

# 20

## CHAPTER

# Whose Government? Politics, Populists, and Progressives

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**W**e are living in a grand and wonderful time,” declared Kansas political organizer Mary E. Lease in 1891. “Men, women and children are in commotion, discussing the mighty problems of the day.” This “movement among the masses,” she said, was based on the words of Jesus: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.” Between the 1880s and the 1910s, thousands of reformers like Lease confronted the problems of industrialization. Lease herself stumped not only for the People’s Party, which sought more government regulation of the economy, but also for the Knights of Labor and Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), as well as for women’s suffrage and public health.

Between the end of Reconstruction and the start of World War I, political reformers focused on four main goals: cleaning up politics, limiting the power of big business, reducing poverty, and promoting social justice. Historians call this period of agitation and innovation the Progressive Era. In the 1880s and 1890s, labor unions and farm groups took the lead in critiquing the industrial order and demanding change. But over time, more and more middle-class and elite Americans took up the call, earning the name *progressives*. On the whole, they proposed more limited measures than farmer-labor advocates did, but since they had more political clout, they often had greater success in winning new laws. Thus both radicals and progressives played important roles in advancing reform.

No single group defined the Progressive Era. On the contrary, reformers took opposite views on such questions as immigration, racial justice, women’s rights, and imperialism. Leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, initially hostile to the sweeping critiques of capitalism offered by radicals, gradually adopted bolder ideas. Dramatic political changes influenced the direction of reform. Close party competition in the 1880s gave way to Republican control between 1894 and 1910, followed by a period of Democratic leadership during Wilson’s presidency (1913–1919). Progressives gave the era its name, not because they acted as a unified force, but because they engaged in diverse, energetic movements to improve America.

### IDENTIFY THE BIG IDEA

**In the Progressive Era, how and why did reformers seek to address the problems of industrial America? To what extent did they succeed?**



**Coxey's Army on the March, 1894** During the severe depression of the 1890s, Ohio businessman Jacob Coxey organized unemployed men for a peaceful march to the U.S. Capitol to plead for an emergency jobs program. They called themselves the Commonwealth of Christ but won the nickname "Coxey's Army." Though it failed to win sympathy from Congress, the army's march on Washington— one of the nation's first—inspired similar groups to set out from many cities. Here, Coxey's group nears Washington, D.C. The man on horseback is Carl Browne, one of the group's leaders and a flamboyant publicist. As the marchers entered Washington, Coxey's seventeen-year-old daughter Mamie, dressed as the "Goddess of Peace," led the procession on a white Arabian horse. Library of Congress.

## Reform Visions, 1880–1892

In the 1880s, radical farmers' groups and the Knights of Labor provided a powerful challenge to industrialization (Chapter 17). At the same time, groups such as the WCTU (Chapter 18) and urban settlements (Chapter 19) laid the groundwork for progressivism, especially among women. Though they had different goals, these groups confronted similar dilemmas upon entering politics. Should they work through existing political parties? Create new ones? Or generate pressure from the outside? Reformers tried all these strategies.

### Electoral Politics After Reconstruction

The end of Reconstruction ushered in a period of fierce partisan conflict. Republicans and Democrats traded control of the Senate three times between 1880 and 1894, and the House majority five times. Causes of this tight competition included northerners' disillusion-

ment with Republican policies and the resurgence of southern Democrats, who regained a strong base in Congress. Dizzying population growth also changed the size and shape of the House of

Representatives. In 1875, it counted 243 seats; two decades later, that had risen to 356. Between 1889 and 1896, entry of seven new western states—Montana, North and South Dakota, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah—contributed to political instability.

Heated competition and the legacies of the Civil War drew Americans into politics. Union veterans donned their uniforms to march in Republican parades, while ex-Confederate Democrats did the same in the South. When politicians appealed to war loyalties, critics ridiculed them for “**waving the bloody shirt**”: whipping up old animosities that ought to be set aside. For those who had fought or lost beloved family members in the conflict, however—as well as those struggling over African American rights in the South—war issues remained crucial. Many voters also had strong views on economic policies, especially Republicans' high protective tariffs. Proportionately more voters turned out in presidential elections from 1876 to 1892 than at any other time in American history.

The presidents of this era had limited room to maneuver in a period of narrow victories, when the opposing party often held one or both houses of Congress. Republicans Rutherford B. Hayes and Benjamin

Harrison both won the electoral college but lost the popular vote. In 1884, Democrat Grover Cleveland won only 29,214 more votes than his opponent, James Blaine, while almost half a million voters rejected both major candidates (Map 20.1). With key states decided by razor-thin margins, both Republicans and Democrats engaged in vote buying and other forms of fraud. The fierce struggle for advantage also prompted innovations in political campaigning (Thinking Like a Historian, p. 640).

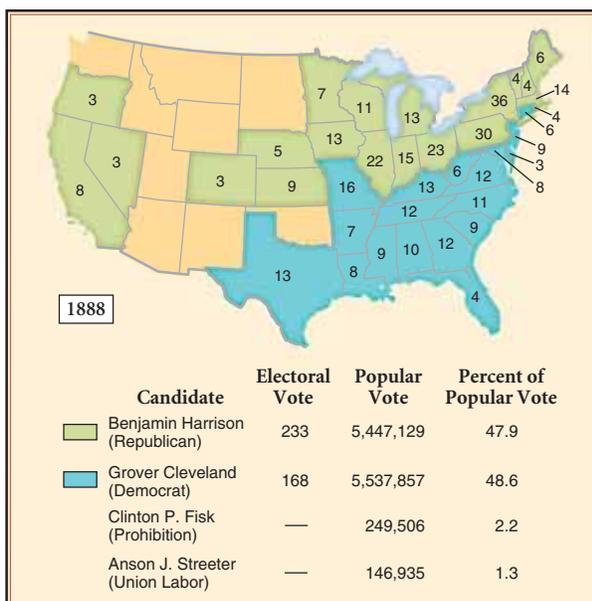
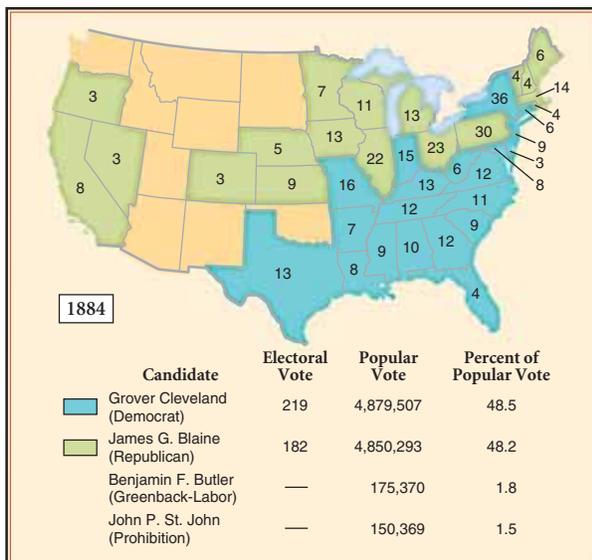
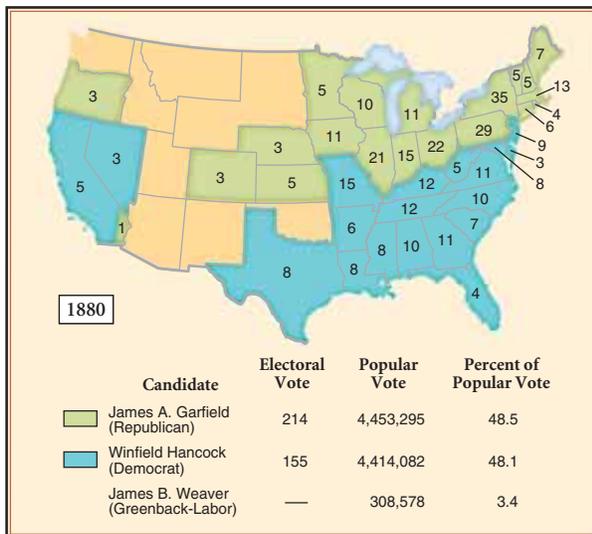
Some historians have characterized this period as a **Gilded Age**, when politics was corrupt and stagnant and elections centered on “meaningless hoopla.” The term *Gilded Age*, borrowed from the title of an 1873 novel cowritten by Mark Twain, suggested that America had achieved a glittery outer coating of prosperity and lofty rhetoric, but underneath suffered from moral decay. Economically, the term *Gilded Age* seems apt: as we have seen in previous chapters, a handful of men made spectacular fortunes, and their “Gilded” triumphs belied a rising crisis of poverty, pollution, and erosion of workers' rights. But political leaders were not blind to these problems, and the political scene was hardly idle or indifferent. Rather, Americans bitterly disagreed about what to do. Nonetheless, as early as the 1880s, Congress passed important new federal measures to clean up corruption and rein in corporate power. That decade deserves to be considered an early stage in the emerging Progressive Era.

**New Initiatives** One of the first reforms resulted from tragedy. On July 2, 1881, only four months after entering the White House, James Garfield was shot at a train station in Washington, D.C. (“Assassination,” he had told a friend, “can no more be guarded against than death by lightning, and it is best not to worry about either.”) After lingering for several agonizing months, Garfield died. Most historians now believe the assassin, Charles Guiteau, suffered from mental illness. But reformers then blamed the spoils system, arguing that Guiteau had murdered Garfield out of disappointment in the scramble for patronage, the granting of government jobs to party loyalists.

In the wake of Garfield's death, Congress passed the **Pendleton Act** (1883), establishing a nonpartisan Civil Service Commission to fill federal jobs by examination. Initially, civil service applied to only 10 percent of such jobs, but the act laid the groundwork for a sweeping transformation of public employment. By the 1910s, Congress extended the act to cover most federal positions; cities and states across the country enacted similar laws.

#### IDENTIFY CAUSES

What factors led to close party competition in the 1880s?



**MAP 20.1**

**The Presidential Elections of 1880, 1884, and 1888**

The anatomy of hard-fought, narrowly won presidential campaigns is evident in this trio of electoral maps. First, note the equal division of the popular vote between Republicans and Democrats. Second, note the persistent pattern of electoral votes, as states overwhelmingly went to the same party in all three elections. Here, we can identify who determined the outcomes—“swing” states, such as New York and Indiana, whose vote shifted every four years and always in favor of the winning candidate.

Civil service laws had their downside. In the race for government jobs, they tilted the balance toward middle-class applicants who could perform well on tests. “Firemen now must know equations,” complained a critic, “and be up on Euclid too.” But the laws put talented professionals in office and discouraged politicians from appointing unqualified party hacks. The civil service also brought stability and consistency to government, since officials did not lose their jobs every time their party lost power. In the long run, civil service laws markedly reduced corruption.

Leaders of the civil service movement included many classical liberals (Chapter 15): former Republicans who became disillusioned with Reconstruction and advocated smaller, more professionalized government. Many had opposed President Ulysses S. Grant’s reelection in 1872. In 1884, they again left the Republican Party because they could not stomach its scandal-tainted candidate, James Blaine. Liberal Republicans—ridiculed by their enemies as **Mugwumps** (fence-sitters who had their “mugs” on one side and their “wumps” on the other)—helped elect Democrat Grover Cleveland. They believed he shared their vision of smaller government.

As president, Cleveland showed that he largely did share their views. He vetoed, for example, thousands of bills providing pensions for individual Union veterans. But in 1887, responding to pressure from farmer-labor advocates in the Democratic Party who demanded action to limit corporate power, he signed the Interstate Commerce Act (Chapter 17). At the same time, municipal and state-level initiatives were showing how expanded government could help solve industrial problems. In the 1870s and early 1880s, many states created Bureaus of Labor Statistics to investigate workplace safety and unemployment. Some appointed commissions to oversee key industries, from banking to dairy farming. By later standards, such commissions were underfunded, but even when they lacked legal

# THINKING LIKE A HISTORIAN



## Making Modern Presidents

Between 1880 and 1917, the stature and powers of the U.S. president grew in relation to those of Congress. Presidential campaign techniques also changed. The sources below shed light on candidates' increasing public visibility and new uses of campaign funds.

