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FROM CRISIS TO EMPIRE

THE POLITICS OF EQUILIBRIUM

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STIRRINGS OF IMPERIALISM

WAR WITH SPAIN

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LOOKING AHEAD

1. What were the major social and economic problems that beset the United States in the late nineteenth century, and how did the two major political parties respond to these problems?
2. What was Populism, what were its goals, and to what degree were these goals achieved?
3. How did the United States become an imperial power?

THE UNITED STATES APPROACHED the end of the nineteenth century as a fundamentally different nation from what it had been at the beginning of the Civil War. With rapid change came cascading social and political problems—problems that the weak and conservative governments of the time showed little inclination or ability to address.

A catastrophic economic depression that began in 1893 created devastating hardship for millions of Americans. Farmers responded by creating an agrarian political movement known as Populism. American workers, facing massive unemployment, staged large and occasionally violent strikes. Not since the Civil War had American politics been so polarized and impassioned. The election of 1896, which pitted the agrarian hero William Jennings Bryan against the solid conservative William McKinley, was dramatic but anticlimactic. Supported by the mighty Republican Party and many eastern groups who looked with suspicion and unease at the agricultural demands coming from the West, McKinley easily triumphed.

McKinley did little in his first term in office to resolve the problems and grievances of his time, but the economy revived nevertheless. Having largely ignored the depression, however, McKinley focused on another great national cause: the plight of Cuba in its war with Spain. In the spring of 1898, the United States declared war on Spain and entered the conflict in Cuba—a brief but bloody war that ended with an American victory four months later.

The conflict had begun as a way to support Cuban independence from the Spanish, but a group of fervent and influential imperialists worked to convert the war into an occasion for acquiring overseas possessions. Despite a powerful anti-imperialist movement, the acquisition of the former Spanish colonies proceeded—only to draw Americans into yet another imperial war, this one in the Philippines, where the Americans, not the Spanish, were the targets of local enmity.

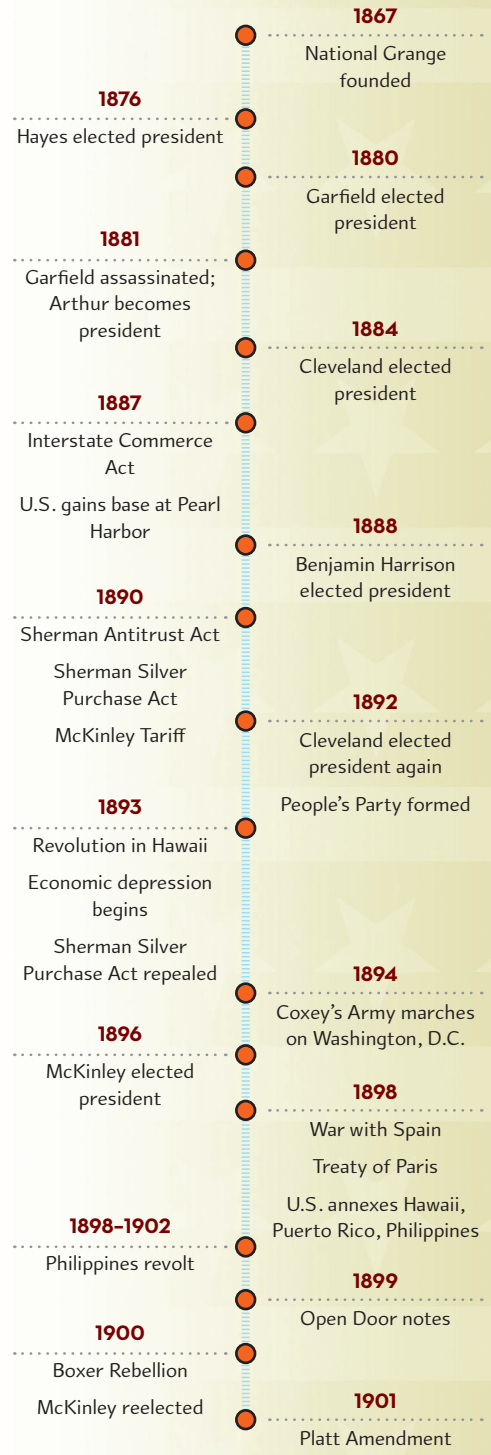
THE POLITICS OF EQUILIBRIUM

The enormous social and economic changes of the late nineteenth century strained not only the nation’s traditional social arrangements but its political institutions as well. Searching for stability and social justice, Americans looked to the government for leadership. Yet that government during much of this period was ill equipped to confront these new challenges. As a result, problems and grievances festered and grew.

THE PARTY SYSTEM

The most striking feature of late-nineteenth-century politics was the stability of the party system. From the end of Reconstruction until the late 1890s, the electorate was divided almost evenly between the Republicans and the Democrats. Sixteen states were solidly and consistently Republican, and fourteen states (most in the South) were solidly and consistently Democratic. Only a handful of states were usually in doubt, and they generally decided the results of national elections, often on the basis of voter turnout. The Republican Party captured the presidency in all but two of the elections of the era, but in the five presidential elections beginning in 1876, the average popular-vote margin separating the Democratic and Republican candidates was 1.5 percent. The congressional

TIME LINE



balance was similarly stable, with the Republicans generally controlling the Senate and the Democrats generally controlling the House.

Despite the relatively modest differences, most eligible Americans had strong loyalties **High Voter Turnout** to their chosen party. Voter turnout in presidential elections between 1860 and 1900 averaged over 78 percent of all eligible voters. Large groups of potential voters were disenfranchised in these years: women in most states and almost all blacks and many poor whites in the South. But for adult white males, there were few restrictions on voting.

What explains this extraordinary loyalty to the two political parties? It was not that the parties took distinct positions on important public issues. They did so rarely. **Reasons for Party Loyalties** Party loyalties reflected other factors. Region was perhaps the most important. To white southerners, loyalty to the Democratic Party—the vehicle by which they had triumphed over Reconstruction and preserved white supremacy—was a matter of unquestioned faith. Republican loyalties were equally intense in the North. To many, the party of Lincoln remained a bulwark against slavery and treason.

Religious and ethnic differences also shaped party loyalties. The Democratic Party attracted most of the Catholic voters, recent immigrants, and poorer workers. The Republican Party appealed to northern Protestants, citizens of old stock, and much of the middle class. Among the few substantive issues on which the parties took clearly different stands were immigration matters. Republicans tended to support immigration restriction and to favor temperance legislation, which many believed would help discipline immigrant communities. Catholics and immigrants viewed such proposals as assaults on them and their cultures, and the Democratic Party followed their lead.

Party identification, then, was usually more a reflection of cultural inclinations than a calculation of economic interest. Individuals might affiliate with a party because their parents had done so or because it was the party of their region, their church, or their ethnic group.

THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

One reason the parties avoided most substantive issues was that the federal government did relatively little. The government in Washington was responsible for delivering the mail, maintaining a military, conducting foreign policy, and collecting tariffs and taxes. It had few other responsibilities and few institutions capable of undertaking additional responsibilities even if it had chosen to do so.

There was one significant exception. From the end of the Civil War to the early twentieth century, the federal government administered a system of annual pensions for retired Union Civil War veterans and their widows. At its peak, this pension system was making payments **First Pension System** to a majority of the male citizens (black and white) of the North and to many women as well. Some reformers hoped to make the system permanent and universal, others found it corrupt and expensive. When the Civil War generation died out, the pension system died with it.

In most other respects, the United States in the late nineteenth century was a society without a modern national government. The most powerful institutions were the two political parties (and the bosses and machines that dominated them) and the federal courts.

PRESIDENTS AND PATRONAGE

Presidents in the late nineteenth century had great symbolic importance, but they were unable to do very much except distribute government appointments. A new president and his tiny staff had to make almost 100,000 appointments.

It sometimes proved impossible for a president to avoid factional conflict, as the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes demonstrated. By the end of his term, two groups—the Stalwarts, led by Roscoe Conkling of New York, and the Half-Breeds, *Stalwarts and Half-Breeds* captained by James G. Blaine of Maine—were competing for control of the Republican Party. Rhetorically, the Stalwarts favored traditional, professional machine politics, while the Half-Breeds favored reform. In fact, both groups were mainly interested in a larger share of patronage. Hayes tried to satisfy both and ended up satisfying neither.

The battle over patronage overshadowed all else during Hayes's unhappy presidency. His one important, substantive initiative—an effort to create a civil service system—attracted no support from either party. And his early announcement that he would not seek reelection only weakened him further.

The Republicans managed to retain the presidency in 1880 in part because they agreed on a ticket that included a Stalwart and a Half-Breed. They nominated James A. Garfield, a veteran congressman from Ohio and a Half-Breed, for president and Chester A. Arthur of New York, a Stalwart, for vice president. The Democrats nominated General Winfield Scott Hancock, a minor Civil War commander with no national following. Benefiting from the end of the recession of 1879, Garfield won a decisive electoral victory, although his popular-vote margin was thin.



GETTING HOT ENOUGH FOR HIM.

PRESIDENT CHESTER A. ARTHUR Although originally a Stalwart, Arthur attempted to reform the spoils system. In this *Puck* cartoon, he is catching heat from a variety of Republican factions, including the Stalwarts and Half-Breeds. (The Library of Congress)

Garfield began his presidency by defying the Stalwarts and supporting civil service reform. He soon found himself embroiled in an ugly public quarrel with Conkling and the Stalwarts. The dispute was never resolved. On July 2, 1881, only four months after *Garfield Assassinated* his inauguration, Garfield was shot twice while standing in the Washington railroad station by an apparently deranged gunman (and unsuccessful office seeker) who shouted, “I am a Stalwart and Arthur is president now!” Garfield lingered for nearly three months but finally died.

Garfield’s successor, Chester A. Arthur, had spent his political lifetime as a devoted, skilled, and open spoilsman and a close ally of the New York political boss Roscoe Conkling. But on becoming president, he tried—like Hayes and Garfield before him—to follow an independent course and even to promote reform. To the dismay of the Stalwarts, Arthur kept most of Garfield’s appointees in office and supported civil service reform. In *Pendleton Act* 1883, Congress passed the first national civil service measure, the Pendleton Act, which required that some federal jobs be filled by competitive written examinations rather than by patronage. Relatively few offices fell under civil service at first, but its reach steadily widened.

CLEVELAND, HARRISON, AND THE TARIFF

In the unsavory election of 1884, the Republican candidate for president was Senator James G. Blaine of Maine—known to his admirers as the “Plumed Knight” but to many others as a symbol of seamy party politics. A group of disgruntled “liberal Republicans,” known by their critics as the “mugwumps,” announced that they would bolt the party and support an honest Democrat. Rising to the bait, the Democrats nominated Grover Cleveland, the reform governor of New York.

In a campaign filled with personal invective, what may have decided the election was the last-minute introduction of a religious controversy. Shortly before the election, a delegation of Protestant ministers called on Blaine in New York City; their spokesman, Dr. Samuel Burchard, referred to the Democrats as the party of “rum, Romanism, and rebellion.” Blaine was slow to repudiate Burchard’s indiscretion, and Democrats quickly *Cleveland Elected* spread the news that Blaine had tolerated a slander on the Catholic Church. Cleveland’s narrow victory probably resulted from an unusually heavy Catholic vote for the Democrats in New York.

Grover Cleveland was respected, if not often liked, for his stern and righteous opposition to politicians, grafters, pressure groups, and Tammany Hall. He embodied an era in which few Americans believed the federal government could, or should, do very much. Cleveland had always doubted the wisdom of protective tariffs (taxes on imported goods designed to protect domestic producers). The existing high rates, he believed, were responsible for the annual surplus in federal revenues, which was tempting Congress to pass “reckless” and “extravagant” legislation, which he frequently vetoed. In December 1887, therefore, he asked Congress to reduce the tariff rates. Democrats in the House approved a tariff reduction, but Senate Republicans defiantly passed a bill of their own, actually raising the rates. The resulting deadlock made the tariff an issue in the election of 1888.

The Democrats renominated Cleveland and supported tariff reductions. Endorsing protection, Republicans settled on former senator Benjamin Harrison of Indiana, who was obscure but respectable (and the grandson of President William Henry Harrison). It was *Harrison Elected* one of the most corrupt elections in American history. Cleveland won the popular vote by 100,000, but Harrison won an electoral majority of 233 to 168.

