prescribed in the Constitution—by state legislatures—with direct election of senators by popular vote.
- The Eighteenth Amendment (1919) (repealed in 1933 by the Twenty-first Amendment) prohibited the “manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors” within the United States. Some reformers blamed alcohol for many of society’s problems.
- The Nineteenth Amendment (1920) granted women the right to vote. No state could deny or abridge this right.

Progressives had mixed success with the Supreme Court. Some of the court’s key cases in the progressive era are the following:

- **Lochner v. New York (1905)** invalidated a New York State law that had limited night work hours in bakeries. The court contended that the law was a violation of the work contract between employer and employee.
- **Muller v. Oregon (1908)** upheld a law that limited work hours for women laundry workers only. It did not apply to other workers (see
the *Adkins* case below) and did not overturn the *Lochner* decision. In the *Muller* case, the Court decided that the inherent “weakness” of females required their protection by the government.

*Adkins v. Children’s Hospital* (1923) held that a maximum ten-hour workday for women workers in Washington, D.C., was unconstitutional, overturning *Muller v. Oregon*.

**The Women’s Rights Movement**

While a milestone in the women’s rights effort had been reached with ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, women continued to be relegated to a second-class status, both economically—in the workplace—and socially. More and more women entered clerical and factory work, and some entered the professions, but their pay was considerably lower than men’s pay, and they were denied access to certain professions and jobs. Roosevelt and Wilson, while progressive-minded in other ways, were certainly not strong advocates of the federal government’s involvement in the women’s rights cause. Some progressive women sought alternatives. For example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Women and Economics* advocated for female financial independence. Another reformer, Margaret Sanger, observed the ill effects that unwanted pregnancies had on women, especially the poor, and thus advocated for the legalization of birth control. Even though she was arrested for disseminating contraceptive literature through the U.S. Mail, the indomitable Sanger set up the nation’s first birth-control clinic in 1916. Alice Paul, a militant suffragist, engaged in acts of civil disobedience to draw attention to the need for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing women the right to vote. In addition, Jeannette Rankin became the first woman elected to Congress (1917). She promptly involved herself in the peace movement and would vote against U.S. intervention in World War I and World War II.

**The Socialist Challenge**

Formed in 1901 by Eugene Debs and V. L. Berger as a radical alternative to the two dominant political parties, the Socialist party of the United States was dedicated to the welfare of the laboring class. Socialists called for policies and programs that went beyond the aspirations of the progressives, such as public ownership of utilities, railroads, and major industries such as oil and steel. On issues such as workers’ compensation and minimum-wage laws, however, progressives and socialists cooperated. Over time, state, local, and federal governments embraced some Socialist ideas: public ownership of utilities, the eight-hour workday, and pensions for employees. During World War I, the party’s supporters were persecuted, and following the war, the party was decimated in the first red scare. Yet the Socialist party offered Americans a viable alternative to the platforms of the Democrats and Republicans.

Debs was the party’s presidential candidate five times. He embraced socialism while imprisoned for participating in the Pullman Strike in 1894. Debs did best in 1920 while in prison for violating the
Espionage Act by opposing America’s entry into World War I; in that election he garnered 6 percent of the popular vote.

**The Wobblies**

While most unions, such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL), sought to compromise and coexist with big business, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, founded in 1905 by revolutionary socialists and nicknamed the Wobblies) took a radically different approach. To them, capitalism was a tool of oppression that extended beyond the workplace into every aspect of one’s social, economic, cultural, and political life. Led by “Big Bill” Haywood, the Wobblies dreamed of “one big union” of skilled and unskilled workers as the only way to challenge the enormous clout of America’s corporations. When the United States entered World War I, the Wilson administration began to prosecute the Wobblies for treasonous acts; they had engaged in strikes and supported others to do so, which the administration claimed was undermining the war effort. At its height, it had enrolled 100,000 members, but its power waned after World War I.

**BLACK AMERICANS AND THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT**

While Roosevelt and Wilson were catalysts for numerous reforms in the early twentieth century, the status and rights of black Americans were not priorities for them. Wilson, born in Virginia during the Civil War, did not appear to have much sympathy for the plight of black Americans. (Some historians maintain Wilson was a blatant racist.) Roosevelt concurred. He saw no political solution to the problem despite his outcries against the lawless acts perpetrated against blacks. Most progressives were frankly indifferent to the discrimination that was so very much a part of the black experience in the United States at this time. The most reform-minded politician could also be a racist. In most cases, black Americans had to look to their own leaders to develop a response to the political, economic, and social barriers that confronted them daily. Three gifted leaders emerged in this period:

- **Booker T. Washington** gained national attention in 1895 when he spoke at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. In his speech, known as the Atlanta Compromise, Washington advised blacks to “put down your bucket where you are” and work for individual self-improvement. Once blacks were economically independent, he maintained, social change would follow. To this end, he started the Tuskegee Institute, a vocational school for blacks. For many white Americans, Washington’s advice to his fellow blacks was sound. Washington (who was born a slave) was not advocating a radical or militant solution to the condition of blacks in America, but one that was moderate and therefore generally acceptable to white America. When President Roosevelt invited Washington to dine at the White House, it caused a national furor.