1. **Household sewing machine company advertisement, 1880s.** President Grover Cleveland, a bachelor, married young Frances Folsom in a quiet White House ceremony in June 1886. The bride, a college graduate who was twenty-six years younger than her husband, proved wildly popular. The Clevelands never authorized political or commercial use of the First Lady's image. Nonetheless, over their objections, young women organized "Frankie Cleveland Clubs" to march in Democratic parades, while companies such as this one capitalized on her popularity in advertising.



Picture Research Consultants & Archives.

2. **Account of Benjamin Harrison's front porch campaign in Indianapolis, New York Tribune, October 12, 1888.** For much of the nineteenth century, presidential candidates left campaigning to their allies. A man who promoted himself risked appearing vain and greedy for office. By the 1880s, Republicans began to run "front porch campaigns": party leaders arranged for delegations to visit the candidate at home.

This morning General Harrison's home was surrounded by visitors, who had arrived in the city in the night and on the early morning trains. . . . There were many relic-hunters among the early visitors and they swarmed about the house, taking, without protest from any one, whatever they were pleased to seize. There is no longer a fence about the house to be converted into relics, and so the visitors are taking the trees now. The shrubbery has almost disappeared. . . . The informal reception began as soon as the General got up from [breakfast] and continued until afternoon. The first delegation was composed of representatives of the Cincinnati Republican Clubs. . . . A delegation from Belleville, Ill., which . . . had patiently waited for more than four hours, were next invited to enter the house, and they were accorded the usual hand-shaking reception. . . .

The parade early in the afternoon was the principal feature of the day's demonstration. Two hundred or more clubs participated and they came from all parts of the State, representing various classes and interests. . . . There were mounted men and men on foot, women in wagons and women in uniform marching, brass bands. . . .

On the balcony beside General Harrison stood his wife, with several of her lady friends.

3. **Henry George on money in politics, *Wheeling Register*, September 19, 1896.** Reformer Henry George was among many who warned of the influence of corporate contributions, solicited brilliantly in 1896 by William McKinley's campaign manager, Mark Hanna. Short of funds, Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan undertook exhausting nationwide speaking tours.

There is no question which of the great parties represents the house of Have and which the house of Want. . . . Democrat[s] are cramped for want of funds. . . . On the other hand there is practically "no end of money" at the disposal of the McKinley committees. . . .

As for the banks, the great railroad companies and insurance companies, who, even in ordinary times find it to their interest to help financially one, and frequently both, sides . . . , their purse strings are unloosed more freely than ever before, but only in one direction.

The danger to a republican form of government of a money interest in politics is so clear that it needs not to be dwelt upon. . . . The steady tendency of American legislation, national and state, has not merely been to create great special interests, but in the very effort to control them for the benefit of the public, to concern them directly in politics.

4. **Theodore Roosevelt on the campaign trail, 1904.** Having watched Bryan's electrifying tours, Theodore Roosevelt became the first winning candidate to adopt the practice. In 1904, after a summer front porch campaign, he undertook a thirty-day speaking tour of the West. To cover as much ground as possible, Roosevelt often spoke from the last car of his train.



Library of Congress.

5. **"Expenses of the Campaign," *Springfield Daily Republican*, September 22, 1900.**

It is estimated that it costs \$25,000,000 to elect a president of the United States. The annual allowance which the British Parliament makes to Queen Victoria is \$1,925,000 . . . indicat[ing] that it is much cheaper to maintain a queen permanently than it is to elect a president. . . .

More than half of the money spent by both national and state committees goes for campaign orators. During the next three months it is estimated that the Republican national committee will have 3000 "spellbinders" traveling out of the Chicago headquarters and 2500 who will report to the New York office. . . .

The next largest item on the campaign bill is that for printing. . . . Each of the national committees will spend at least \$500,000 in this way. Before the campaign is over it is estimated that both the Republican and Democratic committees will send out 100,000,000 separate documents. . . .

One more important branch of the work is the two house-to-house canvasses of the voters. . . . Hundreds of men are employed in each state, and the work of tabulating and classifying the results is by no means small. . . .

Some novel campaign methods will be adopted by both the great parties during the campaign just opening. The Republicans, it is stated, have decided to use phonographs. . . . Some eloquent party man . . . will deliver a speech before a phonographic record, from which any desired number of copies may be made . . . and sent far out into the rural districts, where it would be impossible for the more popular and important orators to go. . . .

Democrats, on the other hand, will pin their faith to stereopticons [an early slide projector].

Sources: (2) *New York Tribune*, October 12, 1888; (3) *Wheeling Register*, September 19, 1896; (5) *Springfield Daily Republican*, September 22, 1900.

### ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

1. What did a presidential candidate need in the 1880s to run an effective campaign? Two decades later, what had changed, and what had not?
2. Based on these documents, what developments both inside and outside of politics seem to have influenced changing campaign strategies?

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Historians have traced the rise of an "imperial presidency" in the late 1890s and early 1900s. How might new campaign techniques have reflected, and perhaps contributed to, this rise? To what extent was it a Republican invention?



### “Political Purity,” Puck, 1884

This Democratic cartoon suggests the disillusionment with Republicans that emerged among many voters in the 1880s. Here, the party chooses a dress, bustle, and plume to celebrate Republicans’ achievements in prior decades: the Union war record, Emancipation, and “high moral ideals.” Her undergarments tell a different story: they are marked with scandals of the Grant era (Chapter 15), while the economic interests of tariff supporters (“protection”) are depicted as her corset. The hats in the upper right corner show Republicans’ attempts to appeal to various constituencies: temperance advocates and German immigrants, workingmen and business leaders. Whitelaw Reid, staunchly Republican editor of the *New York Tribune*, appears as the party’s handmaiden. Puck, August 20, 1884.

power, energetic commissioners could serve as public advocates, exposing unsafe practices and generating pressure for further laws.

**Republican Activism** In 1888, after a decade of divided government, Republicans gained control of both Congress and the White House. They pursued an ambitious agenda they believed would meet the needs of a modernizing nation. In 1890, Congress extended pensions to all Union veterans and yielded to growing public outrage over trusts by passing a law to regulate interstate corporations. Though it proved difficult to enforce and was soon weakened by the Supreme Court, the **Sherman Antitrust Act** (1890) was the first federal attempt to forbid any “combination, in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade.”

President Benjamin Harrison also sought to protect black voting rights in the South. Warned during his campaign that the issue was politically risky, Harrison vowed that he would not “purchase the presidency by a compact of silence upon this question.” He found allies in Congress. Massachusetts representative Henry Cabot Lodge drafted the Federal Elections Bill of 1890, or **Lodge Bill**, proposing that whenever one hundred citizens in any district appealed for intervention, a bipartisan federal board could investigate and seat the rightful winner.

Despite cries of outrage from southern Democrats, who warned that it meant “Negro supremacy,” the House passed the measure. But it met resistance in the Senate. Northern classical liberals, who wanted the “best men” to govern through professional expertise, thought it provided too much democracy, while machine bosses feared the threat of federal interference in the cities. Unexpectedly, many western Republicans also opposed the bill—and with the entry of ten new states since 1863, the West had gained enormous clout. Senator William Stewart of Nevada, who had southern family ties, claimed that federal oversight of elections would bring “monarchy or revolution.” He and his allies killed the bill by a single vote.

The defeat was a devastating blow to those seeking to defend black voting rights. In the verdict of one furious Republican leader who supported Lodge’s proposal, the episode marked the demise of the party of emancipation. “Think of it,” he fumed. “Nevada, barely a respectable *county*, furnished two senators to betray the Republican Party and the rights of citizenship.”

Other Republican initiatives also proved unpopular—at the polls as well as in Congress. In the Midwest, swing voters reacted against local Republican campaigns to prohibit liquor sales and end state funding for Catholic schools. Blaming high consumer prices on protective tariffs, other voters rejected Republican economic policies. In a major shift in the 1890 election, Democrats captured the House of Representatives. Two years later, by the largest margin in twenty years, voters reelected Democrat Grover Cleveland to the presidency for a nonconsecutive second term. Republican congressmen abandoned any further attempt to enforce fair elections in the South.

## The Populist Program

As Democrats took power in Washington, they faced rising pressure from rural voters in the South and West who had organized the Farmers’ Alliance. Savvy politicians responded quickly. Iowa Democrats, for example,

### Riding to a Populist Rally, Dickinson County, Kansas, 1890s

Farm families in wagons carry their banners to a local meeting of the People's Party. Men, women, and children often traveled together to campaign events, which included not only stump speeches but also picnics, glee club music, and other family entertainments. Kansas State Historical Society.



took up some of the farmers' demands, forestalling creation of a separate farmer-labor party in that state. But other politicians listened to Alliance pleas and did nothing. It was a response they came to regret.

Republicans utterly dominated Kansas, a state chock-full of Union veterans and railroad boosters. But politicians there treated the Kansas Farmers' Alliance with contempt. In 1890, the Kansas Alliance joined with the Knights of Labor to create a People's Party. They then stunned the nation by capturing four-fifths of the lower house of the Kansas legislature and most of the state's congressional seats. The victory electrified labor and agrarian radicals nationwide. In July 1892, delegates from these groups met at Omaha, Nebraska, and formally created the national People's Party.

Nominating former Union general and Greenback-Labor leader James B. Weaver for president, the Populists, as they became known, captured a million votes in November and carried four western states (Map 20.2).

### UNDERSTAND POINTS OF VIEW

How did the political goals of Populists differ in this period from those of Democrats and Republicans?

In recognizing an “irrepressible conflict between capital and labor,” Populists split from the mainstream parties, calling for stronger government to protect ordinary Americans. “We believe,” declared their **Omaha Platform** (1892), “that the power of government—in other words, of the people—should be expanded as rapidly and as far as the good sense of an intelligent people and the teachings of experience shall justify, to

### MAP 20.2

#### The Heyday of Western Populism, 1892

This map shows the percentage of the popular vote won by James B. Weaver, the People's Party candidate, in the presidential election of 1892. Except in California and Montana, the Populists won broad support across the West and genuinely threatened the established parties in that region.



the end that oppression, injustice and poverty should eventually cease.” Populists called for public ownership of railroad and telegraph systems, protection of land from monopoly and foreign ownership, a federal income tax on the rich, and a looser monetary policy to help borrowers. Some Populist allies went further to make their point: in New Mexico, the *Gorras Blancas*, a vigilante group of small-scale Mexican American farmers, protested exploitative railroads and “land grabbers” by intimidating railroad workers and cutting fences on large Anglo farms.



To see a longer excerpt of the Omaha Platform, along with other primary sources from this period, see *Sources for America's History*.

Populist leaders represented a grassroots uprising of ordinary farmers, and some won colorful nicknames. After a devastating debate triumph, James H. Davis of Texas became known as “Cyclone.” Mary E. Lease was derided as “Yellin’ Mary Ellen”; her fellow Kansan Jerry Simpson was called “Sockless Jerry” after he ridiculed a wealthy opponent for wearing “fine silk hosiery,” boasting that he himself wore no socks at all. The national press, based in northeastern cities, ridiculed such “hayseed politicians,” but farmers insisted on being taken seriously. In the run-up to one election, a Populist writer encouraged party members to sing these lyrics to the tune of an old gospel hymn:

I once was a tool of oppression,  
As green as a sucker could be  
And monopolies banded together  
To beat a poor hayseed like me. . . .

But now I’ve roused up a little,  
And their greed and corruption I see,  
And the ticket we vote next November  
Will be made up of hayseeds like me.

Driven by farmers’ votes, the People’s Party had mixed success in attracting other constituencies. Its labor planks won support among Alabama steelworkers and Rocky Mountain miners, but not among many other industrial workers, who stuck with the major parties. Prohibitionist and women’s suffrage leaders attended Populist conventions, hoping their issues would be taken up, but they were disappointed. The legacies of the Civil War also hampered the party. Southern Democrats warned that Populists were really Radical Republicans in disguise, while northeastern Republicans claimed the southern “Pops” were ex-Confederates plotting another round of treason. Amid these heated debates, the political system suddenly confronted an economic crisis.

## The Political Earthquakes of the 1890s

In 1893, a severe economic depression hit the United States. Though it was a global shock, and the agriculture sector had already lagged for years, Republicans blamed Grover Cleveland, who had just reentered the White House. “On every hand can be seen evidences of Democratic times,” declared one Republican. “The deserted farm, the silent factory.”