NEW PUBLIC ISSUES

Benjamin Harrison's record as president was little more substantial than that of his grandfather, who had died a month after taking office. Harrison had few visible convictions, and he made no effort to influence Congress. And yet during Harrison's passive administration, public opinion was beginning to force the government to confront some of the pressing social and economic issues of the day, most notably the power of trusts.

By the mid-1880s, fifteen western and southern states had adopted laws prohibiting combinations that restrained competition. But corporations found it easy to escape limitations by incorporating in states, such as New Jersey and Delaware, that offered them special privileges. If antitrust legislation was to be effective, its supporters believed, it would have to come from the national government. In July 1890, both houses of Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act, almost without dissent. For over a *Sherman Antitrust Act* decade after its passage, the Sherman Act—indifferently enforced and steadily weakened by the courts—had no impact. As of 1901, the Justice Department had instituted many antitrust suits against unions, but only fourteen against business combinations.

The Republicans were more interested in the issue they believed had won them the 1888 election: the tariff. Representative William McKinley of Ohio and Senator Nelson W. Aldrich of Rhode Island drafted the highest protective measure ever proposed to Congress. Known as the McKinley Tariff, it became law in October 1890. But Republican leaders *McKinley Tariff* apparently misinterpreted public sentiment. Many voters saw the high tariff as a way to enrich producers and starve consumers. The party suffered a stunning reversal in the 1890 congressional election. The Republicans' substantial Senate majority was slashed to 8; in the House, the party retained only 86 of the 332 seats, losing its majority in that chamber. Nor were the Republicans able to recover over the next two years. In the presidential election of 1892, Benjamin Harrison once again supported protection; Grover Cleveland, renominated by the Democrats, once again opposed it. A new third party, the People's Party, with James B. Weaver as its candidate, advocated substantial economic reform. Cleveland won 277 electoral votes to Harrison's 145 and had a popular margin of 380,000. Weaver ran far behind.

The policies of Cleveland's second term were much like those of his first. Again, he supported a tariff reduction, which the House approved but the Senate weakened. Cleveland denounced the result but allowed it to become law as the Wilson-Gorman Tariff.

Public pressure had been growing since the 1880s for other reforms, among them regulation of the railroads. Farm organizations in the Midwest (most notably the Grangers) had persuaded several state legislatures to pass regulatory legislation in the early 1870s. But in 1886, the Supreme Court—in *Wabash, St. Louis, and Pacific Railway Co. v. Illinois*, known as the *Wabash case*—ruled one of the Granger Laws in Illinois unconstitutional. According to the Court, the law was an attempt to control interstate commerce and thus infringed on the exclusive power of Congress. Later, the courts limited the powers of the states to regulate commerce even within their own boundaries.

Effective railroad regulation, it was now clear, could come only from the federal government. Congress responded to public pressure in 1887 with the *Interstate Commerce Act* Interstate Commerce Act, which banned discrimination in rates between long and short hauls, required that railroads publish their rate schedules and file them with the government, and declared that all interstate rail rates must be "reasonable and just." A five-person agency, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) was to administer the act. But it had to rely on the courts to enforce its rulings. For almost twenty years after its passage, the Interstate Commerce Act—which was, like the Sherman Act, haphazardly enforced and narrowly interpreted by the courts—had little practical effect.

THE AGRARIAN REVOLT

No group watched the performance of the federal government in the 1880s with greater dismay than American farmers. They helped produce the Populist upheaval—one of the most powerful movements of political protest in American history.

THE GRANGERS

Farmers had been making efforts to organize politically for several decades before the 1880s. The first major farm organization was the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, founded in 1867. From it emerged a network of local organizations that tried to teach new scientific agricultural techniques to their members. When the depression of 1873 caused a sharp decline in farm prices, membership rapidly increased and the direction of the organization changed. Granges in the Midwest began to organize marketing cooperatives and to promote political action to curb monopolistic practices by railroads and warehouses. At their peak, Grange supporters controlled the legislatures in most of the midwestern states. The result was the Granger Laws of the early 1870s, by which many states imposed strict regulations on railroad rates and practices. But the destruction of the new regulations by the courts, combined with the political inexperience of many Grange leaders and the return of prosperity in the late 1870s, produced a dramatic decline in the power of the association.

THE FARMERS' ALLIANCES

As early as 1875, farmers in parts of the South were banding together in so-called Farmers' Alliances just as the Granges were weakening. By 1880, the Southern Alliance had more than 4 million members; a comparable Northwestern Alliance was taking root in the plains states and the Midwest, largely replacing the Grange.

Like the Granges, the Alliances formed cooperatives and other marketing mechanisms. They established stores, banks, processing plants, and other facilities to free their members from dependence on the hated “furnishing merchants” who kept so many farmers in debt. Some Alliance leaders, however, saw the movement in larger terms: as an effort to build a society in which economic competition might give way to cooperation. Alliance lecturers traveled throughout rural areas, lambasting the concentrated power of great corporations and financial institutions.

Although the Alliances quickly became far more widespread than the Granges had ever been, they suffered from similar problems. Their cooperatives did not always work well, partly because of mismanagement and partly because of the strength of opposing market forces. These economic frustrations helped push the movement into a new phase at the end of the 1880s: the creation of a national political organization.

In 1889, the Southern and Northwestern Alliances agreed to a loose merger. The next year the Alliances held a national convention at Ocala, Florida, and issued the so-called **Ocala Demands**. Ocala Demands, which were, in effect, a party platform. In the 1890 off-year elections, candidates supported by the Alliances won partial or complete control of the legislatures in twelve states. They also won six governorships, three seats in the U.S. Senate, and approximately fifty in the U.S. House of Representatives. Many of the successful Alliance candidates were Democrats who had benefited—often passively—from



MARY E. LEASE The fiery Populist orator Mary E. Lease was a fixture on the Alliance lecture circuit in the 1890s. She made some 160 speeches in 1890 alone. Her critics called her the “Kansas Pythoness,” but she was popular among farmers with her denunciations of banks, railroads, and “middlemen,” and her famous advice to “raise less corn and more hell.” (© Corbis)

Alliance endorsements. But dissident farmers drew enough encouragement from the results to contemplate further political action.

Alliance leaders discussed plans for a third party at meetings in Cincinnati in May 1891 and St. Louis in February 1892. Then, in July 1892, 1,300 exultant delegates poured into Omaha, Nebraska, to proclaim the creation of the new party, approve an official set of principles, and nominate candidates for the presidency and vice *People's Party Established* presidency. The new organization's official name was the People's Party, but the movement was more commonly referred to as **Populism**.

The election of 1892 demonstrated the potential power of the new movement. The Populist presidential candidate—James B. Weaver of Iowa, a former Greenbacker—polled more than 1 million votes. Nearly 1,500 Populist candidates won election to seats in state legislatures. The party elected three governors, five senators, and ten congressmen. It could also claim the support of many Republicans and Democrats in Congress who had been elected by appealing to Populist sentiment.

THE POPULIST CONSTITUENCY

Already, however, there were signs of the limits of Populist strength. Populism had great appeal to farmers, particularly to small farmers with little long-range economic security. But Populism failed to move much beyond that group. Its leaders made energetic efforts to include labor within the coalition by courting the Knights of Labor and adding a labor plank to its platform. But Populism never attracted significant labor support, in part because the economic interests of labor and the interests of farmers were often at odds.

In the South, white Populists struggled with the question of whether to accept African Americans into the party. There was an important black component to the movement—a network of “Colored Alliances” that by 1890 numbered over 1.25 million members. But most white Populists accepted the assistance of African Americans only as long as it was clear that whites would remain indisputably in control. When southern conservatives began to attack the Populists for undermining white supremacy, the interracial character of the movement quickly faded.

POPULIST IDEAS

The Populists spelled out their program first in the Ocala Demands of 1890 and then, more clearly, in the Omaha platform of 1892. They proposed a system of “subtreasuries,” a network of government-owned warehouses where farmers could deposit their crops, to allow them to borrow money from the government at low rates of interest until the price of their goods went up. In addition, the Populists called for the abolition of national banks (which they believed were dangerous institutions of concentrated power), the end of absentee ownership of land, the direct election of United States senators (which would weaken the power of conservative state legislatures), and other devices to improve the ability of the people to influence the political process. They called as well for regulation and (after 1892) government ownership of railroads, telephones, and telegraphs. And they demanded a system of government-operated postal savings banks, a graduated income tax, the inflation of the currency, and, later, the remonetization of silver.

Some Populists were anti-Semitic, anti-intellectual, anti-eastern, and antiurban. But bigotry was not the dominant force behind Populism. It was, rather, a serious and usually responsible effort to find solutions to real problems. Populists emphatically rejected the laissez-faire orthodoxies of their time, including the idea that the rights of ownership are absolute, and in fact called on the federal government to promote a dramatic redistribution of wealth and power. In short, the Populists raised one of the most overt and powerful challenges of the era to the direction in which American industrial capitalism was moving.

THE CRISIS OF THE 1890s

The agrarian protest was only one of many indications of the national political crisis emerging in the 1890s. There was a severe depression, widespread labor unrest and violence, and the continuing failure of either major party to respond to the growing distress. Grover Cleveland, who took office for the second time just as the economy was collapsing, remained convinced that any government action would be a violation of principle.

THE PANIC OF 1893

The Panic of 1893 launched the most severe depression the nation had ever experienced. It began in March 1893, when the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, unable to meet payments on loans, declared bankruptcy. Two months later, the National Cordage Company failed as well. Together, these two corporate failures triggered a stock market collapse. And since many of the major New York banks were heavy investors in the market, a wave of bank failures soon began. That caused a contraction of credit, which meant that many of the new, aggressive, and loan-dependent businesses soon went bankrupt.

The depression reflected, among other things, the degree to which all parts of the American economy were now interconnected. And it showed how dependent the economy was on the health of the railroads, which remained the nation's most powerful corporate and financial institutions. When the railroads suffered, as they did beginning in 1893, everyone suffered.

Once the panic began, it spread with startling speed. Within six months, more than 8,000 businesses, 156 railroads, and 400 banks failed. Already low agricultural prices tumbled further. Up to 1 million workers, 20 percent of the labor force, lost their jobs. The depression was unprecedented not only in its severity but also in its persistence. Although conditions improved slightly beginning in 1895, prosperity did not fully return until 1901.

The depression produced widespread social unrest, especially among the enormous numbers of unemployed workers. In 1894, Jacob S. Coxe, an Ohio businessman and Populist, began advocating a massive public works program to create jobs for the unemployed.



COXEY'S ARMY Jacob S. Coxe leads his "army" of unemployed men through the town of Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in 1894, en route to Washington, where he hoped to pressure Congress to approve his plans for a massive public works program to put people back to work. (© Photo by Fotosearch/Getty Images)

When it became clear that Congress was ignoring his proposals, Coxey organized a march “*Coxey’s Army*” of the unemployed (known as “Coxey’s Army”) to Washington, D.C., to present his demands to the government. Congress continued to ignore them.

To many middle-class Americans, the labor turmoil of the time—the Homestead and Pullman strikes, for example (see Chapter 17)—was a sign of a dangerous instability, even perhaps a revolution. Labor radicalism—some of it real, more of it imagined by the frightened middle class—heightened the general sense of crisis among the public.

THE SILVER QUESTION

The financial panic weakened the government’s monetary system. President Cleveland believed that the instability of the currency was the primary cause of the depression. The “money question,” therefore, became one of the burning issues of the era.

The debate centered on what would form the basis of the dollar, what would lie behind it and give it value. Today, the value of the dollar rests on little more than public confidence in the government. But in the nineteenth century, many people believed that currency was worthless if there was not something concrete behind it—precious metal (specie), which holders of paper money could collect if they presented their currency to a bank or to the Treasury.

During most of its existence as a nation, the United States had recognized two metals—gold and silver—as a basis for the dollar, a system known as “bimetallism.” In the 1870s, however, that had changed. The official ratio of the value of silver to the value of gold for purposes of creating currency (the “mint ratio”) was 16 to 1: sixteen ounces of silver equaled one ounce of gold. But the actual commercial value of silver (the “market ratio”) was much higher than that. Owners of silver could get more by selling it for manufacture into jewelry and other objects than they could by taking it to the mint for conversion into coins. So they stopped taking it to the mint, and the mint stopped coining silver.