- **W. E. B. Du Bois**, like many other blacks, had serious reservations about Washington’s approach. Born after the Civil War, he had been educated at Harvard University. His views were more
expansive than Washington’s in that he looked to white Americans to eliminate racism and segregation. In 1903 he published *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he attacked Washington’s patient approach to racial acceptance and equality. Instead, talented blacks should go beyond developing a trade or skill and seek a university education. This “talented tenth” would be the vanguard in the effort to have black rights restored without delay and would become the nucleus of an organization called the Niagara Movement, forerunner to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Started in 1909, the NAACP soon went to work challenging Jim Crow laws. In *Buchanan v. Worley* (1915) the Court struck down a Louisville, Kentucky, law that required segregated communities. In *Guinn v. United States* (1919), the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional Oklahoma’s use of the grandfather clause. To this day, the NAACP is active in promoting the rights of black Americans.

**Marcus Garvey** embraced nationalism as the solution to the black struggle. Believing that blacks would never gain acceptance and equality in the United States, he created the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which had as its goal the creation of an independent nation in Africa. Although other civil rights leaders such as Du Bois repudiated him, thousands of blacks, mostly in poor urban areas, purchased stock in the Black Star Line, whose fleet would ostensibly transport them to Africa. Garvey’s scheme failed, and many lost what little money they had in their investment. Ironically, Garvey’s desire for a segregated black nation was exactly what reactionary and racist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan supported.

**The End of the Progressive Era**

By the early 1920s the progressive movement had run its course. However, many progressive organizations’ supporters were imbued with a spirit of reform that would continue to thrive. As war loomed, the foreign threat siphoned off the attention that domestic conditions had received. The devastation of World War I dampened the enthusiasm of many who believed that through government a more democratic society could be realized. Others embraced the notion that the material growth the nation was experiencing following the war was an indication that life in America had indeed improved. Still others believed that, given the tribulations of war and the social, economic, and political struggles of the previous twenty years, a “return to normalcy” was needed.
**Topic 14 Content Review**

To answer the Topic 14 Content Review questions, return to the Period 7 page on the Fast Track to a 5 site and click on the Topic 14 tab. The review contains 15 multiple choice items with feedback.

**Short-Answer Questions**

1. The progressive era featured several different reform movements advocating for a variety of changes in the United States.
   A. Which reform movement had the greatest impact on the nation? Why?
   B. Cite one government action to support your claim.

Question 2 is based on the following passage:

“Now, it is very necessary that we should not flinch from seeing what is vile and debasing. There is filth on the floor and it must be scraped up with the muck-rake; and there are times and places where this service is the most needed of all services that can be performed. But the man who never does anything else, who never thinks or speaks or writes, save of his feats with the muck-rake, speedily becomes, not a help to society, not an incitement to do good, but one of the most potent forces of evil.”

—Theodore Roosevelt, 1906

2. Based on the passage and the opinion Roosevelt expresses on muckrakers, respond to the following tasks:
   A. How does Theodore Roosevelt describe muckrakers?
   B. Do the major reformers of the progressive era conform to or contradict Roosevelt’s description? Use at least ONE example to support your answer.

**Long-Essay Questions**

1. To what extent did the government play a role in reforming American social, economic, and political life in the early twentieth century? In your response include TWO of the following:
   A. reforms at the federal level
   B. reforms at the state level
   C. reforms at the local/city level

2. To what extent can the Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson administrations be considered progressive?
Answers

Short-Answer Questions

1. There are several examples that you might want to use here. You could discuss the movements for women’s suffrage, which results in the Nineteenth Amendment and women attaining the right to vote. You could also discuss movements against child labor, including the role of settlement houses in these efforts, and laws that limited or outlawed child labor in this time period. You could also discuss the political reforms of the time period and the efforts of Robert La Follette, which led to the direct primary, referendum, initiative, and recall.

2. Roosevelt, who defined the term “muckraker” here, is clearly describing such a person negatively as one who focuses on the worst of society without doing anything about it. Surely there were many who affirmed this definition, but the figures that we commonly refer to as muckrakers today tend to contradict that definition, including Upton Sinclair, who revealed the conditions in the meatpacking plants in *The Jungle*; Jacob Riis who exposed tenement life in *How the Other Half Lives*; and Ida Tarbell’s condemnation of big business in *The History of the Standard Oil Company*.

Long-Essay Questions

1. You want to keep in mind that reforms emanate from both the government and from grassroots movements. The question asks you to address only government-related reforms, but this does not preclude you from discussing reforms that resulted from the work of nongovernment activists. This is a straightforward question in which you identify those reforms that you deem significant and discuss what abuses they were intended to correct. You may want to mention the creation of the Food and Drug Act, the Nineteenth Amendment, legislation that targeted big businesses, and political reforms like referendum, initiative, and recall. (Historical Thinking Skills: I-2: Patterns of Continuity and Change Over Time, III-7: Appropriate Use of Historical Evidence, and IV-9 Synthesis)

2. Again, this is a straightforward question. It nonetheless requires a high-level thinking skill: the ability to evaluate a president’s record on reform. Identify the reform measures taken by each, evaluate the success of the reforms, and discuss whether there is a pattern of social, economic, and political reforms initiated by these presidents. (Historical Thinking...
Skills: II-4: Comparison, II-5: Contextualization, IV-8: Interpretation, and IV-9: Synthesis)