Apparently receptive to such appeals, voters outside the South abandoned the Democrats in 1894 and 1896. Republicans, promising prosperity, gained control of the White House and both chambers of Congress for the next fifteen years. This development created both opportunities and challenges for progressive reformers. A different pattern emerged in the South: Democrats deployed fraud, violence, and race-based appeals for white solidarity to defeat the Populist revolt.

### Depression and Reaction

When Cleveland took the oath of office in March 1893, hard times were prompting European investors to pull money out of the United States; farm foreclosures and railroad bankruptcies signaled economic trouble. A few weeks later, a Pennsylvania railroad went bankrupt, followed by several other companies. Investors panicked; the stock market crashed. By July, major banks had drained their reserves and “suspended,” unable to give depositors access to their money. By year’s end, five hundred banks and thousands of other businesses had gone under. “Boston,” one man remembered, “grew suddenly old, haggard, and thin.” The unemployment rate in industrial cities soared above 20 percent.

For Americans who had lived through the terrible 1870s, conditions looked grimly familiar. Even fresher in the public mind were recent labor uprisings, including the 1886 Haymarket violence and the 1892 showdown at Homestead—followed, during the depression’s first year, by a massive Pennsylvania coal strike and a Pullman railroad boycott that ended with bloody clashes between angry crowds and the U.S. Army. Prosperous Americans, fearful of Populism, were even more terrified that workers would embrace socialism or Marxism. Reminding Americans of upheavals such as the Paris Commune of 1871 and its bloody aftermath, conservative commentators of the 1890s launched America’s first “Red Scare”—a precursor to similar episodes of hysteria in the 1920s (Chapter 22) and 1950s (Chapter 25).

In the summer of 1894, a further protest jolted affluent Americans. Radical businessman Jacob Coxey of Ohio proposed that the U.S. government hire the unemployed to fix America's roads. In 1894, he organized hundreds of jobless men — nicknamed Coxey's Army — to march peacefully to Washington and appeal for the program. Though public employment of the kind Coxey proposed would become central to the New Deal in the 1930s, many Americans in the 1890s viewed Coxey as a dangerous extremist. Public alarm grew when more protesters, inspired by Coxey, started out from Los Angeles, Seattle, and other cities. As they marched east, these men found warm support and offers of aid in Populist-leaning cities and towns. In other places, police and property owners drove marchers away at gunpoint. Coxey was stunned by what happened when he reached Capitol Hill: he was jailed for trespassing on the grass. Some of his men, arrested for vagrancy, ended up in Maryland chain gangs. The rest went home hungry.

As this response suggested, President Grover Cleveland's administration was increasingly out of step with rural and working-class demands. Any president would have been hard-pressed to cope with the depression, but Cleveland made a particularly bad hash of it. He steadfastly resisted pressure to loosen the money supply by expanding federal coinage to include silver as well as gold. Advocates of this **free silver** policy ("free" because, under this plan, the U.S. Mint would not charge a fee for minting silver coins) believed the policy would encourage borrowing and stimulate industry. But Cleveland clung to the gold standard; however dire things became, he believed, the money supply must remain tied to the nation's reserves of gold.

Even collapsing prices and a hemorrhage of gold to Europe did not budge the president. With gold reserves dwindling in 1895, he made a secret arrangement with a syndicate of bankers led by John Pierpont Morgan to arrange gold purchases to replenish the treasury. Morgan helped maintain America's gold supply — preserving the gold standard — and turned a tidy profit by earning interest on the bonds he provided. Cleveland's deal, once discovered, enraged fellow Democrats. South Carolina governor Ben Tillman vowed to go to Washington and "poke old Grover with a pitchfork," earning the nickname "Pitchfork Ben."

As the 1894 midterm elections loomed, Democratic candidates tried to distance themselves from the president. But on election day, large numbers of voters chose Republicans, who promised to support business, put down social unrest, and bring back prosperity. Western voters turned many Populists out of office. In the next

congressional session, Republicans controlled the House by a margin of 245 to 105. The election began sixteen years of Republican national dominance.

## Democrats and the "Solid South"

In the South, the only region where Democrats gained strength in the 1890s, the People's Party lost ground for distinctive reasons. After the end of Reconstruction, African Americans in most states had continued to vote in significant numbers. As long as Democrats competed for (and sometimes bought) black votes, the possibility remained that other parties could win them away. Populists proposed new measures to help farmers and wage earners — an appealing message for poverty-stricken people of both races. Some white Populists went out of their way to build cross-racial ties. "The accident of color can make no difference in the interest of farmers, croppers, and laborers," argued Georgia Populist Tom Watson. "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings."

Such appeals threatened the foundations of southern politics. Democrats struck back, calling themselves the "white man's party" and denouncing Populists for advocating "Negro rule." From Georgia to Texas, many poor white farmers, tenants, and wage earners ignored such appeals and continued to support the Populists in large numbers. Democrats found they could put down the Populist threat only through fraud and violence. Afterward, Pitchfork Ben Tillman of South Carolina openly bragged that he and other southern whites had "done our level best" to block "every last" black vote. "We stuffed ballot boxes," he said in 1900. "We shot them. We are not ashamed of it." "We had to do it," a Georgia Democrat later argued. "Those damned Populists would have ruined the country."

Having suppressed the political revolt, Democrats looked for new ways to enforce white supremacy. In 1890, a constitutional convention in Mississippi had adopted a key innovation: an "understanding clause" that required would-be voters to interpret parts of the state constitution, with local Democratic officials deciding who met the standard. After the Populist uprising, such measures spread to other southern states. Louisiana's grandfather clause, which denied the ballot to any man whose grandfather had been unable to vote in slavery days, was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court. But in *Williams v. Mississippi* (1898), the Court allowed poll taxes and literacy tests to stand.

### EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES

How did different groups of Americans react to the economic depression of the 1890s, and what happened as a result?

**TRACE CHANGE  
OVER TIME**

How did politics change in the South between the 1880s and the 1910s?

By 1908, every southern state had adopted such measures.

The impact of disenfranchisement can hardly be overstated (Map 20.3). Across the South, voter turnout plunged, from above 70 percent to 34 percent or even lower. Not only blacks but also many poor whites ceased to vote. Since Democrats faced virtually no opposition, action shifted to the “white primaries,” where Democratic candidates competed for nominations. Some former Populists joined the Democrats in openly advocating white supremacy. The racial climate hardened. Segregation laws proliferated. Lynchings of African Americans increasingly occurred in broad daylight, with crowds of thousands gathered to watch.

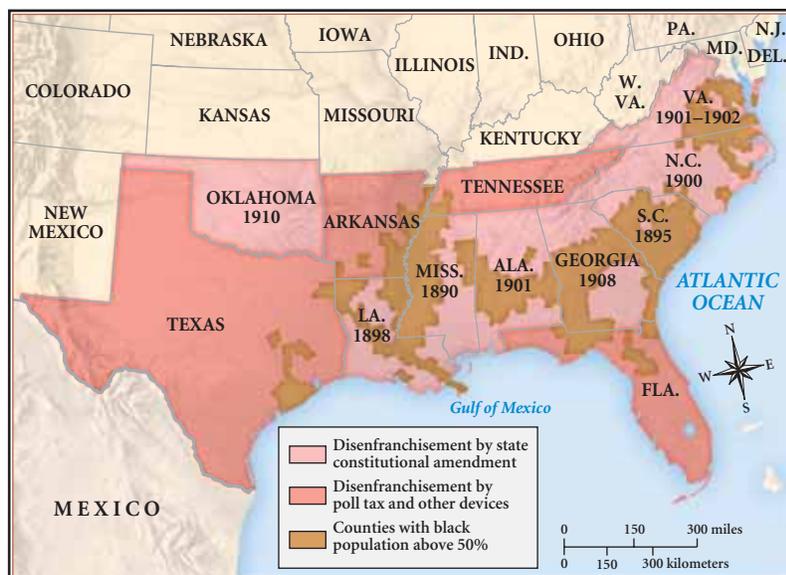
The convict lease system, which had begun to take hold during Reconstruction, also expanded. Blacks received harsh sentences for crimes such as “vagrancy,” often when they were traveling to find work or if they could not produce a current employment contract. By the 1890s, Alabama depended on convict leasing for 6 percent of its total revenue. Prisoners were overwhelmingly black: a 1908 report showed that almost 90 percent of Georgia’s leased convicts were black; out of a white population of 1.4 million, only 322 were in prison. Calling attention to the torture and deaths of prisoners, as well as the damaging economic effect of their unpaid labor, reformers, labor unions, and Populists protested the situation strenuously. But “reforms” simply replaced convict leasing with the chain gang, in which prisoners worked directly for the

state on roadbuilding and other projects, under equally cruel conditions. All these developments depended on a political **Solid South** in which Democrats exercised almost complete control.

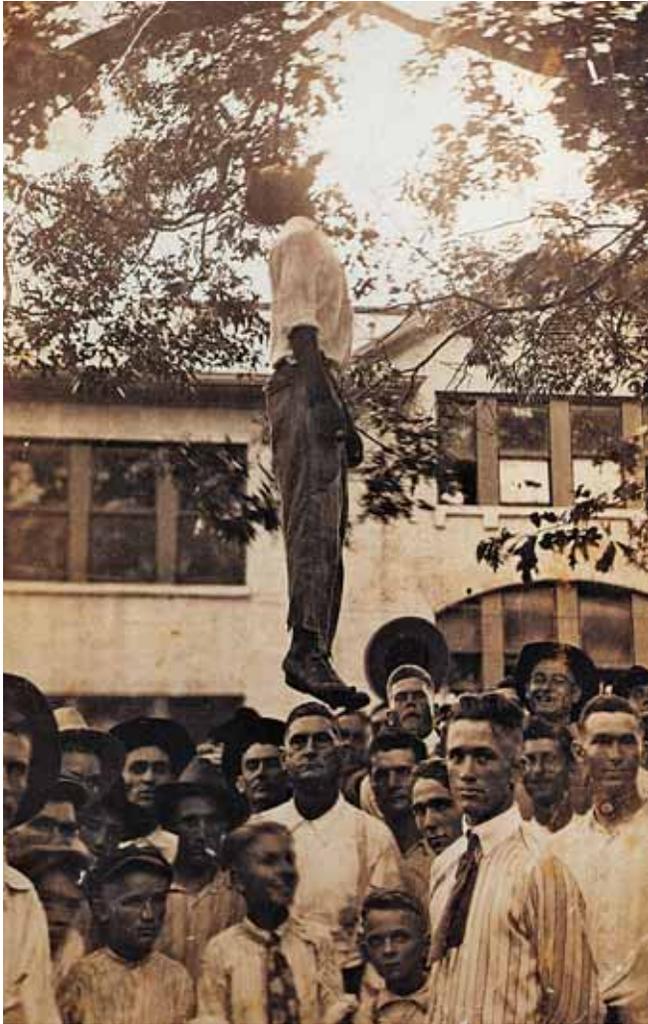
The impact of the 1890s counterrevolution was dramatically illustrated in Grimes County, a cotton-growing area in east Texas where blacks comprised more than half of the population. African American voters kept the local Republican Party going after Reconstruction and regularly sent black representatives to the Texas legislature. Many local white Populists dismissed Democrats’ taunts of “negro supremacy,” and a Populist-Republican coalition swept the county elections in 1896 and 1898. But after their 1898 defeat, Democrats in Grimes County organized a secret brotherhood and forcibly prevented blacks from voting in town elections, shooting two in cold blood. The Populist sheriff proved unable to bring the murderers to justice. Reconstituted in 1900 as the White Man’s Party, Democrats carried Grimes County by an overwhelming margin. Gunmen then laid siege to the Populist sheriff’s office, killed his brother and a friend, and drove the wounded sheriff out of the county. The White Man’s Party ruled Grimes County for the next fifty years.

**New National Realities**

While their southern racial policies were abhorrent, the national Democrats simultaneously amazed the country in 1896 by embracing parts of the Populists’ radical farmer-labor program. They nominated for

**MAP 20.3****Disenfranchisement in the New South**

In the midst of the Populist challenge to Democratic one-party rule in the South, a movement to deprive blacks of the right to vote spread from Mississippi across the South. By 1910, every state in the region except Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas, and Florida had made constitutional changes designed to prevent blacks from voting, and these four states accomplished much the same result through poll taxes and other exclusionary methods. For the next half century, the political process in the South would be for whites only.