In 1873, Congress passed a law that seemed simply to recognize the existing situation by officially discontinuing silver coinage. Few objected at the time. But later in the 1870s, the market value of silver fell well below the official mint ratio of 16 to 1. Silver was suddenly available for coinage again, and it soon became clear that Congress had foreclosed a potential method of expanding the currency. Before long, many Americans concluded that a conspiracy of big bankers had been responsible for the “demonetization” of silver and referred to the law as the “Crime of ’73.”

Two groups of Americans were especially determined to undo the Crime of ’73. One consisted of the silver-mine owners, now understandably eager to have the government take their surplus silver and pay them much more than the market price. The other group consisted of discontented farmers, who wanted an increase in the quantity of money—an inflation of the currency—as a means of raising the prices of farm products and easing payment of the farmers’ debts. The inflationists demanded that the government return at once to the “free and *Free Silver*” *Advocates* unlimited coinage of silver” at the old ratio of 16 to 1. Congress responded weakly to these demands with the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890, which required the government to purchase silver and pay for it in gold. But the government allowed only existing silver coinage. It did not allow any newly minted silver money.

At the same time, the nation’s gold reserves were steadily dropping. President Cleveland believed that the chief cause of the weakening gold reserves was the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Early in his second administration, therefore, Congress responded to his request and repealed the Sherman Act—although only after a bitter and divisive battle that helped create a split in the Democratic Party.

“A CROSS OF GOLD”

Republicans, watching the failure of the Democrats to deal effectively with the depression, were confident of success in 1896. Party leaders, led by the Ohio boss Marcus A. Hanna, settled on former congressman William McKinley, author of the 1890 *McKinley Nominated* tariff act and now governor of Ohio, as the party’s presidential candidate. The tariff, they believed, should be the key issue in the campaign. But they also opposed the free coinage of silver, except by agreement with the leading commercial nations (which everyone realized was unlikely). Thirty-four delegates from the mountain and plains states walked out of the convention in protest and joined the Democratic Party.



BEARING THE CROSS OF GOLD The cartoonist Grant Hamilton created this image of William Jennings Bryan shortly after he made his famous “Cross of Gold” speech at the Democratic National Convention, which subsequently nominated him for president. The cartoon highlights two of the most powerful images in Bryan’s speech—a “crown of thorns” and a “cross of gold,” both biblical references and both designed to represent the oppression that the gold standard imposed on working people. (© Granger, NYC—All Rights Reserved.)

The Democratic Convention of 1896 was unusually tumultuous. Southern and western delegates, eager for a way to compete with the Populists, were determined to seize control of the party from conservative easterners, incorporate some Populist demands—among them free silver—into the Democratic platform, and nominate a pro-silver candidate.

Defenders of the gold standard seemed to dominate the debate, until William Jennings Bryan, a handsome, thirty-six-year-old congressman from Nebraska, mounted the podium to address the convention. His great voice echoed through the hall as he delivered what became one of the **Bryan's "Cross of Gold" Speech** most famous political speeches in American history. The closing passage sent his audience into something close to a frenzy: "Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: 'You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.'" It became known as the "Cross of Gold" speech.

In the glow of Bryan's speech, the convention voted to adopt a pro-silver platform. And the following day, Bryan (as he had eagerly and not entirely secretly hoped) was nominated for president on the fifth ballot.

The choice of Bryan and the Democratic platform created a quandary for the Populists. They had expected both major parties to adopt conservative programs and nominate conservative candidates, leaving the Populists to represent the growing forces of protest. But now the Democrats had stolen much of their thunder. The Populists faced the choice of naming their own candidate and splitting the protest vote or endorsing Bryan and losing their identity as a party. Many Populists argued that "fusion" with the Democrats would destroy their party. But the majority concluded that there was no viable alternative. Amid considerable acrimony, the convention voted to nominate Bryan as the Populist candidate.

THE CONSERVATIVE VICTORY

The campaign of 1896 produced panic among conservatives. The business and financial community, frightened beyond reason at the prospect of a Bryan victory, contributed lavishly to the Republican campaign. From his home in Canton, Ohio, McKinley conducted a traditional "front-porch" campaign by receiving pilgrimages of the Republican faithful, organized and paid for by Hanna.

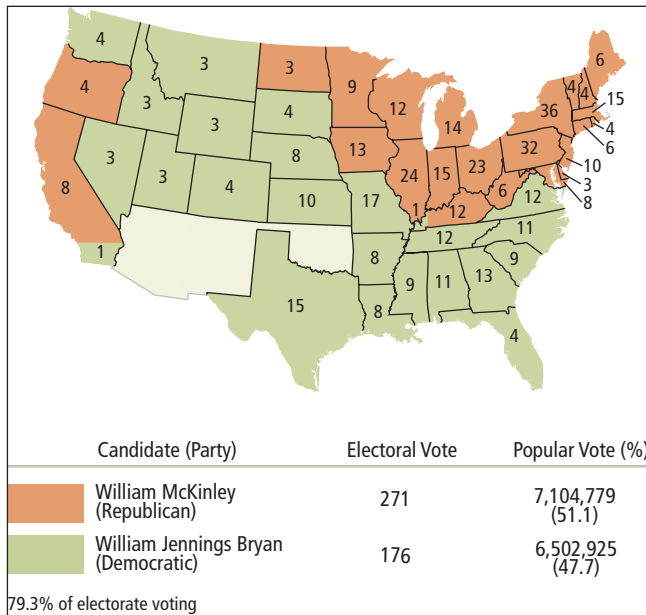
Bryan showed no such restraint. He became the first presidential candidate in American history to stump every section of the country systematically. He traveled 18,000 miles and addressed an estimated 5 million people.

On election day, McKinley polled 271 electoral votes to Bryan's 176 and received 51.1 percent of the popular vote to Bryan's 47.7. Bryan carried the areas of the South and West where miners or struggling staple farmers predominated. The Democratic program, like that of the Populists, had been too narrow to win a national election.

For the Populists and their allies, the election results were a disaster. They had gambled **End of the People's Party** everything on their fusion with the Democratic Party and lost. Within months of the election, the People's Party began to dissolve.

McKINLEY AND RECOVERY

The administration of William McKinley saw a return to relative calm. One reason was the exhaustion of dissent. Another reason was the shrewd character of the McKinley administration itself, committed as it was to reassuring stability. Most important, however, was the gradual easing of the economic crisis, a development that undercut many of those who were agitating for change.



THE ELECTION OF 1896 The results of the presidential election of 1896 are, as this map shows, striking for the regional differentiation they reveal. William McKinley won the election by a comfortable if not enormous margin, but his victory was not broad-based. He carried all the states of the Northeast and the industrial Midwest, along with California and Oregon, but virtually nothing else. Bryan carried the entire South and almost all of the agrarian West. • *What campaign issues in 1896 helped account for the regional character of the results?*

McKinley and his allies committed themselves fully to only one issue: the need for higher tariff rates. Within weeks of his inauguration, the administration won approval of the Dingley Tariff, raising duties to the highest point in American history. The administration dealt more gingerly with the explosive silver question (an issue that McKinley himself had never considered very important). He sent a commission to Europe to explore the possibility of a silver agreement with Great Britain and France. As he and everyone else anticipated, the effort produced nothing. The Republicans then enacted the Currency, or *Gold Standard Act* Gold Standard, Act of 1900, which confirmed the nation's commitment to the gold standard.

And so the “battle of the standards” ended in victory for the forces of conservatism. Economic developments at the time seemed to vindicate the Republicans. Prosperity began to return in 1898. Foreign crop failures drove farm prices upward, and American business entered another cycle of expansion. Prosperity and the gold standard, it seemed, were closely allied.

But while the free-silver movement had failed, it had raised an important question for the American economy. In the quarter century before 1900, the countries of the Western world had experienced a spectacular growth in productive facilities and population. Yet the supply of money had not kept pace with economic progress. Had it not been for a dramatic increase in the gold supply in the late 1890s (a result of new techniques for extracting gold from low-content ores and the discovery of huge new gold deposits in Alaska, South Africa, and Australia), Populist predictions of financial disaster might in fact have proved correct. In 1898, two and a half times as much gold was produced as in 1890, and the currency supply was soon inflated far beyond anything Bryan and the free-silver forces had anticipated.

By then, however, Bryan—like many other Americans—was becoming engaged with another major issue: the nation’s growing involvement in world affairs and its increasing flirtation with **imperialism**.

STIRRINGS OF IMPERIALISM

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, many Americans hoped to translate the era’s great industrial feats into global economic, political, and military power. The depression of 1893 further pushed observers to call for greater overseas trade to stimulate the economy. These expansionists—some called them “**jingoes**”—hoped to resume the course of Manifest Destiny.

THE NEW MANIFEST DESTINY

In addition to their economic and political motivations, jingoes believed that domestic tensions in the country might be resolved by a more robust foreign policy and stronger American nationalistic spirit—or even by war. It had been a generation since the Civil War, and some jingoes felt the nation’s masculinity had withered in the meantime. Mass industrial wage labor, the same line of reasoning went, had turned American workers from independent producers into faceless cogs in a machine. Some critics of woman suffrage thought it threatened to feminize and weaken the traditional male preserve of politics. Waves of immigration and wars of labor had divided the country. A more stout assertion of power abroad, jingoes hoped, might restore American vitality and unity.

Expansionists were also driven by competitive impulses. Americans were well aware of the imperialist fever that was raging through Europe, leading the major powers to partition much of Africa among themselves and to turn eager eyes on the Far East and the Chinese Empire. (See “America in the World: Imperialism.”) Some Americans feared that their nation would soon be left out of all these potential markets. Scholars and others found a philosophic justification for expansionism in Charles Darwin’s theories. They contended that nations or “races,” like biological species, struggled constantly for existence and that only the fittest could survive. For strong nations to dominate weak ones was, therefore, in accordance with the laws of nature.

The most effective apostle of imperialism was Alfred Thayer Mahan, a captain and, later, admiral in the United States Navy. Mahan’s thesis, presented in *The Influence of Sea Power and Colonies* and *Sea Power upon History* (1890) and other works, was simple: countries with sea power were the great nations of history. Effective sea power required, among other things, colonies. Mahan believed that the United States should, at the least, acquire defensive bases in the Caribbean and the Pacific and take possession of Hawaii and other Pacific islands. He feared that the United States did not have a large enough navy to play the great role he envisioned. But during the 1870s and 1880s, the government launched a shipbuilding program that by 1898 had moved the United States to fifth place among the world’s naval powers, and by 1900 to third place.

HAWAII AND SAMOA

The islands of Hawaii in the mid-Pacific had been an important way station for American ships in the China trade since the early nineteenth century. By the 1880s, officers of the expanding United States Navy were looking covetously at Pearl Harbor on the island of

Oahu as a possible permanent base for U.S. ships. The growing number of Americans who had taken up residence on the islands also pressed for an increased American presence in Hawaii.

Settled by Polynesian people beginning in about 1500 B.C., Hawaii had developed an agricultural and fishing society in which different islands (and different communities on the same islands), each with its own chieftain, lived more or less self-sufficiently. When the first Americans arrived in Hawaii in the 1790s on merchant ships from New England, there were perhaps half a million people living there. Battles among rival communities were frequent, as ambitious chieftains tried to consolidate power over their neighbors. *First Sugar Plantation* In 1810, after a series of such battles, King Kamehameha I established his dominance, welcomed American traders, and helped them develop a thriving trade between Hawaii and China. But Americans soon wanted more than trade. Missionaries began settling there in the early nineteenth century; and in the 1830s, William Hooper, a Boston trader, became the first of many Americans to buy land and establish a sugar plantation on the islands.

The arrival of these merchants, missionaries, and planters was devastating to traditional Hawaiian society. The newcomers inadvertently brought infectious diseases to which the Hawaiians, like the American Indians before them, were tragically vulnerable. By the mid-nineteenth century, more than half the native population had died. The Americans brought other incursions as well. Missionaries worked to replace native religion with Christianity. Other white settlers introduced liquor, firearms, and a commercial economy, all of which eroded the traditional character of Hawaiian society. By the 1840s, American planters had spread throughout the islands; and an American settler, G. P. Judd, had become prime minister of Hawaii under King Kamehameha III, who had agreed to establish a constitutional monarchy. Judd governed Hawaii for over a decade.

In 1887, the United States negotiated a treaty with Hawaii that permitted it to open a naval base at Pearl Harbor. By then, growing sugar for export to America had become the basis of the Hawaiian economy—as a result of an 1875 agreement allowing Hawaiian sugar to enter the United States duty-free. The American-dominated sugar plantation system displaced native Hawaiians from their lands and relied heavily on Asian immigrants, whom the Americans considered more reliable and more docile than the natives.

Native Hawaiians did not accept their subordination without protest. In 1891, they elevated a powerful nationalist to the throne: Queen Liliuokalani, who *Queen Liliuokalani* set out to challenge the growing American control of the islands. But she remained in power only two years. In 1890, the United States had eliminated the exemption from American tariffs in Hawaiian sugar trade. The result was devastating to the economy of the islands, and American planters concluded that the only way for them to recover was to become part of the United States (and, hence, exempt from its tariffs). In 1893, they staged a revolution and called on the United States for protection. After the American minister ordered marines from a warship in Honolulu harbor to go ashore to aid the American rebels, the queen yielded her authority.

A provisional government, dominated by Americans, immediately sent a delegation to Washington to negotiate a treaty of annexation. Debate over the treaty *Hawaii Annexed* continued until 1898, when Congress finally approved the agreement.

Three thousand miles south of Hawaii, the Samoan islands had also long served as a way station for American ships in the Pacific trade. As American commerce with Asia increased, business groups in the United States regarded Samoa with new interest, and the American navy began eyeing the Samoan harbor at Pago Pago. In 1878, the Hayes administration extracted a treaty from Samoan leaders for an American naval station at Pago Pago.



IMPERIALISM

Empires were not, of course, new to the nineteenth century, when the United States acquired its first overseas colonies. They had existed since the early moments of recorded history, and they have continued into our own time.

But in the second half of the nineteenth century, the construction of empires took on a new form, and the word *imperialism* emerged for the first time to describe it. In many places, European powers now created colonies not by sending large numbers of migrants to settle and populate new lands, but instead by creating military, political, and business structures that allowed them to dominate and profit from the existing populations. This new imperialism changed the character of the colonizing nations, enriching them greatly and producing new classes of people whose lives were shaped by the demands of imperial business and administration. It changed the character of colonized societies even more, drawing them into the vast nexus of global industrial capitalism and introducing Western customs, institutions, and technologies to the subject peoples.

As the popularity of empire grew in the West, efforts to justify it grew as well. Champions of imperialism argued that the acquisition of colonies was essential for the health, even the survival, of their own industrializing nations. Colonies were sources of raw materials vital to industrial production; they were markets for manufactured goods; and they were suppliers of cheap labor. Defenders of empire also argued that imperialism was good for the colonized people. Many saw colonization as an opportunity to export Christianity to “heathen” lands, and new missionary movements emerged in Europe and America in response. More secular apologists argued that imperialism

helped bring colonized people into the modern world.

The invention of steamships, railroads, telegraphs, and other modern vehicles of transportation and communication; the construction of canals (particularly the Suez Canal, completed in 1869, and the Panama Canal, completed in 1914); the creation of new military technologies (repeating rifles, machine guns, and modern artillery)—all contributed to the ability of Western nations to reach, conquer, and control distant lands.

The greatest imperial power of the nineteenth century was Great Britain. By 1800, despite its recent loss of the colonies that became the United States, it already possessed vast territory in North America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain greatly expanded its empire. Its most important acquisition was India, one of the largest and most populous countries in the world and a nation in which Great Britain had long exerted informal authority. In 1857, when native Indians revolted against British influence, British forces brutally crushed the rebellion and established formal colonial control over India. British officials, backed by substantial military power, now governed India through a large civil service staffed mostly by people from England and Scotland but with some Indians serving in minor positions. The British invested heavily in railroads, telegraphs, canals, harbors, and agricultural improvements, to enhance the economic opportunities available to them. They created schools for Indian children in an effort to draw them into British culture and make them supporters of the imperial system.

The British also extended their empire into Africa and other parts of Asia. The great imperial champion Cecil Rhodes expanded a small existing British colony at



SIEGE OF DELHI The Indian Mutiny, which lasted from 1857 to 1859, was a major uprising against the rule of the British East India Company, with Indians fighting on both sides. The uprising ended over a century of indirect rule by the Company and resulted in the British Crown taking direct control over India. Administration of the British Empire in India became known as the “raj,” from the Indian word for “rule.” (©Ingram Publishing)

Capetown into a substantial colony that included much of what is now South Africa. In 1895, he added new British territories to the north, which he named Rhodesia (and which today are Zimbabwe and Zambia). Others spread British authority into Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and much of Egypt. British imperialists also extended the empire into East Asia, with the acquisition of Singapore, Hong Kong, Burma, and Malaya; and they built a substantial presence—although not formal colonial rule—in China.

Other European states, watching the vast expansion of the British Empire, quickly jumped into the race for colonies. France created colonies in Indochina (Vietnam and Laos), Algeria, west Africa, and Madagascar. Belgium moved into the Congo in west Africa. Germany established colonies in the Cameroons, Tanganyika, and other parts of Africa, and in the Pacific islands north of Australia. Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese imperialists created colonies as well in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific—driven both by a calculation of

their own commercial interests and by the frenzied competition that had developed among rival imperial powers. In 1898, the United States was drawn into the imperial race, in part inadvertently as an unanticipated result of the Spanish-American War. But the drive to acquire colonies resulted as well from the deliberate efforts of home-grown proponents of empire (among them Theodore Roosevelt), who believed that in the modern industrial-imperial world, a nation without colonies would have difficulty remaining, or becoming, a true great power. •

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. What motivated the European nations' drive for empire in the late nineteenth century?
2. Why was Great Britain so successful in acquiring its vast empire?
3. How do the imperial efforts and ambitions of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century compare with those of European powers?

Great Britain and Germany were also interested in the islands, and they, too, secured treaty rights from the native princes. For the next ten years, the three powers jockeyed for **Samoa Divided** dominance in Samoa, finally agreeing to create a tripartite protectorate over Samoa, with the native chiefs exercising only nominal authority. The three-way arrangement failed to halt the rivalries of its members, and in 1899, the United States and Germany divided the islands between them, compensating Britain with territories elsewhere in the Pacific. The United States retained the harbor at Pago Pago.

WAR WITH SPAIN

Imperial ambitions had thus begun to stir within the United States well before the late 1890s. But a war with Spain in 1898 turned those stirrings into overt expansionism.

CONTROVERSY OVER CUBA

Spain's once-formidable empire had grown rickety, but still included two prized island possessions: Cuba, ninety miles off the shores of Florida, and the Philippines, in Asia. As in many imperial holdings, the native peoples in these regions objected to the presence of European colonizers and occasionally waged insurrections. One rebellion in Cuba had ended in 1878 with Spanish rule intact. Nominal Cuban control over the economy followed, but the depression of the 1890s led Spain to withdraw even that privilege. In 1895 **Cuban Revolt** Cuban revolutionaries mounted a new insurrection, led by the revolutionary poet José Martí and military heroes of the earlier wars of liberation.

The rebellion soon attracted the sympathies of people in the United States. Popular newspapers reported horrific atrocities committed by the Spanish against Cuban rebels and civilians. The Spanish governor since 1896, General Valeriano Weyler, was rounding up Cubans in detention camps to isolate rebels in the countryside, and then destroying agriculture to starve them out. These policies of “the Butcher” led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Cuban civilians. The conflict also imperiled the American-owned sugar plantations in Cuba and regional commerce more broadly. And ever since the articulation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, Americans had dreamed of ridding North and South America of European colonizers. Some hoped to replace the Spanish with a heavy American presence in the region, while others, including William Jennings Bryan and other prominent Democrats and members of Congress, wished only to liberate Cuba and leave it to the Cubans.

The conflict in Cuba came at a particularly opportune moment for the publishers of some American newspapers: Joseph Pulitzer with his *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst with his *New York Journal*. In the 1890s, Hearst and Pulitzer were engaged in a ruthless circulation war, and they both sent batteries of reporters and illustrators to Cuba with orders to provide accounts of Spanish atrocities. This sort of sensationalist reporting was known as **yellow journalism**. (See “Patterns of Popular Culture: Yellow Journalism.”)

Although President Cleveland worried about the potential disruptions of American trade, he did not intervene. Nor, at first, did his successor, William McKinley. Both men shared the commercial and humanitarian concerns, but sought to avoid war with a European power. An irritated Theodore Roosevelt, the assistant secretary of the navy, excoriated President McKinley for his un-masculine weakness, charging that he had “no more backbone than a chocolate éclair.”

The situation changed in early 1898. In January pro-Spanish Cubans rioted in Havana against the idea of a free Cuba, or *Cuba libre*, which the two American political parties had at least rhetorically supported even as successive U.S. administrations remained neutral. Thus the riots carried anti-American undertones, and President McKinley, under pressure from the popular media after unfulfilled promises from Spain, sent the U.S.S. *Maine* to Havana harbor to protect American citizens. On February 15, 1898, *The Maine* the ship exploded, killing 266 Americans. Although later investigations revealed it likely an accident, most Americans, egged on by the jingoistic press, blamed the Spanish.

For all the earlier arguments about humanity, commerce, and geopolitical strategy, the destruction of the *Maine* challenged American honor. A Democrat in the House voted for war “to defend the honor and maintain the dignity of this republic”; a Republican sought “peace with honor.” On April 25, Congress passed a resolution calling for war against the Spanish. It included the Teller Amendment, named for Democratic senator *Teller Amendment* Henry T. Teller from Colorado, which swore off any intentions to occupy, possess, or control Cuba after a future victory against the Spanish.

“A SPLENDID LITTLE WAR”

The American ambassador to England, John Hay, called the ensuing Spanish-American conflict “a splendid little war,” an opinion that most Americans—with the exception of many of the enlisted men who fought in it—seemed to share. Declared in April, it was over in August, in part because Cuban rebels had already greatly weakened the Spanish resistance, making the American intervention in many respects little more than a “mopping-up” exercise. Only 460 Americans were killed in battle or died of wounds, although some 5,200 others perished of disease: malaria, dysentery, and typhoid, among others. Casualties among Cuban insurgents, who continued to bear the brunt of the fighting, were much higher.

The American war effort was not without difficulties. United States soldiers faced serious supply problems: a shortage of modern rifles and ammunition, uniforms too heavy for the warm Caribbean weather, inadequate medical services, and skimpy, almost indigestible food. The regular army numbered only 28,000 troops and officers, most of whom had experience in quelling Indian outbreaks but none in larger-scale warfare. That meant that, as in the Civil War, the United States had to rely heavily on National Guard units, organized by local communities and commanded for the most part by local leaders without military experience.

A significant proportion of the American invasion force consisted of black soldiers. Some were volunteer troops put together by African American communities. Others were members of the four black regiments in the regular army, who had been stationed on the frontier to defend white settlements against Indians and were now transferred east to fight in Cuba. As the black soldiers traveled through the South toward the training camps, some resisted the rigid segregation to which they were subjected. African American soldiers in Georgia deliberately made use of a “whites only” park; in Florida, they beat a soda-fountain operator for refusing to *Racial Tensions in the Military* serve them; in Tampa, white provocations and black retaliation led to a nightlong riot that left thirty wounded.

Racial tensions continued in Cuba. African Americans played crucial roles in some of the important battles of the war (including the famous charge at San Juan Hill) and won many medals. Nearly half the Cuban insurgents fighting with the Americans were themselves black,



YELLOW JOURNALISM

Joseph Pulitzer was a successful newspaper publisher in St. Louis, Missouri, when he traveled to New York City in 1883 to buy a struggling paper, the *New York World*. “There is room in this great and growing city,” he wrote in one of his first editorials, “for a journal that is not only cheap, but bright, not only bright but large, not only large but truly democratic . . . that will serve and battle for the people with earnest sincerity.” Within a year, the *World’s* daily circulation had soared from 10,000 to over 60,000. By 1886, it had reached 250,000 and was making enormous profits.

The success of Pulitzer’s *World* marked the birth of what came to be known as “yellow journalism,” a phrase that reportedly derived from a character in one of the *World’s* comic strips: “the Yellow Kid.” Color printing in newspapers was relatively new, and yellow was the most difficult color to print; so in the beginning, the term *yellow journalism* was a comment on the new technological possibilities that Pulitzer was so eagerly embracing. Eventually, however, it came to refer to a sensationalist style of reporting and writing that spread quickly through urban America and changed the character of newspapers forever.