### Lynching in Texas

Lynchings peaked between 1890 and 1910; while most common in the South, they occurred in almost every state, from Oregon to Minnesota to New York. After many lynchings—such as this one in the town of Center, Texas, in 1920—crowds posed to have their pictures taken. Commercial photographers often, as in this case, produced photographic postcards to sell as souvenirs. What do we make of these gruesome rituals? Who is in the crowd, and who is not? What do we learn from the fact that this group of white men, some of whom may have been responsible for the lynching, felt comfortable having their photographs recorded with the body? The victim in this photograph, a young man named Lige Daniels, was seized from the local jail by a mob that broke down the prison door to kidnap and kill him. The inscription on the back of the postcard includes information about the killing, along with the instructions “Give this to Bud From Aunt Myrtle.” Private Collection.

president a young Nebraska congressman, free-silver advocate William Jennings Bryan, who passionately defended farmers and attacked the gold standard. “Burn down your cities and leave our farms,” Bryan declared in his famous convention speech, “and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country.” He ended with a vow: “You shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold.” Cheering delegates endorsed a platform calling for free silver and a federal income tax on the wealthy that would replace tariffs as a source of revenue. Democrats, long defenders of limited government, were moving toward a more activist stance.

Populists, reeling from recent defeats, endorsed Bryan in the campaign, but their power was waning. Populist leader Tom Watson, who wanted a separate program, more radical than Bryan’s, observed that Democrats in 1896 had cast the Populists as “Jonah

while they play whale.” The People’s Party never recovered from its electoral losses in 1894 and from Democrats’ ruthless opposition in the South. By 1900, rural voters pursued reform elsewhere, particularly through the new Bryan wing of the Democratic Party.

Meanwhile, horrified Republicans denounced Bryan’s platform as anarchistic. Their nominee, the Ohio congressman and tariff advocate William McKinley, chose a brilliant campaign manager, Ohio coal and shipping magnate Marcus Hanna, who orchestrated an unprecedented corporate fund-raising campaign. Under his guidance, the party backed away from moral issues such as prohibition of liquor and reached out to new immigrants. Though the popular vote was closer, McKinley won big: 271 electoral votes to Bryan’s 176 (Map 20.4).

Nationwide, as in the South, the realignment of the 1890s prompted new measures to exclude voters. Influenced by classical liberals’ denunciations of “unfit

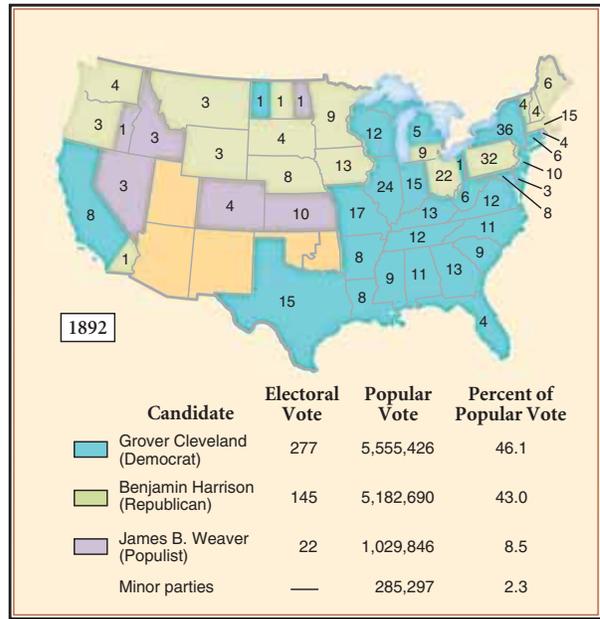


**William Jennings Bryan**

This 1896 campaign poster emphasizes the youth of the thirty-six-year-old Nebraska Democrat and includes portraits of his wife Mary and their three young children. The full text of his famous “Cross of Gold” speech appears flanked by silver coins and overlaid with “16 to 1,” representing the Chicago platform’s proposal to mint U.S. silver coins at a 16-to-1 ratio with gold, increasing the money supply to stimulate the economy and aid borrowers. At the bottom stand a farmer and industrial workingman—primary bases of Democratic support. Many farmers and workers voted for McKinley, however, especially in the industrial heartland of the Northeast and Midwest. Though Bryan secured the electoral votes of the South and a substantial majority of western states, McKinley won the election. Library of Congress.

voters,” many northern states imposed literacy tests and restrictions on immigrant voting. Leaders of both major parties, determined to prevent future Populist-style threats, made it more difficult for new parties to get candidates listed on the ballot. In the wake of such laws, voter turnout declined, and the electorate narrowed in ways that favored the native-born and wealthy.

Antidemocratic restrictions on voting helped, paradoxically, to foster certain democratic innovations.



**MAP 20.4**

**The Presidential Elections of 1892 and 1896**

In the 1890s, the age of political stalemate came to an end. Students should compare the 1892 map with Map 20.1 (p. 639) and note especially Cleveland’s breakthrough in the normally Republican states of the Upper Midwest. In 1896, the pendulum swung in the opposite direction, with McKinley’s consolidation of Republican control over the Northeast and Midwest far overbalancing the Democratic advances in the thinly populated western states. The 1896 election marked the beginning of sixteen years of Republican dominance in national politics.

Having excluded or reduced the number of poor, African American, and immigrant voters, elite and middle-class reformers felt more comfortable increasing the power of the voters who remained. Both major

parties increasingly turned to the direct primary, asking voters (in most states, registered party members) rather than party leaders to choose nominees. Another measure that enhanced democratic participation was the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution (1913), requiring that U.S. senators be chosen not by state legislatures, but by popular vote. Though many states had adopted the practice well before 1913, southern states had resisted, since Democrats feared that it might give more power to their political opponents. After disenfranchisement, such objections faded and the measure passed. Thus disenfranchisement enhanced the power of remaining voters in multiple, complicated ways.

At the same time, the Supreme Court proved hostile to many proposed reforms. In 1895, for example, it struck down a recently adopted federal income tax on the wealthy. The Court ruled that unless this tax was calculated on a per-state basis, rather than by the wealth of individuals, it could not be levied without a constitutional amendment. It took progressives nineteen years to achieve that goal.

Labor organizations also suffered in the new political regime, as federal courts invalidated many regulatory laws passed to protect workers. As early as 1882, in the case of *In re Jacobs*, the New York State Court of Appeals struck down a public-health law that prohibited cigar manufacturing in tenements, arguing that such regulation exceeded the state's police powers. In *Lochner v. New York* (1905), the U.S. Supreme Court told New York State it could not limit bakers' workday to ten hours because that violated bakers' rights to make contracts. Judges found support for such rulings in the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibited states from depriving "any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law." Though the clause had been intended to protect former slaves, courts used it to shield contract rights, with judges arguing that they were protecting workers'

### PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

What developments caused the percentage of Americans who voted to plunge after 1900, and what role did courts play in antidemocratic developments?



#### The U.S. Supreme Court, 1894

During the 1890s, the Supreme Court struck down a number of pieces of progressive legislation, including a progressive federal income tax that had been signed into law by Congress and the president. In the Knight Sugar Case (*United States v. E. C. Knight Co.*), the Court ruled that the federal government had limited power over interstate commerce when a company did most of its manufacturing in a single state. In another 1894 decision, *In re Debs*, manufacturers were allowed free use of injunctions to shut down strikes. Two years later, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Court gave national sanction to racial segregation. In the front row, from left to right, are justices Horace Gray, Stephen J. Field, Chief Justice Melville W. Fuller, John Marshall Harlan I, and David J. Brewer. Standing in the back row, left to right, are justices Howell Jackson, Henry B. Brown, George Shiras, and Edward Douglas White. C. M. Bell, Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.

freedom *from* government regulation. Interpreted in this way, the Fourteenth Amendment was a major obstacle to regulation of private business.

Farmer and labor advocates, along with urban progressives who called for more government regulation, disagreed with such rulings. They believed judges, not state legislators, were overreaching. While courts treated employers and employees as equal parties, critics dismissed this as a legal fiction. “Modern industry has reduced ‘freedom of contract’ to a paper privilege,” declared one labor advocate, “a mere figure of rhetoric.” Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., dissenting in the *Lochner* decision, agreed. If the choice was between working and starving, he observed, how could bakers “choose” their hours of work? Holmes’s view, known as legal realism, eventually won judicial favor, but only after years of progressive and labor activism.

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## Reform Reshaped, 1901–1912

William McKinley, a powerful presence in the White House, was no reformer. His victory was widely understood as a triumph for business and especially for industrial titans who had contributed heavily to his campaign. But the depression of the 1890s, by subjecting millions to severe hardship, had dramatically illustrated the problems of industrialization. At the same time, the success of McKinley’s campaign managers—who spent more than \$3.5 million, versus Bryan’s \$300,000—raised unsettling questions about corporate power. Once the crisis of the 1890s passed, many middle-class Americans proved ready to embrace progressive ideas. The rise of such ideas was aided by historical chance, when a shocking assassination put a reformer in the White House.

### Theodore Roosevelt as President

On September 14, 1901, only six months after William McKinley won his second face-off against Democrat William Jennings Bryan, the president was shot as he attended the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. He died eight days later. The murderer, Leon Czolgosz, was influenced by anarchists who had carried out recent assassinations in Europe. Though Czolgosz was American-born, many feared that McKinley’s violent death was another warning of the threat posed by radical immigrants. As the nation mourned its third murdered president in less than four decades, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt was sworn into office.

Roosevelt, from a prominent family, had chosen an unconventional path. After graduating from Harvard, he plunged into politics, winning a seat as a Republican New York assemblyman. Disillusioned by his party’s resistance to reform, he left politics in the mid-1880s and moved to a North Dakota ranch. But his cattle herd was wiped out in the blizzards of 1887. He returned east, winning appointments as a U.S. Civil Service commissioner, head of the New York City Police Commission, and McKinley’s assistant secretary of the navy. An energetic presence in all these jobs, Roosevelt gained broad knowledge of the problems America faced at the municipal, state, and federal levels.

After serving in the War of 1898 (Chapter 21), Roosevelt was elected as New York’s governor. In this job, he pushed through civil service reform and a tax on corporations. Seeking to neutralize this progressive and rather unpredictable political star, Republican bosses chose Roosevelt as McKinley’s running mate in 1900, hoping the vice-presidency would be a political dead end. Instead, they suddenly found Roosevelt in the White House. The new president, who called for vigorous reform, represented a major shift for the Republicans.

**Antitrust Legislation** Roosevelt blended reform with the needs of private enterprise, but on occasion he challenged corporations in new ways. During a bitter 1902 coal strike, for example, he threatened to nationalize the big coal companies if their owners refused to negotiate with the miners’ union. The owners hastily came to the table. Roosevelt also sought better enforcement of the Interstate Commerce Act and Sherman Antitrust Act. He pushed through the Elkins Act (1903), which prohibited discriminatory railway rates that favored powerful customers. That same year, he created the Bureau of Corporations, empowered to investigate business practices and bolster the Justice Department’s capacity to mount antitrust suits. The department had already filed such a suit against the Northern Securities Company, arguing that this combination of northwestern railroads had created a monopoly in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. In a landmark decision in 1904, the Supreme Court ordered Northern Securities dissolved.

That year, calling for every American to get what he called a Square Deal, Roosevelt handily defeated Democratic candidate Alton B. Parker. Now president in his own right, Roosevelt stepped up his attack on trusts. He regarded large-scale enterprise as the natural tendency of modern industry, but he hoped to



### Reining in Big Business

This 1904 cartoon from *Puck* shows Theodore Roosevelt as a tiny figure with a sword marked “public service,” taking on railroad developer Jay Gould, financier John Pierpont Morgan, and other Wall Street titans. The figure at the top right is oil magnate John D. Rockefeller. In its reference to the folktale “Jack the Giant Killer,” the cartoon suggests how difficult it will be for the president to limit the power of globally connected bankers and financiers. Library of Congress.

identify and punish “malefactors of great wealth” who abused their power. After much wrangling in Congress, Roosevelt won a major victory with the passage of the Hepburn Act (1906), which enabled the Interstate Commerce Commission to set shipping rates.