Sensationalism was not new to journalism in the late nineteenth century, of course. Political scandal sheets had been publishing lurid stories since before the American Revolution. But the yellow journalism of the 1880s and 1890s took the search for a mass audience to new levels. The *World* created one of the first Sunday editions, with lavishly colored special sections, comics, and illustrated features. It expanded coverage of sports, fashion,

literature, and theater. It pioneered large, glaring, overheated headlines that captured the eyes of people who were passing newsstands. It published exposés of political corruption. It made considerable efforts to bring drama and energy to its coverage of crime. It tried to involve readers directly in its stories (as when a *World* campaign helped raise \$300,000 to build a base for the Statue of Liberty, with much of the money coming in donations of five or ten cents from working-class readers). And it introduced a self-consciously populist style of writing that appealed to working-class readers. “The American people want something terse, forcible, picturesque, striking,” Pulitzer said. His reporters wrote short, forceful sentences. They did not shy away from expressing sympathy or outrage. And they were not always constrained by the truth.

Pulitzer very quickly produced imitators, the most important of them the California publisher William Randolph Hearst, who in 1895 bought the *New York Journal*, cut its price to one cent (Pulitzer quickly followed suit), copied many of the *World’s* techniques, and within a year raised its circulation to 400,000. Hearst soon made the *Journal* the largest-circulation paper in the country—selling more than a million copies a day. Pulitzer, whose own circulation was not far behind, accused him of “pandering to the worst tastes of the prurient and the horror-loving” and “dealing in bogus news.” But the *World* wasted no time before imitating the *Journal*. The competition between these two great “yellow” journals soon drove both to new levels of sensationalism. Their success drove newspapers in other cities around the nation to copy their techniques.

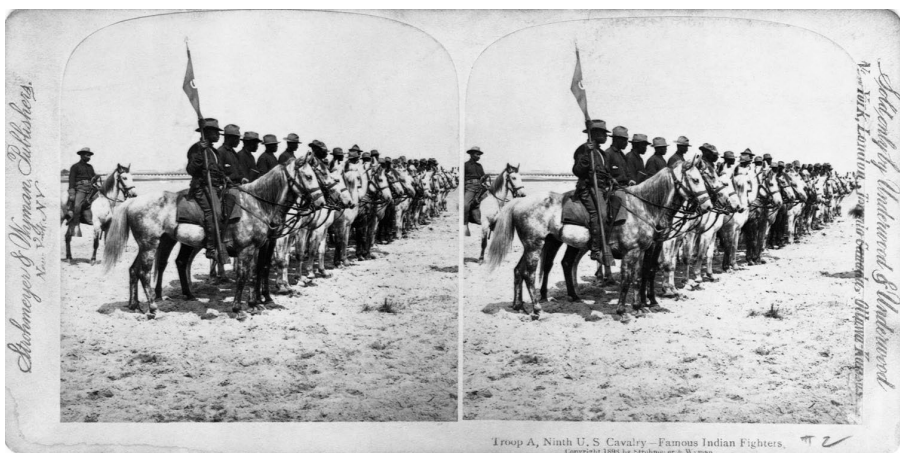
The civil war in Cuba in the 1890s gave both papers their best opportunities yet for combining sensational reporting with shameless appeals to patriotism and moral outrage. They avidly published exaggerated reports of Spanish atrocities toward the Cuban rebels, fanning popular anger toward Spain. When the American battleship *Maine* mysteriously exploded in Havana harbor in 1898, both papers (without any evidence) immediately blamed Spanish authorities. The *Journal* offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the conviction of those responsible for the explosion, and it crowded all other stories off its front page (“There is no other news,” Hearst told his editors) to make room for such screaming headlines as THE WHOLE COUNTRY THRILLS WITH WAR FEVER and HAVANA POPULACE INSULTS THE MEMORY OF THE MAINE VICTIMS. In the three days following the *Maine* explosion, the *Journal* sold more than 3 million copies, a new world’s record for newspaper circulation.

In the aftermath of the *Maine* episode, the more conservative press launched a spirited attack on yellow journalism. That was partly in response to Hearst’s boast

that the conflict in Cuba was “the *Journal’s* war.” He sent a cable to one of his reporters in Cuba saying: “You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war.” Growing numbers of critics tried to discourage yellow journalism, which “respectable” editors both deplored and feared. Some schools, libraries, and clubs began to banish the papers from their premises. But the techniques the “yellow” press pioneered in the 1890s helped map the way for a tradition of colorful, popular journalism—later embodied in “tabloids,” some elements of which eventually found their way into television news—that has endured into the present day. •

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. Did Pulitzer’s *World*, Hearst’s *Journal*, and their imitators report the news or manufacture it?
2. How did the “yellow” press influence the public’s perception of the Spanish-American War?
3. How does television news continue the tradition of “yellow” journalism? In what other mass media do you see the style and techniques pioneered by the “yellow” press?



Troop A, Ninth U. S. Cavalry—Famous Indian Fighters.
Copyright 1991 by Underwood & Underwood

AFRICAN AMERICAN CAVALRY Substantial numbers of African Americans fought in the United States Army during the Spanish-American War. Although confined to all-black units, they engaged in combat alongside white units and fought bravely and effectively. This photograph shows a troop of African American cavalry in formation in Cuba. It is meant to be viewed through a stereoscope, which would create a single three-dimensional image. (© Corbis)

including one of the leading insurgent generals, Antonio Maceo. The sight of black Cuban soldiers fighting alongside whites as equals gave African Americans a stronger sense of the injustice of their own position.

SEIZING THE PHILIPPINES

By an accident of history, the assistant secretary of the navy during the Cuban revolution was Theodore Roosevelt, an ardent Anglophile eager to see the United States join the British and other nations as imperial powers. Roosevelt was, in fact, a relatively minor figure in the Navy Department, but he was determined to expand his power. British friends had persuaded him that the war in Cuba gave the United States a rare opportunity to expand the American empire. Roosevelt responded by sending the Navy's Pacific fleet to the Philippines, with orders to attack as soon as America declared war. On May 1, 1898, Commodore George Dewey led the fleet into Manila harbor, quickly destroyed the aging Spanish fleet, and forced the Spanish government to surrender Manila with hardly a shot fired. He became the first American hero of the war.

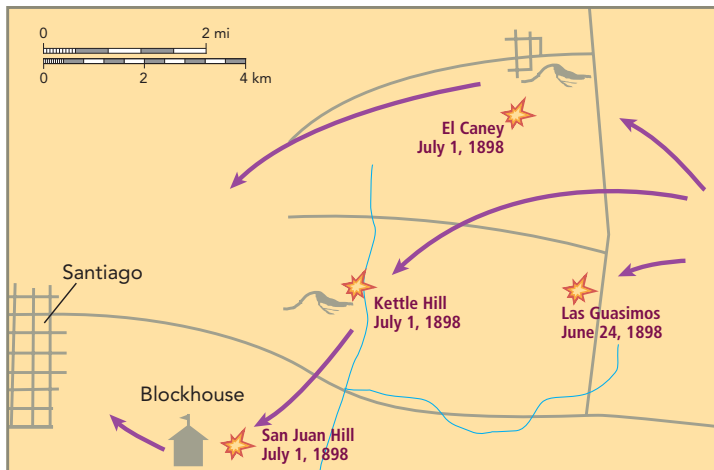
THE BATTLE FOR CUBA

Cuba remained the principal focus of American military efforts. At first, the American commanders planned a long period of training before actually sending troops into combat. But when a Spanish fleet under Admiral Pascual Cervera slipped past the American navy into Santiago harbor on the southern coast of Cuba, plans changed quickly. The American Atlantic fleet quickly bottled Cervera up in the harbor. And the U.S. Army's commanding general, Nelson A. Miles, hastily altered his strategy and left Tampa in June with a force of 17,000 to attack Santiago.

General William R. Shafter, the American commander, moved toward Santiago, which he planned to surround and capture. On the way he met and defeated Spanish forces at Las Guasimos and, a week later, in two simultaneous battles, El Caney and San Juan Hill. At the center of the fighting (and on the front pages of the newspapers) during many of *The Rough Riders* these engagements was a cavalry unit known as the Rough Riders. Nominally commanded by General Leonard Wood, its real leader was Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, who had resigned from the Navy Department to get into the war and who had struggled with an almost desperate fury to get his regiment into the fighting. His passion to join the war undoubtedly reflected the decision of his beloved father, Theodore Roosevelt Sr., not to fight in the Civil War, a source of private shame within the family that his son sought to erase.

Roosevelt rapidly emerged as a hero of the conflict. His fame rested in large part on his role in leading a bold, if perhaps reckless, charge up Kettle Hill (a minor part of the larger battle for the adjacent San Juan Hill) directly into the face of Spanish guns. Roosevelt himself emerged unscathed, but nearly a hundred of his soldiers were killed or wounded. He remembered the battle as "the great day of my life."

Although Shafter was now in position to assault Santiago, his army was so weakened by sickness that he feared he might have to abandon his position. But unknown to the Americans, the Spanish government had by now decided that Santiago was lost and had ordered Cervera to evacuate. On July 3, Cervera tried to escape the harbor. The waiting American squadron destroyed his entire fleet. On July 16, the commander of Spanish ground forces in Santiago surrendered. At about the same time, an American army landed



THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR IN CUBA, 1898 The military conflict between the United States and Spain in Cuba was a brief affair. The Cuban rebels and an American naval blockade had already brought the Spanish to the brink of defeat. The arrival of American troops was simply the final blow. In the space of about a week, U.S. troops won four decisive battles in the area around Santiago in southeast Cuba—one of them (the Battle of Kettle Hill) the scene of Theodore Roosevelt's famous charge up the adjacent San Juan Hill. This map shows the extent of the American naval blockade, the path of American troops from Florida to Cuba, and the location of the actual fighting. • *What were the implications of the war in Cuba for Puerto Rico?*

in Puerto Rico and occupied it against virtually no opposition. On August 12, an armistice ended the war. Under the terms of the armistice, Spain recognized the independence of **Puerto Rico Occupied** Cuba, ceded Puerto Rico and the Pacific island of Guam to the United States, and accepted continued American occupation of Manila pending the final disposition of the Philippines.

PUERTO RICO AND THE UNITED STATES

The island of Puerto Rico had been a part of the Spanish Empire since 1508. By the early seventeenth century, the native people of the island, the Arawaks, had largely disappeared as a result of infectious diseases, Spanish brutality, and poverty. Puerto Rican society developed, therefore, with a Spanish ruling class and a large African workforce for the coffee and sugar plantations that came to dominate its economy.

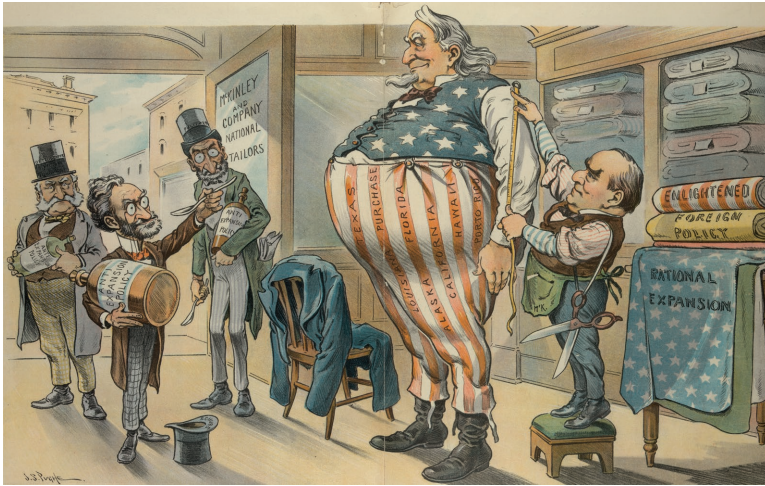
Puerto Rican resistance to Spanish rule began to emerge in the nineteenth century. The resistance prompted some reforms: the abolition of slavery in 1873, representation in the Spanish parliament, and other changes. Demands for independence continued to grow, and in 1898, Spain granted the island a degree of independence. But before the changes had any chance to take effect, control of Puerto Rico shifted to the United States. American military forces occupied the island during the Spanish-American War, and they remained **Foraker Act** in control until 1900, when the Foraker Act ended military rule and established a formal colonial government. Agitation for independence continued, and in 1917, Congress passed the Jones Act, which declared Puerto Rico to be United States territory and made all Puerto Ricans American citizens.

The Puerto Rican sugar industry flourished as it took advantage of the American market that was now open to it without tariffs. As in Hawaii, Americans from the mainland began establishing large sugar plantations on the island and hired natives to work them. The growing emphasis on sugar as a cash crop, and the transformation of many Puerto Rican farmers into paid laborers, led to a reduction in the growing of food for the island and greater reliance on imported goods. When international sugar prices were high, Puerto Rico did well. When they dropped, the island's economy sagged, pushing the many plantation workers—already poor—into destitution.

THE DEBATE OVER THE PHILIPPINES

Although the annexation of Puerto Rico produced relatively little controversy, the annexation of the Philippines created an impassioned debate. Controlling a nearby Caribbean island fit reasonably comfortably into the United States' sense of itself as the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere. But to many Americans, controlling a large and densely populated territory thousands of miles away seemed very different and more ominous.

McKinley claimed to be reluctant to support annexation. But, according to his own accounts, he came to believe there were no acceptable alternatives. Returning the **The Philippines Question** Philippines to Spain would be “cowardly and dishonorable,” he claimed. Turning them over to another imperialist power (France, Germany, or Britain) would be “bad business and discreditable.” Granting them independence would be irresponsible because the Filipinos were “unfit for self government.” The only solution was “to take them all and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them.”



MEASURING UNCLE SAM FOR A NEW SUIT In this *Puck* cartoon, President McKinley is favorably depicted as a tailor, meaning his client for a suit is large enough to accommodate the new possessions the United States obtained in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. The stripes on Uncle Sam's pants bear the names of earlier, less controversial acquisitions, such as the Louisiana Purchase. (The Library of Congress)

The Treaty of Paris, signed in December 1898, confirmed the terms of the armistice and brought a formal end to the war. American negotiators had startled the Spanish by demanding that they also cede the Philippines to the United States, but an American offer of \$20 million for the islands softened their resistance. They accepted all the American terms.

In the United States Senate, however, resistance was fierce. During debate over ratification of the treaty, a powerful anti-imperialist movement arose to oppose acquisition of the Philippines. The anti-imperialists included some of the *Anti-Imperialist League* nation's wealthiest and most powerful figures: Andrew Carnegie, Mark Twain, Samuel Gompers, Senator John Sherman, and others. Some anti-imperialists believed that imperialism was immoral, a repudiation of America's commitment to human freedom. Others feared "polluting" the American population by introducing "inferior" Asian races into it. Industrial workers feared being undercut by a flood of cheap laborers from the new colonies. Conservatives worried about the large standing army and entangling foreign alliances that they believed imperialism would require and that they feared would threaten American liberties. Sugar growers and other anti-imperialists feared unwelcome competition from the new territories. The Anti-Imperialist League, established late in 1898 by upper-class Bostonians, New Yorkers, and others to fight against annexation, waged a vigorous campaign against ratification of the Paris treaty (See "Consider the Source: Platform of the Anti-Imperialist League.").

But favoring ratification was an equally varied group. There were the exuberant imperialists such as Theodore Roosevelt, who saw the acquisition of empire as a way to reinvigorate the nation. Some businessmen saw opportunities to dominate the Asian trade. Most Republicans saw partisan advantages in acquiring valuable new territories through a war fought and won by a Republican administration. Perhaps the *Arguments for Annexation* strongest argument in favor of annexation, however, was that the United States already possessed the islands.

PLATFORM OF THE AMERICAN ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE, 1899

As part of their campaign against the annexation of the Philippines by the United States, members of the Anti-Imperialist League circulated this party platform. Here they argue that American political ideals are not compatible with imperialist actions.

We hold that the policy known as imperialism is hostile to liberty and tends toward militarism, an evil from which it has been our glory to be free. We regret that it has become necessary in the land of Washington and Lincoln to reaffirm that all men, of whatever race or color, are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We maintain that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. We insist that the subjugation of any people is “criminal aggression” and open disloyalty to the distinctive principles of our Government.

We earnestly condemn the policy of the present National Administration in the Philippines. It seeks to extinguish the spirit of 1776 in those islands. We deplore the sacrifice of our soldiers and sailors, whose bravery deserves admiration even in an unjust war. We denounce the slaughter of the Filipinos as a needless horror. We protest against the extension of American sovereignty by Spanish methods.

We demand the immediate cessation of the war against liberty, begun by Spain and continued by us. We urge that Congress be promptly convened to announce to the Filipinos our purpose to concede to them the independence for which they have so long fought and which of right is theirs.

The United States have always protested against the doctrine of international law which permits the subjugation of the weak by the strong. A self-governing state cannot

accept sovereignty over an unwilling people. The United States cannot act upon the ancient heresy that might makes right.

Imperialists assume that with the destruction of self-government in the Philippines by American hands, all opposition here will cease. This is a grievous error. Much as we abhor the war of “criminal aggression” in the Philippines, greatly as we regret that the blood of the Filipinos is on American hands, we more deeply resent the betrayal of American institutions at home. The real firing line is not in the suburbs of Manila. The foe is of our own household. The attempt of 1861 was to divide the country. That of 1899 is to destroy its fundamental principles and noblest ideals.

Whether the ruthless slaughter of the Filipinos shall end next month or next year is but an incident in a contest that must go on until the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are rescued from the hands of their betrayers. Those who dispute about standards of value while the Republic is undermined will be listened to as little as those who would wrangle about the small economies of the household while the house is on fire. The training of a great people for a century, the aspiration for liberty of a vast immigration are forces that will hurl aside those who in the delirium of conquest seek to destroy the character of our institutions.

We deny that the obligation of all citizens to support their Government in times of grave national peril applies to the present situation. If an Administration may with impunity ignore the issues upon which it was chosen, deliberately create a condition of war anywhere on the face of the globe, debauch the civil service for spoils to promote the adventure, organize a truth-suppressing censorship and demand of all citizens a suspension of judgment and their unanimous support while it chooses to

continue the fighting, representative government itself is imperiled.

We propose to contribute to the defeat of any person or party that stands for the forcible subjugation of any people. We shall oppose for reelection all who in the White House or in Congress betray American liberty in pursuit of un-American gains. We still hope that both of our great political parties will support and defend the Declaration of Independence in the closing campaign of the century.

Source: “Platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League,” in *Speeches, Correspondence, and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, vol. 6, ed. Frederick Bancroft (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), p. 77, note 1.

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. On what grounds did the Anti-Imperialist League oppose U.S. expansion, and where were these principles ratified?
2. What were the costs of imperial expansion for the United States and what losses were Filipinos to incur?
3. How did the prospect of an American empire affect the nation’s democratic principles?

When anti-imperialists warned of the danger of acquiring heavily populated territories whose people might have to become citizens, the jingoes had a ready answer: the nation’s long-standing policies toward Indians—treating them as dependents rather than as citizens—had created a precedent for annexing land without absorbing people.

The fate of the treaty remained in doubt for weeks, until it received the unexpected support of William Jennings Bryan, a fervent anti-imperialist. He backed ratification because he hoped to move the issue out of the Senate and make it the subject of a national referendum in 1900, when he expected to be the Democratic presidential candidate again. Bryan persuaded a number of anti-imperialist Democrats to support the treaty so as to set up the 1900 debate. The Senate ratified it finally on February 6, 1899.

But Bryan miscalculated. If the election of 1900 was in fact a referendum on the Philippines, as Bryan expected, it proved beyond a doubt that the nation **Election of 1900** had decided in favor of imperialism. Once again Bryan ran against McKinley; and once again McKinley won—even more decisively than in 1896. It was not only the issue of the colonies, however, that ensured McKinley’s victory. The Republicans benefited from growing prosperity—and also from the colorful personality of their vice presidential candidate, Theodore Roosevelt, the hero of San Juan Hill.

THE REPUBLIC AS EMPIRE

The new American empire was small by the standards of the great imperial powers of Europe. But it embroiled the United States in the politics of both Europe and the Far East in ways the nation had always tried to avoid in the past. It also drew Americans into a brutal war in the Philippines.

GOVERNING THE COLONIES

Three American dependencies—Hawaii, Alaska, and Puerto Rico—presented relatively few problems. They received territorial status (and their residents American citizenship) relatively quickly: Hawaii in 1900, Alaska in 1912, and Puerto Rico in 1917. The navy took control of the Pacific islands of Guam and Tutuila. The United States simply left

alone some of the smallest, least populated Pacific islands now under its control. Cuba was a thornier problem. American military forces, commanded by General Leonard Wood, remained there until 1902 to prepare the island for independence. Americans built roads, schools, and hospitals; reorganized the legal, financial, and administrative systems; and introduced medical and sanitation reforms. But the United States also laid the basis for years of American economic domination of the island.

When Cuba drew up a constitution that made no reference to the United States, **Platt Amendment** Congress responded by passing the Platt Amendment in 1901 and pressuring Cuba into incorporating its terms into its constitution. The Platt Amendment barred Cuba from making treaties with other nations; gave the United States the right to intervene in Cuba to preserve independence, life, and property; and required Cuba to permit American naval stations on its territory. The amendment left Cuba with only nominal political independence.

American capital made the new nation an American economic appendage as well. American investors poured into Cuba, buying up plantations, factories, railroads, and refineries. Resistance to “Yankee imperialism” produced intermittent revolts against the Cuban government—revolts that at times prompted U.S. military intervention. American troops occupied the island from 1906 to 1909 after one such rebellion; they returned again in 1912 to suppress a revolt by black plantation workers. As in Puerto Rico and Hawaii, sugar production—spurred by access to the American market—increasingly dominated the island’s economy and subjected it to the same cycle of booms and busts that plagued other sugar-producing appendages of the United States economy.

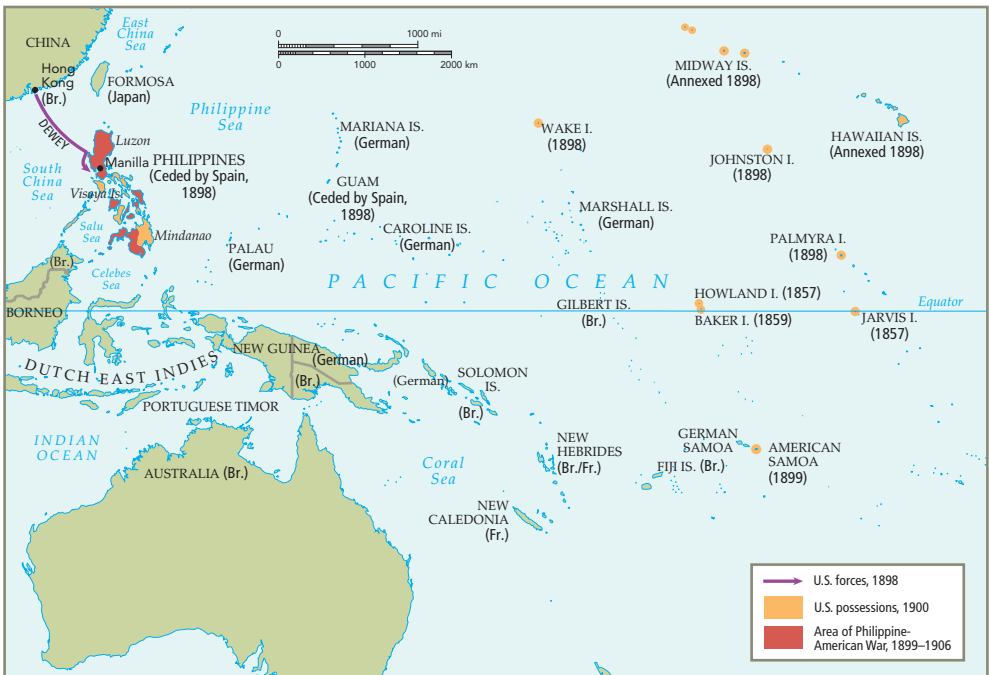
THE PHILIPPINE WAR

Like other imperial powers, the United States soon discovered that subjugating another people was not an easy task. The American experience in the Philippines began with a long and bloody war.

The conflict in the Philippines is the least remembered of all American wars. It was also one of the longest. It lasted from 1898 to 1902, and it was one of the most vicious. It involved 200,000 American troops and resulted in 4,300 American deaths. The number of Filipinos killed in the conflict has long been a matter of dispute, but it seems likely that at least 50,000 natives (and perhaps many more) died. The American occupiers faced brutal guerrilla tactics in the Philippines, and they soon found themselves drawn into the same pattern of brutality that had outraged so many Americans when Weyler had used them in the Caribbean.