At the time Roosevelt acted, trusts had partially protected themselves with the help of two friendly states, New Jersey and Delaware, whose legislatures had loosened regulations and invited trusts to incorporate under their new state laws. With its Northern Securities ruling, however, the Supreme Court began to recognize federal authority to dissolve the most egregious monopolies. Roosevelt left a powerful legacy

to his successor, William Howard Taft. In its *Standard Oil* decision (1911), the Supreme Court agreed with Taft’s Justice Department that John D. Rockefeller’s massive oil monopoly should be broken up into several competing companies. After this ruling, Taft’s attorney general undertook antitrust actions against other giant companies.

### UNDERSTAND POINTS OF VIEW

To what degree, and in what ways, were Roosevelt’s policies progressive?

**Environmental Conservation** Roosevelt was an ardent outdoorsman and hunter. It was after the president went bear hunting in Mississippi in 1902, in fact, that a Russian Jewish immigrant couple in New York began to sell stuffed “Teddy’s bears,” which became an American childhood tradition. After John Muir gave Roosevelt a tour of Yosemite Valley, the president described the transcendent experience of camping in the open air under the giant sequoias. “The majestic trunks, beautiful in color and in symmetry,” he wrote, “rose round us like the pillars of a mightier cathedral than ever was conceived.”

Roosevelt translated his love of nature into environmental action. By the end of his presidency, he had issued fifty-one executive orders creating wildlife refuges and signed a number of bills advocated by environmentalists. He also oversaw creation of three national parks, including Colorado’s Mesa Verde, the first to “protect the works of man”: American Indian archaeological sites. Also notable was his vigorous use of the Antiquities Act, through which he set aside such beautiful sites as Arizona’s Grand Canyon and Washington’s Mt. Olympus.

Some of Roosevelt’s conservation policies, however, had a probusiness bent. He increased the amount of land held in federal forest reserves and turned their management over to the new, independent U.S. Forest Service, created in 1905. But his forestry chief, Gifford Pinchot, insisted on fire suppression to maximize logging potential. In addition, Roosevelt lent support to the **Newlands Reclamation Act** (1902), which had much in common with earlier Republican policies to promote economic development in the West. Under the act, the federal government sold public lands to raise money for irrigation projects that expanded agriculture on arid lands. The law, interestingly, fulfilled one of the demands of the unemployed men who had marched with Coxey’s Army.

**Roosevelt’s Legacies** Like the environmental laws enacted during his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt was full of contradictions. An unabashed believer in

what he called “Anglo-Saxon” superiority, Roosevelt nonetheless incurred the wrath of white supremacists by inviting Booker T. Washington to dine at the White House. Roosevelt called for elite “best men” to enter politics, but he also defended the dignity of labor.

In 1908, Roosevelt chose to retire, bequeathing the Republican nomination to talented administrator William Howard Taft. Taft portrayed himself as Roosevelt’s man, though he maintained a closer relationship than his predecessor with probusiness Republicans in Congress. In 1908, Taft faced off against Democrat William Jennings Bryan, who, eloquent as ever, attacked Republicans as the party of “plutocrats”: men who used their wealth to buy political influence. Bryan outdid Taft in urging tougher antitrust and pro-labor legislation, but Taft won comfortably.

In the wake of Taft’s victory, however, rising pressure for reform began to divide Republicans. Conservatives dug in, while militant progressives within the party thought Roosevelt and his successor had not gone far enough. Reconciling these conflicting forces was a daunting task. For Taft, it spelled disaster. Through various incidents, he found himself on the opposite side of progressive Republicans, who began to call themselves “Insurgents” and to plot their own path.

## Diverse Progressive Goals

The revolt of Republican Insurgents signaled the strength of grassroots demands for change. No one described these emerging goals more eloquently than Jane Addams, who famously declared in *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1902), “The cure for the ills of Democracy is more Democracy.” It was a poignant statement, given the sharply antidemocratic direction American politics had taken since the 1890s. What, now, should more democracy look like? Various groups of progressives — women, antipoverty reformers, African American advocates — often disagreed about priorities and goals. Some, frustrated by events in the United States, traveled abroad to study inspiring experiments in other nations, hoping to bring ideas home (*America Compared*, p. 653).

States also served as seedbeds of change. Theodore Roosevelt dubbed Wisconsin a “laboratory of democracy” under energetic Republican governor Robert La Follette (1901–1905). La Follette promoted what he called the **Wisconsin Idea** — greater government intervention in the economy, with reliance on experts, particularly progressive economists, for policy recommendations. Like Addams, La Follette combined respect for expertise with commitment to “more Democracy.”

He won battles to restrict lobbying and to give Wisconsin citizens the right of **recall** — voting to remove unpopular politicians from office — and **referendum** — voting directly on a proposed law, rather than leaving it in the hands of legislators. Continuing his career in the U.S. Senate, La Follette, like Roosevelt, advocated increasingly aggressive measures to protect workers and rein in corporate power.

**Protecting the Poor** The urban settlement movement called attention to poverty in America’s industrial cities. In the emerging social sciences, experts argued that unemployment and crowded slums were not caused by laziness and ignorance, as elite Americans had long believed. Instead, as journalist Robert Hunter wrote in his landmark study, *Poverty* (1904), such problems resulted from “miserable and unjust social conditions.” Charity work was at best a limited solution. “How vain to waste our energies on single cases of relief,” declared one reformer, “when *society* should aim at removing the prolific sources of all the woe.”

By the early twentieth century, reformers placed particular emphasis on labor conditions for women and children. The **National Child Labor Committee**, created in 1907, hired photographer Lewis Hine to record brutal conditions in mines and mills where children worked. (See Hine’s photograph on p. 621.) Impressed by the committee’s investigations, Theodore Roosevelt sponsored the first White House Conference on Dependent Children in 1909, bringing national attention to child welfare issues. In 1912, momentum from the conference resulted in creation of the Children’s Bureau in the U.S. Labor Department.

Those seeking to protect working-class women scored a major triumph in 1908 with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Muller v. Oregon*, which upheld an Oregon law limiting women’s workday to ten hours. Given the Court’s ruling three years earlier in *Lochner v. New York*, it was a stunning victory. To win the case, the National Consumers’ League (NCL) recruited Louis Brandeis, a son of Jewish immigrants who was widely known as “the people’s lawyer” for his eagerness to take on vested interests. Brandeis’s legal brief in the *Muller* case devoted only two pages to the constitutional issue of state police powers. Instead, Brandeis rested his arguments on data gathered by the NCL describing the toll that long work hours took on women’s health. The “Brandeis brief” cleared the way for use of social science research in court decisions. Sanctioning a more expansive role for state governments, the *Muller* decision encouraged women’s organizations to lobby for further reforms. Their achievements included



## A Progressive Reports from New Zealand

Henry Demarest Lloyd, a reform journalist discouraged by populism’s defeat in the United States, toured New Zealand in 1899. Lloyd wanted to study New Zealand’s sudden burst of reform legislation stemming from a great industrial strike in 1890 and, in its wake, a Labor Party election victory that precipitated dramatic change.

Lloyd was one of many reformers who looked overseas for progressive ideas. The urban settlement movement in the United States was inspired by British examples. Municipal, state, and federal officials borrowed innovative policies from other parts of the industrializing world—from scientific forest management to workmen’s compensation laws.

New Zealand democracy is the talk of the world to-day. It has made itself the policeman and partner of industry to an extent unknown elsewhere. It is the “experiment station” of advanced legislation. . . .

Instead of escaping from the evils of the social order by going to a new country, the Englishmen who settled New Zealand found that they had brought all its problems with them. . . . The best acres were in the hands of monopolists. . . . The little farmer, forced by unjust and deliberately contrived laws to pay his own and his rich neighbor’s taxes, had to sell out his little homestead to that neighbor for what he could get. The workingman, able to get neither land nor work, had to become a tramp. . . . The blood of the people was the vintage of the rich.

Here is the record of ten years [of progressive legislation]: . . . The rich man, because rich, is made to pay more. . . .

By compulsory arbitration the public gets for the guidance of public opinion all the facts as to disputes between labor and capital, [and] puts an end to strikes and lock-outs. . . . For the unemployed the nation makes itself a labor bureau. It brings them and the employers together. It reorganizes its public works and land system so as to give land to the landless and work to the workless. . . . The state itself insures the working people against accident.

. . . The nation’s railroads are used to redistribute unemployed labour, to rebuild industry shattered by calamity, to stimulate production by special rates to and

from farms and factories, to give health and education to the school and factory population and the people generally by cheap excursions.

. . . Women are enfranchised. . . . On election day one can see the baby-carriage standing in front of the polls while the father and mother go in and vote — against each other if they choose.

Last of all, pensions are given to the aged poor.

. . . We are exhorted to take “one step at a time” [but] this theory does not fit the New Zealand evolution. . . . It was not merely a change in parties; it was a change in principles and institutions that amounted to nothing less than a social right-about-face. It was a New Zealand revolution, one which without destruction passed at once to the tasks of construction.

Source: Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Newest England* (New York: Doubleday, 1901), 1, 364–374.

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What reforms had New Zealand enacted, according to Lloyd, and what problems did they solve?
2. New Zealand had a population of one million in 1890, mostly British immigrants and their descendants, with a smaller number of native Maori. Why might reform have been easier to achieve there than in the United States?

the first law providing public assistance for single mothers with dependent children (Illinois, 1911) and the first minimum wage law for women (Massachusetts, 1912).

*Muller* had drawbacks, however. Though men as well as women suffered from long work hours, the *Muller* case did not protect men. Brandeis’s brief treated all women as potential mothers, focusing on the state’s

interest in protecting future children. Brandeis and his allies hoped this would open the door to broader regulation of working hours. The Supreme Court, however, seized on motherhood as the key issue, asserting that the female worker, because of her maternal function, was “in a class by herself, and legislation for her protection may be sustained, even when like legislation is not



### Robert M. La Follette

La Follette was transformed into a political reformer when, in 1891, a Wisconsin Republican boss attempted to bribe him to influence a judge in a railway case. As he described it in his autobiography, “Out of this awful ordeal came understanding; and out of understanding came resolution. I determined that the power of this corrupt influence . . . should be broken.” This photograph captures him at the top of his form, expounding his progressive vision to a rapt audience of Wisconsin citizens at an impromptu street gathering. Library of Congress.

necessary for men.” This conclusion dismayed labor advocates and divided female reformers for decades afterward.

Male workers did benefit, however, from new workmen’s compensation measures. Between 1910 and 1917, all the industrial states enacted insurance laws covering on-the-job accidents, so workers’ families would not starve if a breadwinner was injured or killed. Some states also experimented with so-called mothers’ pensions, providing state assistance after a breadwinner’s desertion or death. Mothers, however, were subjected to home visits to determine whether they “deserved” government aid; injured workmen were not judged on this basis, a pattern of gender discrimination that reflected the broader impulse to protect women, while also treating them differently from men. Mothers’ pensions reached relatively small numbers of women, but they laid foundations for the national program Aid to Families with Dependent Children, an important component of the Social Security Act of 1935.

While federalism gave the states considerable freedom to innovate, it hampered national reforms. In

some states, for example, opponents of child labor won laws barring young children from factory work and strictly regulating hours and conditions for older children’s labor. In the South, however, and in coal-mining states like Pennsylvania, companies fiercely resisted such laws—as did many working-class parents who relied on children’s income to keep the family fed. A proposed U.S. constitutional amendment to abolish child labor never won ratification; only four states passed it. Tens of thousands of children continued to work in low-wage jobs, especially in the South. The same decentralized power that permitted innovation in Wisconsin hampered the creation of national minimum standards for pay and job safety.