The Filipinos had rebelled against Spanish rule before 1898, and as soon as they realized the Americans had come to stay, they rebelled against them as well. Aably led by **Emilio Aguinaldo** Emilio Aguinaldo, who claimed to head the legitimate government of the nation, Filipinos harried the American army of occupation from island to island for more than three years. At first, American commanders believed the rebels had only a small popular following. But by early 1900, General Arthur MacArthur, an American commander in the islands (and father of General Douglas MacArthur), was writing: “I have been reluctantly compelled to believe that the Filipino masses are loyal to Aguinaldo and the government which he heads.”

To MacArthur and others, that realization was not a reason to moderate American tactics or conciliate the rebels, but rather to adopt much more severe measures. Gradually, the American military effort became more systematically vicious and brutal. Captured Filipino



THE AMERICAN SOUTH PACIFIC EMPIRE, 1900 Except for Puerto Rico, all of the colonial acquisitions of the United States in the wake of the Spanish-American War occurred in the Pacific. The new attraction of imperialism persuaded the United States to annex Hawaii in 1898. The war itself gave America control of the Philippines, Guam, and other, smaller Spanish possessions in the Pacific. When added to the small, scattered islands that the United States had acquired as naval bases earlier in the nineteenth century, these new possessions gave the nation a far-flung Pacific empire, even if one whose total territory and population remained small by the standards of the other great empires of the age. • *What was the reaction in the United States to the acquisition of this new empire?*

guerrillas were treated not as prisoners of war but as murderers. Many were summarily executed. On some islands, entire communities were evacuated—the residents forced into concentration camps while American troops destroyed their villages. A spirit of savagery grew among some American soldiers, who came to view the Filipinos as almost subhuman and, at times, seemed to take pleasure in arbitrarily killing them.

The racial undertones of the war—American soldiers called the Filipinos “niggers”—were particularly grating for African American troops serving in segregated units. They were hardly unaware that at home, southern states and lynch mobs were in the process of disenfranchising and terrorizing black people. Some noticed a resemblance between the attitude of the American military and government toward the Filipino natives and popular attitudes toward African Americans and Native Americans.

By 1902, reports of the brutality and of the American casualties had soured the American public on the war. But by then, the rebellion had largely exhausted itself and the occupiers had established control over most of the islands. The key to their victory was the March 1901 capture of Aguinaldo, who later signed a document urging his followers to stop fighting and declared his own allegiance to the United States. Fighting continued intermittently until as late as 1906, but American possession of the Philippines was now secure. In the summer of 1901, the military transferred authority over the islands

to William Howard Taft, who became their first civilian governor and gave the Filipinos broad local autonomy. The Americans also built roads, schools, bridges, and sewers; instituted major administrative and financial reforms; and established a public health system. Filipino self-rule gradually increased, and on July 4, 1946, the islands finally gained their independence.

THE OPEN DOOR

The American acquisition of the Philippines increased the already strong U.S. interest in Asia. Americans were particularly concerned about the future of China, which provided a tempting target for exploitation by stronger countries. By 1900, England, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan were beginning to carve up China among themselves, pressuring the Chinese government for “concessions” that gave them effective control over various regions of China. In some cases, they simply seized Chinese territory and claimed it as their own. Many Americans feared that the process would soon cut them out of the China trade altogether.

Eager for a way to advance American interests in China without risking war, McKinley issued a statement in September 1898 saying the United States wanted access to China but no special advantages there. “Asking only the open door for ourselves, we are ready to accord the open door to others.” The next year, Secretary of State John Hay translated those words into policy when he addressed identical messages—which became known as the “Open Door notes”—to England, Germany, Russia, France, Japan, and Italy. He asked that each nation with a “sphere of influence” in China allow other nations to trade freely and equally in its sphere. The principles Hay outlined would allow the United States to trade freely with China without fear of interference.

Europe and Japan received the **Open Door** proposals coolly. Russia openly rejected them; the other powers claimed to accept them in principle but to be unable to act unless all the other powers agreed. Hay refused to consider this a rebuff. He boldly announced that all the powers had accepted the principles of the Open Door in “final and definitive” form and that the United States expected them to observe those principles.

No sooner had the diplomatic maneuvering over the Open Door ended than the Boxers, a secret Chinese martial-arts society with highly nationalist convictions (and a somewhat mystical vision of their invulnerability to bullets), launched a revolt against foreigners in China. The Boxer Rebellion spread widely across eastern China, attacking Westerners wherever they could find them—including many Christian missionaries. But the climax of the revolt was a siege of the entire Western foreign diplomatic corps, which took refuge in the British embassy in Peking. The imperial powers (including the United States) sent an international expeditionary force into China to rescue the diplomats. In August 1900, it fought its way into the city and broke the siege.

The Boxer Rebellion became an important event for the role of the United States in China. McKinley and Hay had agreed to American participation in quelling the Boxer Rebellion in order to secure a voice in the settlement of the uprising and prevent the partition of China by the European powers. Hay now won support for his Open Door approach from England and Germany and induced the other participating powers to accept compensation from the Chinese for the damages the Boxer Rebellion had caused. Chinese territorial integrity survived at least in name, and the United States retained access to its lucrative China trade.

A MODERN MILITARY SYSTEM

The war with Spain had revealed glaring deficiencies in the American military system. Had the United States been fighting a more powerful foe, disaster might have resulted. After the war, McKinley appointed Elihu Root, an able corporate lawyer in New York, as secretary of war to supervise a major overhaul of the armed forces.

Root's reforms enlarged the regular army from 25,000 to a maximum of 100,000. They established federal army standards for the National Guard, ensuring that never again would the nation fight a war with volunteer regiments trained and equipped differently than those in the regular army. They sparked the creation of a system of officer training schools, including the Army Staff College (later the Command and General Staff School) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the Army War College in Washington. And in 1903, a general staff (named the Joint Chiefs of Staff) was established to act as military advisers to the secretary of war. As a result of the new reforms, the United States entered the twentieth century with something resembling a modern military system.

CONCLUSION

For nearly three decades after the end of Reconstruction, American politics remained locked in a rigid stalemate. The electorate was almost evenly divided, and the two major parties differed on only a few issues. A series of unimposing if respectable presidents presided over this political system as unwitting symbols of its stability and passivity.

Beneath the calm surface of national politics, however, social issues were creating deep tensions: battles between employers and workers, growing resentment among American farmers facing declining prosperity, outrage at what many voters considered corruption in government and excessive power in the hands of corporate titans. When a great depression began in 1893, these social tensions exploded.

The most visible sign of the challenge to the political stalemate was the Populist movement, an uprising of American farmers demanding far-reaching changes in politics and the economy. In 1892, they created their own political party, the People's Party, which for a few years showed impressive strength. But in the climactic election of 1896, in which the Populist hero William Jennings Bryan became the presidential nominee of both the Democratic Party and the People's Party, the Republicans won a substantial victory—and, in the process, helped create a great electoral realignment that left the Republicans with a clear majority for the next three decades.

The crises of the 1890s helped spur the United States' growing involvement in the world. In 1898, the United States intervened in a colonial war between Spain and Cuba, won a quick and easy military victory, and signed a treaty with Spain that ceded significant territory to the Americans. A vigorous anti-imperialist movement failed to stop the imperial drive. But taking the colonies proved easier than holding them. In the Philippines, American forces became bogged down in a brutal four-year war with Filipino rebels. The conflict soured much of the American public, and the annexation of colonies in 1898 proved to be both the beginning and the end of American territorial expansion.

KEY TERMS/PEOPLE/PLACES/EVENTS

Benjamin Harrison 458	imperialism 468	Queen Liliuokalani 469
Boxer Rebellion 484	Interstate Commerce Act 459	Rutherford B. Hayes 457
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RECALL AND REFLECT

1. How and why did the federal government attempt to regulate interstate commerce in the late nineteenth century?
2. What efforts did farmers undertake to deal with the economic problems they faced in the late nineteenth century?
3. What was the “silver question”? Why was it so important to so many Americans? How did the major political parties deal with this question?
4. How did the Spanish-American War change America's relationship to the rest of the world?
5. What were the main arguments of those who supported U.S. imperialism and those who opposed the nation's imperial ambitions and efforts?

20

THE PROGRESSIVES

THE PROGRESSIVE IMPULSE

WOMEN AND REFORM

THE ASSAULT ON THE PARTIES

SOURCES OF PROGRESSIVE REFORM

CRUSADES FOR SOCIAL ORDER AND REFORM

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND THE MODERN
PRESIDENCY

THE TROUBLED SUCCESSION

WOODROW WILSON AND THE NEW FREEDOM

LOOKING AHEAD

1. What role did women and women's organizations play in the reforms of the progressive era? How did progressive era reforms affect women?
2. What changes to politics and government did progressive reformers advocate at the local, state, and federal levels? How did government change as a result of their reform efforts?
3. How did Woodrow Wilson's progressivism differ from that of Theodore Roosevelt? In what ways was it similar to Roosevelt's?

WELL BEFORE THE END OF the nineteenth century, many Americans had become convinced that rapid industrialization and urbanization had created a growing crisis. The nation's most pressing need, they claimed, was to impose order and justice on a society that seemed to be approaching chaos. By the early years of the twentieth century, this outlook had acquired a name: progressivism.

Not even those who called themselves progressives could agree on what the term meant, for it was a phenomenon of great scope and diversity. But despite or perhaps because of its great diversity, the progressive movement generated a remarkable wave of political and social innovation. From the late nineteenth century until at least the end of World War I, progressive reformers brought into public debate such issues as the role of women in society, racial equality, the rights of labor, and the impact of immigration and cultural diversity.

Progressivism began as a series of local movements and encompassed many different efforts to improve the working of society. Slowly but steadily, these efforts became national

TIME LINE

1873	Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) founded
1889	Jane Addams opens Hull House in Chicago
1893	Anti-Saloon League founded
1900	Galveston, Texas, establishes commission government
1901	McKinley assassinated; Theodore Roosevelt becomes president
1902	Northern Securities antitrust case
1906	Hepburn Railroad Regulation Act Meat Inspection Act
1907	Financial panic and recession
1908	Taft elected president
1909	NAACP formed Pinchot-Ballinger dispute
1911	Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire
1912	Roosevelt forms Progressive Party Woodrow Wilson elected president
1913	Sixteenth Amendment (income tax) Seventeenth Amendment (direct popular election of U.S. senators) Federal Reserve Act
1914	Federal Trade Commission Act Clayton Antitrust Act
1919	Eighteenth Amendment (prohibition)
1920	Nineteenth Amendment (woman suffrage)

efforts. Ultimately it was the presidency, not the Congress, that became the most important vehicle of national reform—first under the dynamic leadership of Theodore Roosevelt and then under the disciplined, moralistic guidance of Woodrow Wilson. By the time America entered World War I in 1917, the federal government—which had exercised limited powers prior to the twentieth century—had greatly expanded its role in American life.

THE PROGRESSIVE IMPULSE

Progressives believed, as their name implies, in the idea of progress. They were optimistic that society was capable of improvement and that continued growth and advancement were the nation's destiny. But progressives believed, too, that growth and progress could not continue to occur recklessly, as they had in the late nineteenth century. The "natural laws" of the marketplace, and the doctrines of laissez-faire and Social Darwinism that dominated those laws, were not sufficient. Direct, purposeful human intervention was essential to ordering and bettering society. These ideas percolated in the United States as well as many other industrializing parts of the world. (See "America in the World: Social Democracy.")