**The Birth of Modern Civil Rights** Reeling from disenfranchisement and the sanction of racial segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), African American leaders faced distinctive challenges. Given the obvious deterioration of African American rights, a new generation of black leaders proposed bolder approaches than those popularized earlier by Booker T. Washington. Harvard-educated sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois called



### W. E. B. Du Bois

W. E. B. Du Bois was born in western Massachusetts in 1868, the son of a barber and a domestic worker. He received an excellent local education and went on to earn his BA and PhD at Harvard, as well as to study with cutting-edge social scientists in Germany. By 1900, Du Bois had become a national civil rights leader and America's leading black intellectual. Famous for his sociological and historical studies, including *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and edited the organization's journal, *The Crisis*. Between 1900 and 1945, he helped organize Pan-African conferences in locations around the world. Toward the end of his life, Du Bois pursued this Pan-African ideal by moving to Ghana, the first modern African nation formed after the end of European colonialism. He died there in 1963. Special Collections and Archives, W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

for a **talented tenth** of educated blacks to develop new strategies. “The policy of compromise has failed,” declared William Monroe Trotter, pugnacious editor of the *Boston Guardian*. “The policy of resistance and aggression deserves a trial.”

In 1905, Du Bois and Trotter called a meeting at Niagara Falls — on the Canadian side, because no hotel on the U.S. side would admit blacks. The resulting Niagara Principles called for full voting rights; an end to segregation; equal treatment in the justice system; and equal opportunity in education, jobs, health care,

and military service. These principles, based on African American pride and an uncompromising demand for full equality, guided the civil rights movement throughout the twentieth century.

In 1908, a bloody race riot broke out in Springfield, Illinois. Appalled by the white mob's violence in the hometown of Abraham Lincoln, New York settlement worker Mary White Ovington called together a group of sympathetic progressives to formulate a response. Their meeting led in 1909 to creation of the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)**. Most leaders of the Niagara Movement soon joined; W. E. B. Du Bois became editor of the NAACP journal, *The Crisis*. The fledgling group found allies in many African American women's clubs and churches. It also cooperated with the National Urban League (1911), a union of agencies that assisted black migrants in the North. Over the coming decades, these groups grew into a powerful force for racial justice.

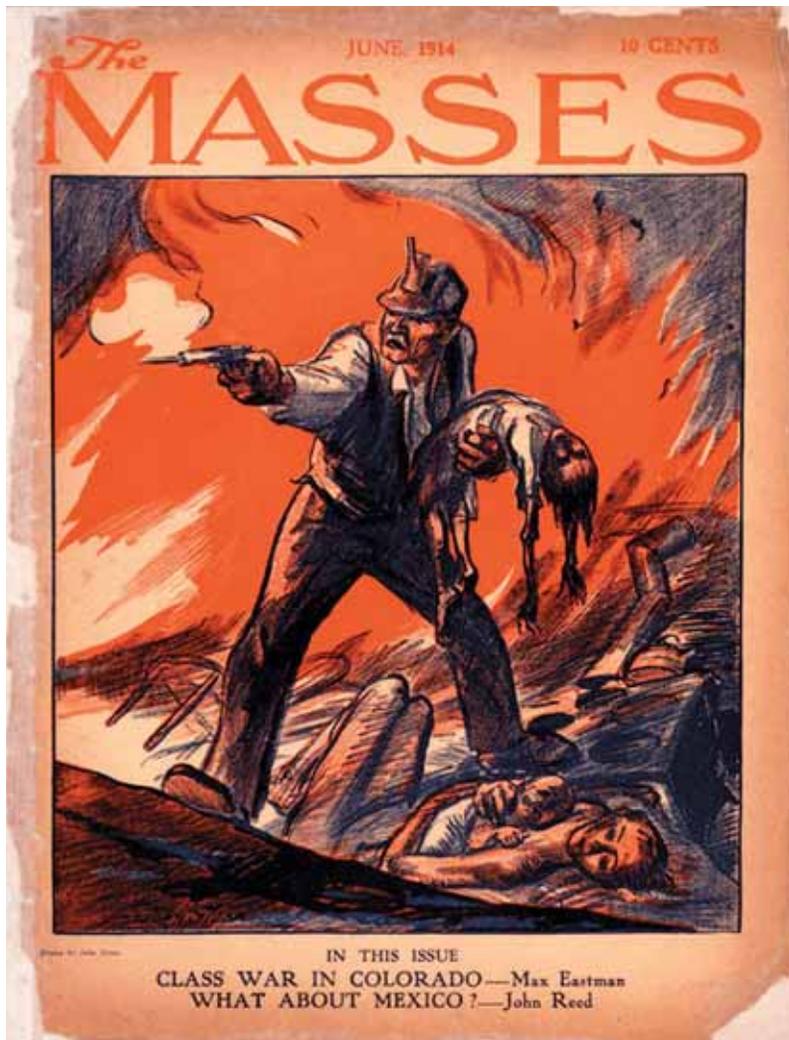
**The Problem of Labor** Leaders of the nation's dominant union, the American Federation of Labor, were slow to ally with progressives. They had long believed workers should improve their situation through strikes and direct negotiation with employers, not through politics. But by the 1910s, as progressive reformers came forward with solutions, labor leaders in state after state began to join the cause.

The nation also confronted a daring wave of radical labor militancy. In 1905, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), led by fiery leaders such as William “Big Bill” Haywood, helped create a new movement, the **Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)**. The Wobblies, as they were called, fervently supported the Marxist class struggle. As syndicalists, they believed that by resisting in the workplace and ultimately launching a general strike, workers could overthrow capitalism. A new society would emerge, run directly by workers. At its height, around 1916, the IWW had about 100,000 members. Though divided by internal conflicts, the group helped spark a number of local protests during the 1910s, including strikes of rail car builders in Pennsylvania, textile operatives in Massachusetts, rubber workers in Ohio, and miners in Minnesota.

Meanwhile, after midnight on October 1, 1910, an explosion ripped through the *Los Angeles Times* headquarters, killing twenty employees and wrecking the building. It turned out that John J. McNamara, a high official

### COMPARE AND CONTRAST

How did various grassroots reformers define “progressivism,” and how did their views differ from Theodore Roosevelt's version of “progressivism”?



### The Ludlow Massacre, 1914

Like his drawings of Triangle Shirtwaist fire victims in New York, this cover illustration for the popular socialist magazine *The Masses* demonstrates John Sloan's outrage at social injustice in progressive America. The drawing memorializes a tragic episode during a coal miners' strike at Ludlow, Colorado—the asphyxiation of women and children when vigilantes torched the tent city of evicted miners—and the aftermath, an armed revolt by enraged miners. *The Masses*, June 1914.

of the American Federation of Labor's Bridge and Structural Iron Workers Union, had planned the bombing against the fiercely antiunion *Times*. McNamara's brother and another union member had carried out the attack. The bombing created a sensation, as did the terrible Triangle Shirtwaist fire (Chapter 19) and the IWW's high-profile strikes. What should be done? As the election of 1912 approached, labor issues moved high on the nation's agenda.

### The Election of 1912

Retirement did not sit comfortably with Theodore Roosevelt. Returning from a yearlong safari in Africa in 1910 and finding Taft wrangling with the Insurgents, Roosevelt itched to jump in. In a speech in Osawatomie, Kansas, in August 1910, he called for a **New Nationalism**. In modern America, he argued, private property had to be controlled "to whatever degree the public

welfare may require it." He proposed a federal child labor law, more recognition of labor rights, and a national minimum wage for women. Pressed by friends like Jane Addams, Roosevelt also endorsed women's suffrage. Most radical was his attack on the legal system. Insisting that courts blocked reform, Roosevelt proposed sharp curbs on their powers (*American Voices*, p. 658).

Early in 1912, Roosevelt announced himself as a Republican candidate for president. A battle within the party ensued. Roosevelt won most states that held primary elections, but Taft controlled party caucuses elsewhere. Dominated by regulars, the Republican convention chose Taft. Roosevelt then led his followers into what became known as the Progressive Party, offering his New Nationalism directly to the people. Though Jane Addams harbored private doubts (especially about Roosevelt's mania for battleships), she seconded his nomination, calling the Progressive Party

### The Republicans Resist Roosevelt, August 7, 1912

This cartoon appeared in the political humor journal *Puck*, six weeks after the Republican convention nominated Taft and two days after the new Progressive Party nominated Theodore Roosevelt. The baptismal choir consists of men such as Gifford Pinchot, who helped Roosevelt form the new party. The G.O.P. elephant refuses to be baptized in “Teddyism,” though Preacher Roosevelt insists, “Salvation is Free.” President William Howard Taft, dressed in brown with a hat, pulls on the elephant’s tail. Library of Congress.



“the American exponent of a world-wide movement for juster social conditions.” In a nod to Roosevelt’s combative stance, party followers called themselves “Bull Mooses.”

Roosevelt was not the only rebel on the ballot: the major parties also faced a challenge from charismatic socialist Eugene V. Debs. In the 1890s, Debs had founded the American Railway Union (ARU), a broad-based group that included both skilled and unskilled workers. In 1894, amid the upheavals of depression and popular protest, the ARU had boycotted luxury Pullman sleeping cars, in support of a strike by workers at the Pullman Company. Railroad managers, claiming the strike obstructed the U.S. mail, persuaded Grover Cleveland’s administration to intervene against the union. The strike failed, and Debs served time in prison along with other ARU leaders. The experience radicalized him, and in 1901 he launched the Socialist Party of America. Debs translated socialism into an American idiom, emphasizing the democratic process as a means to defeat capitalism. By the early 1910s, his party had secured a minor but persistent role in politics. Both the Progressive and Socialist parties drew strength from the West, a region with vigorous urban reform movements and a legacy of farmer-labor activism.

Watching the rise of the Progressives and Socialists, Democrats were keen to build on dramatic gains they had made in the 1910 midterm election. Among their younger leaders was Virginia-born Woodrow Wilson, who as New Jersey’s governor had compiled an impressive reform record, including passage of a direct primary, workers’ compensation, and utility regulation. In

1912, he won the Democrats’ nomination. Wilson possessed, to a fault, the moral certainty that characterized many elite progressives. He had much in common with Roosevelt. “The old time of individual competition is probably gone by,” he admitted, agreeing for more federal measures to restrict big business. But his goals were less sweeping than Roosevelt’s, and only gradually did he hammer out a reform program, calling it the New Freedom. “If America is not to have free enterprise,” Wilson warned, “then she can have freedom of no sort whatever.” He claimed Roosevelt’s program represented collectivism, whereas the New Freedom would preserve political and economic liberty.

With four candidates in the field — Taft, Roosevelt, Wilson, and Debs — the 1912 campaign generated intense excitement. Democrats continued to have an enormous blind spot: their opposition to African American rights. But Republicans, despite plentiful opportunities, had also conspicuously failed to end segregation or pass antilynching laws. Though African American leaders had high hopes for the Progressive Party, they were crushed when the new party refused to seat southern black delegates or take a stand for racial equality. W. E. B. Du Bois considered voting for Debs, calling the Socialists the only party “which openly recognized Negro manhood.” But he ultimately endorsed Wilson. Across the North, in a startling shift, thousands of African American men and women worked and voted for Wilson, hoping Democrats’ reform

### COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Why did the election of 1912 feature four candidates, and how did their platforms differ?



## Theodore Roosevelt: From Anti-Populist to New Nationalist

Theodore Roosevelt published the first piece below in a leading journal in 1897. At the time he was serving as police commissioner of New York City. The second document is a famous speech he delivered in 1910, when he had retired from the presidency but was planning a bid for the 1912 Republican nomination.

### “How Not to Help Our Poorer Brother,” 1897

In the 1890s Roosevelt, a rising Republican star, forcefully denounced populism and other radical movements. The comments below were part of an exchange with Populists’ 1896 vice-presidential nominee, Tom Watson of Georgia.

There are plenty of ugly things about wealth and its possessors in the present age, and I suppose there have been in all ages. There are many rich people who so utterly lack patriotism, or show such sordid and selfish traits of character, . . . that all right-minded men must look upon them with angry contempt; but, on the whole, the thrifty are apt to be better citizens than the thriftless; and the worst capitalist cannot harm laboring men as they are harmed by demagogues. . . .

The first lesson to teach the poor man is that, as a whole, the wealth of the community is distinctly beneficial to him; that he is better off in the long run because other men are well off, and that the surest way to destroy what measure of prosperity he may have is to paralyze industry and the well-being of those men who have achieved success.

. . . It may become necessary to interfere even more than we have done with the right of private contract, and to shackle cunning as we have shackled force. All I insist upon is that we must be sure of our ground before trying to get any legislation, and that we must not expect too much from this legislation. . . . The worst foe of the poor man is the labor leader, whether philanthropist or politician, who tried to teach him that he is a victim of conspiracy and injustice, when in reality he is merely working out his fate with blood and sweat as the immense majority of men who are worthy of the name always have done and always will have to do. . . .

Something can be done by good laws; more can be done by honest administration of the laws; but most of all can be done by frowning resolutely upon the preachers of vague discontent; and by upholding the true doctrine of self-reliance, self-help, and self-mastery. This doctrine sets forth many things. Among them is that, though a man can occasionally be helped when he stumbles, yet

that it is useless to try to carry him when he will not or cannot walk; and worse than useless to try to bring down the work and reward of the thrifty and intelligent to the level of the capacity of the weak, the shiftless, and the idle. . . .

If an American is to amount to anything he must rely upon himself, and not upon the State. . . . It is both foolish and wicked to teach the average man who is not well off that some wrong or injustice has been done him, and that he should hope for redress elsewhere than in his own industry, honesty and intelligence.

### New Nationalism Speech, August 31, 1910

Roosevelt delivered this speech to a gathering of Union veterans at Osawatimie, Kansas, a site associated with abolitionist John Brown (Chapter 13). Why do you think Roosevelt chose this occasion and audience?

Of that [Civil War] generation of men to whom we owe so much, the man to whom we owe most is, of course, Lincoln. Part of our debt to him is because he forecast our present struggle and saw the way out. He said:

. . . “Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.”

If that remark was original with me, I should be even more strongly denounced as a Communist agitator than I shall be anyhow. It is Lincoln’s. I am only quoting it; and that is one side; that is the side the capitalist should hear. Now, let the working man hear his side.

“Capital has its rights, which are as worthy of protection as any other rights. . . . Nor should this lead to a war upon the owners of property. Property is the fruit of labor; property is desirable.”

. . . It seems to me that, in these words, Lincoln took substantially the attitude that we ought to take; he showed the proper sense of proportion in his relative estimates of capital and labor, of human rights and property rights. One of the chief factors in progress is the destruction of special privilege. The essence of any struggle for healthy

liberty has always been, and must always be, to take from some one man or class of men the right to enjoy power, or wealth, or position, or immunity, which has not been earned by service to his or their fellows. That is what you fought for in the Civil War, and that is what we strive for now.

. . . Practical equality of opportunity for all citizens, when we achieve it, will have two great results. First, every man will have a fair chance to make of himself all that in him lies; to reach the highest point to which his capacities, unassisted by special privilege of his own and unhampered by the special privilege of others, can carry him, and to get for himself and his family substantially what he has earned. Second, equality of opportunity means that the commonwealth will get from every citizen the highest service of which he is capable.

. . . When I say that I am for the square deal, I mean not merely that I stand for fair play under the present rules of the game, but that I stand for having those rules changed so as to work for a more substantial equality of opportunity and of reward for equally good service. . . . This means that our government, national and State, must be freed from the sinister influence or control of special interests. Exactly as the special interests of cotton and slavery threatened our political integrity before the Civil War, so now the great special business interests too often control and corrupt the men and methods of government for their own profit. We must drive the special interests out of politics. . . .

The Constitution guarantees protections to property, and we must make that promise good. But it does not give the right of suffrage to any corporation. The true friend of property, the true conservative, is he who insists that property shall be the servant and not the master of the commonwealth. . . . The citizens of the United States must effectively control the mighty commercial forces which they have themselves called into being.

There can be no effective control of corporations while their political activity remains. To put an end to it will be neither a short nor an easy task, but it can be done. . . .

We are face to face with new conceptions of the relations of property to human welfare, chiefly because certain advocates of the rights of property as against the

rights of men have been pushing their claims too far. The man who wrongly holds that every human right is secondary to his profit must now give way to the advocate of human welfare. . . .

No man can be a good citizen unless he has a wage more than sufficient to cover the bare cost of living, and hours of labor short enough so that after his day's work is done he will have time and energy to bear his share in the management of the community. . . . We keep countless men from being good citizens by the conditions of life with which we surround them. We need comprehensive workmen's compensation acts [and] laws to regulate child labor and work for women. . . .

The New Nationalism puts the national need before sectional or personal advantage. It is impatient of the utter confusion that results from local legislatures attempting to treat national issues as local issues, [and] the impotence which makes it possible for local selfishness or for legal cunning, hired by wealthy special interests, to bring national activities to a deadlock. This New Nationalism regards the executive power as the steward of the public welfare. It demands of the judiciary that it shall be interested primarily in human welfare rather than in property. . . .

The object of government is the welfare of the people. The material progress and prosperity of a nation are desirable chiefly so far as they lead to the moral and material welfare of all good citizens.

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Sources: Article from *Review of Reviews*, January 1897; speech from [theodore-roosevelt.com/trspeeches.html](http://theodore-roosevelt.com/trspeeches.html).

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. In what ways did Roosevelt's views change between 1897 and 1910? What factors might have contributed to the change? Can you identify aspects of Roosevelt's thinking that remained the same?
2. How might the jobs Roosevelt held or sought, in 1897 and in 1910, have influenced his ideas?
3. If you were asked, after reading these documents, what Roosevelt stood for, how would you respond?

energy would benefit Americans across racial lines. The change helped lay the foundations for Democrats’ New Deal coalition of the 1930s.

Despite the intense campaign, Republicans’ division between Taft and Roosevelt made the result fairly easy to predict. Wilson won, though he received only 42 percent of the popular vote and almost certainly would have lost if Roosevelt had not been in the race (Map 20.5). In comparison with Roosevelt and Debs, Wilson appeared to be a rather old-fashioned choice. But with labor protests cresting and progressives gaining support, Wilson faced intense pressure to act.

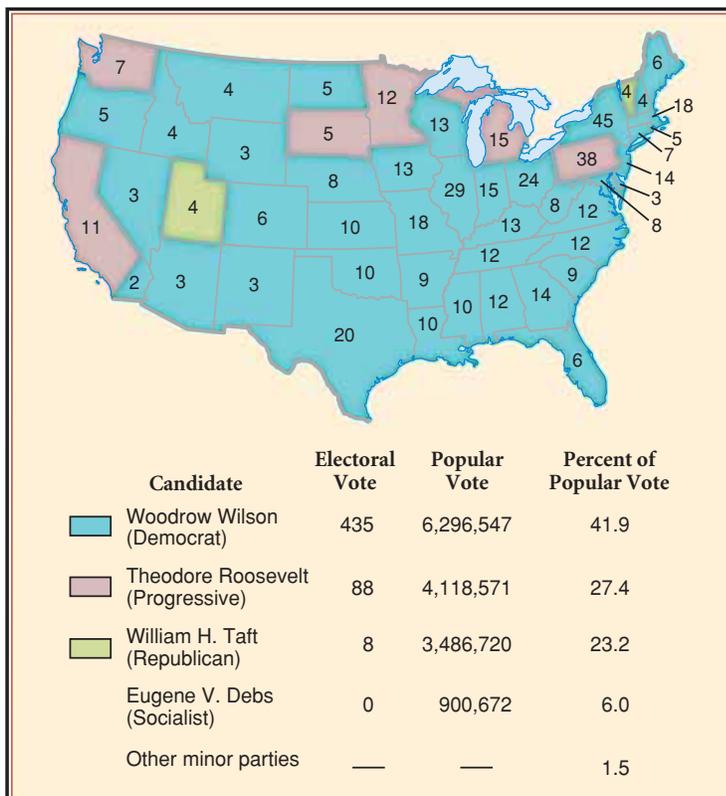
## Wilson and the New Freedom, 1913–1917

In his inaugural address, Wilson acknowledged that industrialization had precipitated a crisis. “There can be no equality of opportunity,” he said, “if men and women and children be not shielded . . . from the consequences of great industrial and social processes which they cannot alter, control, or singly cope with.” Wilson was a Democrat, and labor interests and farmers — some previously radicalized in the People’s

Party — were important components of his base. In the South, many of those voters also upheld strong support for white supremacy. Despite many northern African Americans’ support for Wilson, his administration did little for those constituents. But he undertook bold economic reforms.

### Economic Reforms

In an era of rising corporate power, many Democrats believed workers needed stronger government to intervene on their behalf, and they began to transform themselves into a modern, state-building party. The Wilson administration achieved a series of landmark measures — at least as significant as those enacted during earlier administrations, and perhaps more so (Table 20.1). The most enduring was the federal progressive income tax. “Progressive,” by this definition, referred to the fact that it was not a flat tax but rose progressively toward the top of the income scale. The tax, passed in the 1890s but rejected by the Supreme Court, was reenacted as the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified by the states in February 1913. The next year, Congress used the new power to enact an income tax of 1 to 7 percent on Americans with annual incomes of \$4,000 or more. At a time when white



MAP 20.5

#### The Presidential Election of 1912

The 1912 election reveals why the two-party system is so strongly rooted in American politics — especially in presidential elections. The Democrats, though a minority party, won an electoral landslide because the Republicans divided their vote between Roosevelt and Taft. This result indicates what is at stake when major parties splinter. The Socialist Party candidate, Eugene V. Debs, despite a record vote of 900,000, received no electoral votes.



### “The Finishing Touch,” November 2, 1912

Three days before the election, *Harper's Weekly*, which endorsed Woodrow Wilson, suggested in this cartoon some of the reasons why he would win. Roosevelt supported protective tariffs, while Wilson called for tariff reform; Democrats also claimed that Roosevelt's antitrust proposals were not sufficiently aggressive and that in 1904 he had taken a large campaign contribution from Standard Oil. Such controversies showed the nation's accelerating momentum for reform. The man in the middle is Wilson's campaign manager, William McAdoo. *Harper's Weekly*, November 2, 1912, p. 26.

male wageworkers might expect to make \$800 per year, the tax affected less than 5 percent of households.

Three years later, Congress followed this with an inheritance tax. These measures created an entirely new way to fund the federal government, replacing Republicans' high tariff as the chief source of revenue. Over subsequent decades, especially between the 1930s and the 1970s, the income tax system markedly reduced America's extremes of wealth and poverty.

Wilson also reorganized the financial system to address the absence of a central bank. At the time, the main function of national central banks was to back up commercial banks in case they could not meet their obligations. In the United States, the great private banks of New York (such as J. P. Morgan's) assumed this role; if they weakened, the entire system could collapse. This had nearly happened in 1907, when the Knickerbocker Trust Company failed, precipitating a panic. The **Federal Reserve Act** (1913) gave the nation

a banking system more resistant to such crises. It created twelve district reserve banks funded and controlled by their member banks, with a central Federal Reserve Board to impose regulation. The Federal Reserve could issue currency—paper money based on assets held in the system—and set the interest rate that district reserve banks charged to their members. It thereby regulated the flow of credit to the general public. The act strengthened the banking system and, to a modest degree, discouraged risky speculation on Wall Street.

Wilson and the Democratic Congress turned next to the trusts. In doing so, Wilson relied heavily on Louis D. Brandeis, the celebrated people's lawyer. Brandeis denied that monopolies were efficient. On the contrary, he believed the best source of

### TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME

To what degree did reforms of the Wilson era fulfill goals that various agrarian-labor advocates and progressives had sought?

TABLE 20.1

**Major Federal Progressive Measures, 1883–1921****Before 1900**

Pendleton Civil Service Act (1883)

Hatch Act (1887; Chapter 17)

Interstate Commerce Act (1887; Chapter 17)

Sherman Antitrust Act (1890)

Federal income tax (1894; struck down by Supreme Court, 1895)

**During Theodore Roosevelt's Presidency, 1901–1909**

Newlands Reclamation Act for federal irrigation (1902)

Elkins Act (1903)

First National Wildlife Refuge (1903; Chapter 18)

Bureau of Corporations created to aid Justice Department antitrust work (1903)

National Forest Service created (1905)

Antiquities Act (1906; Chapter 18)

Pure Food and Drug Act (1906; Chapter 19)

Hepburn Act (1906)

First White House Conference on Dependent Children (1909)

**During William Howard Taft's Presidency, 1909–1913**

Mann Act preventing interstate prostitution (1910; Chapter 19)

Children's Bureau created in the U.S. Labor Department (1912)

U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations appointed (1912)

**During Woodrow Wilson's Presidency, 1913–1920**

Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution; federal income tax (1913)

Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution; direct election of U.S. senators (1913)

Federal Reserve Act (1913)

Clayton Antitrust Act (1914)

Seamen's Act (1915)

Workmen's Compensation Act (1916)

Adamson Eight-Hour Act (1916)

National Park Service created (1916; Chapter 18)

Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution; prohibition of liquor (1919; Chapter 22)

Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution; women's suffrage (1920; Chapter 21)

efficiency was vigorous competition in a free market. The trick was to prevent trusts from unfairly using their power to curb such competition. In the **Clayton Antitrust Act** (1914), which amended the Sherman Act, the definition of illegal practices was left flexible, subject to the test of whether an action “substantially

lessen[ed] competition.” The new Federal Trade Commission received broad powers to decide what was fair, investigating companies and issuing “cease and desist” orders against anticompetitive practices.

Labor issues, meanwhile, received attention from a blue-ribbon U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations,

appointed near the end of Taft's presidency and charged with investigating the conditions of labor. In its 1913 report, the commission summed up the impact of industrialization on low-skilled workers. Many earned \$10 or less a week and endured regular episodes of unemployment; some faced long-term poverty and hardship. Workers held "an almost universal conviction" that they were "denied justice." The commission concluded that a major cause of industrial violence was the ruthless antiunionism of American employers. In its key recommendation, the report called for federal laws protecting workers' right to organize and engage in collective bargaining. Though such laws were, in 1915, too radical to win passage, the commission helped set a new national agenda that would come to fruition in the 1930s.

Guided by the commission's revelations, President Wilson warmed up to labor. In 1915 and 1916, he championed a host of bills to benefit American workers. They included the Adamson Act, which established an eight-hour day for railroad workers; the Seamen's Act, which eliminated age-old abuses of merchant sailors; and a workmen's compensation law for federal employees. Wilson, despite initial modest goals, presided over a major expansion of federal authority, perhaps the most significant since Reconstruction. The continued growth of U.S. government offices during Wilson's term reflected a reality that transcended party lines: corporations had grown in size and power, and Americans increasingly wanted federal authority to grow, too.

Wilson's reforms did not extend to the African Americans who had supported him in 1912. In fact, the president rolled back certain Republican policies, such as selected appointments of black postmasters. "I tried to help elect Wilson," W. E. B. Du Bois reflected gloomily, but "under Wilson came the worst attempt at Jim Crow legislation and discrimination in civil service that we had experienced since the Civil War." Wilson famously praised the film *Birth of a Nation* (1915), which depicted the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan in heroic terms. In this way, Democratic control of the White House helped set the tone for the Klan's return in the 1920s.

## Progressive Legacies

In the industrial era, millions of Americans decided that their political system needed to adjust to new conditions. Whatever their specific goals—and whether they were rural, working-class, or middle-class—reformers faced fierce opposition from powerful business interests. When they managed to win key

regulatory laws, they often found these struck down by hostile courts and were forced to try again by different means. Thus the Progressive Era in the United States should be understood partly by its limitations. Elitism and racial prejudice, embodied in new voting restrictions, limited working-class power at the polls; African Americans, their plight ignored by most white reformers, faced segregation and violence. Divided power in a federalist system blocked passage of uniform national policies on such key issues as child labor. Key social welfare programs that became popular in Europe during these decades, including national health insurance and old-age pensions, scarcely made it onto the American agenda until the 1930s.

An international perspective suggests several reasons for American resistance to such programs. Business interests in the United States were exceptionally successful and powerful, flush with recent expansion. At the time, also, voters in countries with older, more native-born populations tended to support government regulation and welfare spending to a greater extent than their counterparts in countries with younger populations and large numbers of immigrants. Younger voters, understandably, seem to have been less concerned than older voters about health insurance and old-age security. Divisions in the American working class also played a role. Black, immigrant, and native-born white laborers often viewed one another as enemies or strangers rather than as members of a single class with common interests. This helps explain why the Socialist Party drew, at peak, less than 6 percent of the U.S. vote at a time when its counterparts in Finland, Germany, and France drew 40 percent or more. Lack of pressure from a strong, self-conscious workingmen's party contributed to more limited results in the United States.

But it would be wrong to underestimate progressive achievements. Over several decades, in this period, more and more prosperous Americans began to support stronger economic regulations. Even the most cautious, elite progressives recognized that the United States had entered a new era. Multinational corporations overshadowed small businesses; in vast cities, old support systems based on village and kinship melted away. Outdated political institutions—from the spoils system to urban machines—would no longer do. Walter Lippmann, founding editor of the progressive magazine *New Republic*, observed in 1914 that Americans had "no precedents to guide us, no wisdom

### PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

What factors explain the limits of progressive reform in the United States?

that wasn't made for a simpler age." Progressives created new wisdom. By 1917, they had drawn blueprints for a modern American state, one whose powers more suited the needs of an industrial era.

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## SUMMARY

The Progressive Era emerged from the political turmoil of the 1880s and 1890s. In the 1880s, despite the limits imposed by close elections, federal and state governments managed to achieve important administrative and economic reforms. After 1888, Republican leaders undertook more sweeping efforts, including the Sherman Antitrust Act, but failed in a quest to protect black voting rights. In the South and West, the People's Party called for much stronger government intervention in the economy, but its radical program drew bitter Republican and Democratic resistance.

The depression of the 1890s brought a wave of reaction. Labor unrest threw the nation into crisis,

and Cleveland's intransigence over the gold standard cost the Democrats dearly in the 1894 and 1896 elections. While Republicans took over the federal government, southern Democrats restricted voting rights in the Solid South. Federal courts struck down regulatory laws and supported southern racial discrimination.

After McKinley's assassination, Roosevelt launched a program that balanced reform and private enterprise. At both the federal and state levels, progressive reformers made extensive use of elite expertise. At the grass-roots, black reformers battled racial discrimination; women reformers worked on issues ranging from public health to women's working conditions; and labor activists tried to address the problems that fueled persistent labor unrest. The election of 1912 split the Republicans, giving victory to Woodrow Wilson, who launched a Democratic program of economic and labor reform. Despite the limits of the Progressive Era, the reforms of this period laid the foundation for a modern American state.

# CHAPTER REVIEW

**MAKE IT STICK** Go to **LearningCurve** to retain what you've read.



**TERMS TO KNOW** Identify and explain the significance of each term below.

## Key Concepts and Events

“waving the bloody shirt” (p. 638)  
**Gilded Age** (p. 638)  
**Pendleton Act** (p. 638)  
**Mugwumps** (p. 639)  
**Sherman Antitrust Act** (p. 642)  
**Lodge Bill** (p. 642)  
**Omaha Platform** (p. 643)  
**free silver** (p. 645)  
*Williams v. Mississippi* (p. 645)  
**Solid South** (p. 646)  
*Lochner v. New York* (p. 649)  
**Newlands Reclamation Act**  
 (p. 651)  
**Wisconsin Idea** (p. 652)

**recall** (p. 652)  
**referendum** (p. 652)  
**National Child Labor Committee**  
 (p. 652)  
*Muller v. Oregon* (p. 652)  
**talented tenth** (p. 655)  
**National Association for the  
 Advancement of Colored  
 People (NAACP)** (p. 655)  
**Industrial Workers of the World**  
 (p. 655)  
**New Nationalism** (p. 656)  
**Federal Reserve Act** (p. 662)  
**Clayton Antitrust Act** (p. 662)

## Key People

**Mary E. Lease** (p. 636)  
**William Jennings Bryan** (p. 647)  
**Theodore Roosevelt** (p. 650)  
**Robert La Follette** (p. 652)  
**Louis Brandeis** (p. 652)  
**W. E. B. Du Bois** (p. 654)  
**Eugene V. Debs** (p. 657)

**REVIEW QUESTIONS** Answer these questions to demonstrate your understanding of the chapter's main ideas.

1. Reformers in the Progressive Era came from different backgrounds and represented several distinct interests. What were some of those backgrounds and interests? How did their goals differ?
2. How did the economic crisis of the 1890s shape American politics?
3. Compare the reform legislation passed during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency with that of Wilson's term. How were these goals and achievements shaped by the broader agenda of the party that held power (Republicans, in Roosevelt's case, and Democrats, in Wilson's)?
4. **THEMATIC UNDERSTANDING** Look at the events on the thematic timeline on page 543. Historians often call the decades from the 1880s to the 1910s the Progressive Era. Given the limitations and new problems that emerged during this time, as well as the achievements of progressive policy-making, do you think the name is warranted? What other names might we suggest for this era?

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Recognize the larger developments and continuities within and across chapters by answering these questions.

- 1. ACROSS TIME AND PLACE** Returning to Chapter 17, review the strategies and goals of the labor and agrarian organizations that flourished in the 1880s. The People's Party embodied many of those ideas. Imagine that you are a journalist interviewing a former People's Party leader in 1917. To what extent might he or she have said that progressives had, after 1900, fulfilled the agrarian-labor agenda? To what extent might he or she criticize progressives for failing to achieve important reforms? What do you conclude from this about the similarities and differences of populism and progressivism?
- 2. VISUAL EVIDENCE** Study the cartoons that appear on pages 642, 651, and 660. One depicts a woman's dressing room; two depict combat among men. What do these cartoons tell us about the ways that ideals of masculinity and femininity were deployed in political campaigns? How might you use these cartoons to explain the challenges that women faced in winning suffrage during the Progressive Era? (For a counterpoint, you may also want to examine John Sloan's drawing about the Ludlow Massacre, on p. 656, and compare its depiction of masculine violence to the other three cartoons.)

## MORE TO EXPLORE Start here to learn more about the events discussed in this chapter.

Charles Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic* (2006). An excellent account of post-Reconstruction politics, emphasizing issues of race and Republicans' dilemma in the South.

John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest* (1983). A provocative dual biography of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed* (2007). A readable introduction and guide to further sources on progressive movements.

Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero* (2006). This biography of William Jennings Bryan is a good starting point on the era's Democrats and their charismatic leader.

Robert C. McMath, *American Populism* (1993). A lively history of the Farmers' Alliance and People's Party.

Nancy Woloch, ed., *Muller v. Oregon* (1996). An excellent analysis and collection of primary documents on this critical legal decision.

**TIMELINE** Ask yourself why this chapter begins and ends with these dates and then identify the links among related events.

1881	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President James Garfield assassinated</li> </ul>
1883	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pendleton Act establishes the Civil Service Commission</li> </ul>
1890	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sherman Antitrust Act</li> <li>• People's Party created in Kansas</li> </ul>
1893	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic depression begins</li> </ul>
1894	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coxey's Army marches on Washington, D.C.</li> </ul>
1895	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Pierpont Morgan arranges gold purchases to rescue U.S. Treasury</li> </ul>
1896	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• William McKinley wins presidency</li> <li>• <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> establishes "separate but equal" doctrine</li> </ul>
1898	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Williams v. Mississippi</i> allows poll taxes and literacy tests for voters</li> </ul>
1899	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Consumers' League founded</li> </ul>
1901	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eugene Debs founds the Socialist Party of America</li> <li>• McKinley assassinated; Theodore Roosevelt assumes presidency</li> </ul>
1902	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newlands Reclamation Act</li> </ul>
1903	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elkins Act</li> </ul>
1904	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robert Hunter publishes <i>Poverty</i></li> </ul>
1905	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industrial Workers of the World founded</li> <li>• Niagara Principles articulated</li> </ul>
1906	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hepburn Act</li> </ul>
1908	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Muller v. Oregon</i> limits women's work hours</li> </ul>
1909	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NAACP created</li> </ul>
1912	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four-way election gives presidency to Woodrow Wilson</li> </ul>
1913	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sixteenth Amendment</li> <li>• Seventeenth Amendment</li> <li>• Federal Reserve Act</li> </ul>
1914	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clayton Antitrust Act</li> </ul>

**KEY TURNING POINTS:** In the timeline above, identify key actions taken by Congress and the Progressive Era presidents, and those enacted by the Supreme Court. What role did each branch of government play in the Progressive Era, and how did those roles change over time?