Progressives did not always agree on the form their interventions should take, and the result was a variety of reform impulses. One powerful impulse was the spirit of "antimonopoly," the fear of concentrated power and the urge to limit and disperse authority and wealth. Another progressive impulse was a belief in the importance of social cohesion: the belief that individuals are part of a great web of social relationships, that each person's welfare is dependent on the welfare of society as a whole. Still another impulse was a deep faith in

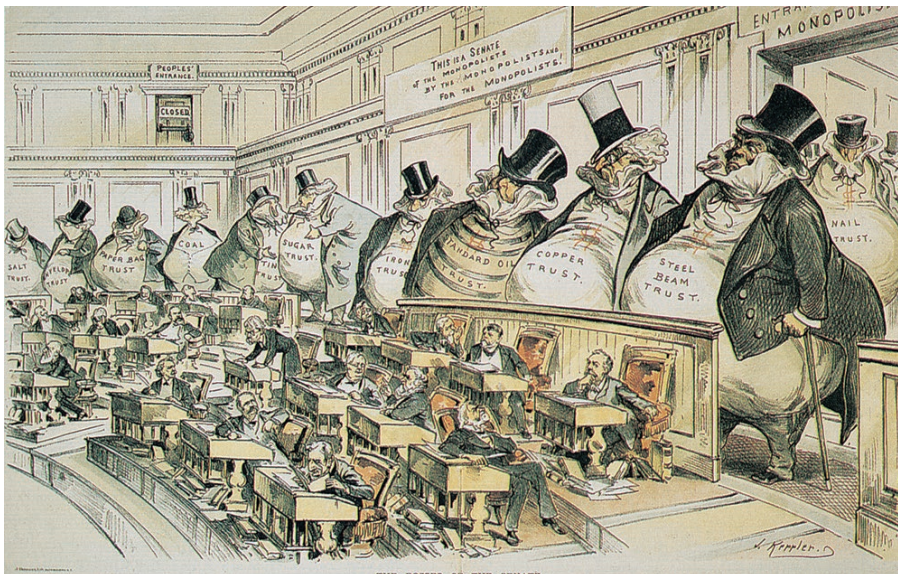
knowledge—in the possibilities of applying to society the principles of natural and social sciences. Most progressives believed, too, that a modernized government could—and must—play an important role in the process of improving and stabilizing society.

THE MUCKRAKERS AND THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

Among the first people to articulate the new spirit of national reform were crusading journalists who began to direct public attention toward social, economic, and political injustices. Known as the **muckrakers**, after Theodore Roosevelt accused them of raking up muck through their writings, they were committed to exposing scandal, corruption, and injustice.

Their first major targets were the trusts and, particularly, the railroads, which the muckrakers considered powerful and deeply corrupt. Exposés of the great corporate organizations began to appear as early as the 1860s, when Charles Francis Adams Jr. and others uncovered corruption among the railroad barons. Decades later, journalist Ida Tarbell produced a scorching study of the Standard Oil trust. By the turn of the century, many muckrakers were turning their attention to government and particularly to the urban political machines. Among the most influential was Lincoln Steffens, a reporter for *McClure's* magazine. His portraits of “machine government” and “boss rule” in cities, written in a tone of studied moral outrage, helped arouse sentiment for urban political reform. By presenting social problems to the public with indignation and moral fervor, they helped inspire other Americans to take action.

Growing outrage at social and economic injustice committed many reformers to the pursuit of **social justice**. (*Social justice* is a term widely used around the world to promote a kind of justice that goes beyond the individual but, instead, seeks justice for whole



THE BOSSES OF THE SENATE (1889), BY JOSEPH KEPPLER Keppler was a popular political cartoonist of the late nineteenth century who shared the growing concern about the power of the trusts—portrayed here as bloated, almost reptilian figures standing menacingly over the members of the U.S. Senate, to whose chamber the “people’s entrance” is “closed.” (© Granger, NYC—All Rights Reserved.)

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Enormous energy, enthusiasm, and organization drove the reform efforts in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of it a result of social crises and political movements in the United States. But the “age of reform,” as some have called it, was not an American phenomenon alone. It was part of a wave of social experimentation that was occurring throughout much of the industrial world. “Progressivism” in other countries influenced the social movements in the United States. American reform, in turn, had significant influence elsewhere as well.

Several industrializing nations adopted the term *progressivism* for their efforts—not only the United States, but also England, Germany, and France. But the term that most broadly defined the new reform energies was *social democracy*. Social democrats in many countries shared a belief in the betterment of society through the accumulation of knowledge. They favored improving the social condition of all people through reforms of the economy and government programs of social protection. And they believed that these goals could be achieved through peaceful political change, rather than through radicalism or revolution. Political parties committed to these goals emerged in several countries: the Labour Party in Britain, social democratic parties in various European nations, and the short-lived Progressive Party in the United States. Intellectuals, academics, and government officials across the world shared the knowledge they were accumulating and observed one another’s social programs. American reformers at the turn of the century spent much time visiting Germany, France, Britain, Belgium, and the Netherlands, observing the reforms in progress there; and Europeans, in turn, visited

the United States. Reformers from both America and Europe were also fascinated by the advanced social experiments in Australia and, especially, New Zealand—which the American reformer Henry Demarest Lloyd once called “the political brain of the modern world.” But New Zealand’s dramatic experiments in factory regulation, woman suffrage, old-age pensions, progressive taxation, and labor arbitration gradually found counterparts in many other nations as well. William Allen White, a progressive journalist from Kansas, said of this time: “We were parts of one another, in the United States and Europe. Something was welding us into one

FIGARO ILLUSTRÉ



THE PARIS EXPO, A PROGRESSIVE SYMBOL The Paris Expositions of 1889 and 1900, symbolized by the Eiffel Tower and enormous globe, drew progressive experts as well as tourists with the vision of progress through industrial innovation. During the Expos, an international group of progressives held meetings to share ideas for bettering society. (© Archives Charmet/Bridgeman Images)

social and economic whole with local political variations . . . [all] fighting a common cause.”

Social democracy—or, as it was sometimes called in the United States and elsewhere, social justice or the social gospel—was responsible for many public programs. Germany began a system of social insurance for its citizens in the 1880s while simultaneously undertaking a massive study of society that produced over 140 volumes of “social investigation” of almost every aspect of the nation’s life. French reformers pressed in the 1890s for factory regulation, assistance to the elderly, and progressive taxation. Britain pioneered the settlement houses in working-class areas of London—a movement that soon spread to the United States—and, like the United States, witnessed growing challenges to the power of monopolies at both the local and national levels.

In many countries, social democrats felt pressure from the rising worldwide labor movement and from the rise of socialist parties in many industrial countries as well. Strikes, sometimes violent, were common in France, Germany, Britain, and the United States in the late nineteenth century. The

more militant workers became, the more unions seemed to grow. Social democrats did not always welcome the rise of militant labor movements, but they took them seriously and used them to support their own efforts at reform.

The politics of social democracy represented a great shift in the character of public life all over the industrial world. Instead of battles over the privileges of aristocrats or the power of monarchs, reformers now focused on the social problems of ordinary people and attempted to improve their lot. “The politics of the future are social politics,” the British reformer Joseph Chamberlain said in the 1880s, referring to efforts to deal with the problems of ordinary citizens. That belief was fueling progressive efforts across the world in the years that Americans have come to call the “progressive era.” •

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. What is social democracy? How does it differ from socialism?
2. What progressive era reforms in American social and political life can be seen in other nations as well?

groups or even societies. Advocates of social justice are likely to believe in a more egalitarian society.) That impulse helped create the rise of what became known as the “Social Gospel,” the effort to make faith into a tool of social reform. The Social Gospel movement was chiefly concerned with redeeming the nation’s cities.

The Salvation Army, which began in England but soon spread to the United States, was one example of the fusion of religion with reform. A Christian social welfare organization with a vaguely military structure, it had recruited 3,000 “officers” and 20,000 “privates” by 1900 and was offering both material aid and spiritual service to the urban poor. In addition, many ministers, priests, and rabbis left traditional parish work to serve in the troubled cities. Charles Sheldon’s book *In His Steps* (1898), the story of a young minister who abandoned a comfortable post to work among the needy, sold more than 15 million copies. The Social Gospel was never the dominant element in the movement for urban reform. But the engagement of religion with reform helped bring to progressivism a powerful moral commitment to redeem the lives of even the least favored citizens.

THE SETTLEMENT HOUSE MOVEMENT

An element of much progressive thought was the belief in the influence of the environment on individual development. Nothing produced greater distress, many urban reformers

believed, than crowded immigrant neighborhoods. One response to the problems of such communities, borrowed from England, was the “settlement house.” The most famous was *Jane Addams and Hull House*. Hull House, which opened in 1889 in Chicago as a result of the efforts of the social worker Jane Addams. It became a model for more than 400 similar institutions throughout the nation. Staffed by members of the educated middle class, settlement houses sought to help immigrant families adapt to the language and customs of their new country.

Young college women (mostly unmarried) were important participants in the settlement house movement. Working in a settlement house, a protected site that served mostly women, was consistent with the widespread assumption that women needed to be sheltered from difficult environments. The clean and well-tended buildings that settlement houses created were not only a model for immigrant women, but an appropriate site for elite women as well.

The settlement houses also helped create another important institution of reform: the profession of social work. A growing number of programs for the professional training of social workers began to appear in the nation’s leading universities, partly in response to the activities of the settlement houses.

THE ALLURE OF EXPERTISE

As the emergence of the social work profession suggests, progressives involved in humanitarian efforts placed a high value on knowledge and expertise. Even nonscientific problems, they believed, could be analyzed and solved scientifically. Many reformers came to believe that only enlightened experts and well-designed bureaucracies could create the stability and order America needed.

Some even spoke of the creation of a new civilization, in which the expertise of scientists and engineers could be brought to bear on the problems of the economy and society. The social scientist Thorstein Veblen, for example, proposed a new economic system in which power would reside in the hands of highly trained engineers. Only they, he argued, could fully understand the “machine process” by which modern society must be governed.

THE PROFESSIONS

The late nineteenth century saw a dramatic expansion in the number of Americans engaged in administrative and professional tasks. Industries needed managers, technicians, and accountants as well as workers. Cities required commercial, medical, legal, and educational services. New technology required scientists and engineers, who, in turn, required institutions and instructors to train them. By the turn of the century, those performing these services had come to constitute a distinct social group—what some historians have called a “new middle class.”

By the early twentieth century, millions within this new middle class were building organizations and establishing standards to secure their position in society. Most of all, they created the modern, organized professions. The idea of professionalism had been a frail one in America even as late as 1880, but as the demand for professional services increased, so did the pressures for reform.

Among the first to respond was the medical profession. In 1901, doctors who considered themselves trained professionals reorganized the *American Medical Association* (AMA) into a national professional society. By 1920, nearly two-thirds

of all American doctors were members. The AMA quickly called for strict, scientific standards for admission to the practice of medicine. State governments responded by passing new laws requiring the licensing of all physicians. By 1900, medical education at a few medical schools—notably Johns Hopkins in Baltimore (founded in 1893)—compared favorably with those in the leading institutions of Europe.

By 1916, lawyers in all forty-eight states had established professional bar associations. The nation's law schools accordingly expanded greatly. Businessmen supported the creation of schools of business administration and set up their own national organizations: the National Association of Manufacturers in 1895 and *National Association of Manufacturers* the United States Chamber of Commerce in 1912. Farmers responded to the new order by forming, through the National Farm Bureau Federation, a network of agricultural organizations designed to spread scientific farming methods.

The professions removed the untrained and incompetent. But the admission requirements also protected those already in the professions from excessive competition and lent prestige and status to the professional level. Some professions used their entrance requirements to exclude African Americans, women, immigrants, and other “undesirables” from their ranks. Others used them simply to keep the numbers down, to ensure that demand would remain high.

WOMEN AND THE PROFESSIONS

American women found themselves excluded from most of the emerging professions. But a substantial number of middle-class women—particularly those emerging from the new women's colleges and from the coeducational state universities—entered professional careers nevertheless.

A few women managed to establish themselves as physicians, lawyers, engineers, scientists, and corporate managers. Most, however, turned by necessity to those professional outlets that society considered suitable for women: settlement houses, social work, and, most important, teaching. Indeed, in the late nineteenth century, perhaps 90 percent of all professional women were teachers. For educated black women, in particular, the existence of segregated schools in the South created a substantial market for African American teachers.

Women also dominated other professional activities. Nursing had become primarily a women's field during and after the Civil War. By the early twentieth century, it was adopting professional standards. And many women entered academia—often earning advanced degrees at such predominantly male institutions as the University of Chicago, MIT, or Columbia, and then finding professional opportunities in the new and expanding women's colleges.

WOMEN AND REFORM

The prominence of women in reform movements is one of the most striking features of progressivism. In many states in the early twentieth century, women could not vote. They almost never held public office. They had footholds in only a few (and usually primarily female) professions and lived in a culture in which most people, male and female, believed that women were not suited for the public world. What, then, explains the prominent role so many women played in the reform activities of the period?

THE “NEW WOMAN”

The phenomenon of the “new woman” was a product of social and economic changes in both the private and public spheres. By the end of the nineteenth century, almost all income-producing activity had moved out of the home and into the factory or the office. At the same time, many women were having fewer children, and their children were beginning school at earlier ages and spending more time there. For wives and mothers who did not work for wages, the home was less of an all-consuming place. Hence, more and more women began looking for activities outside the home.

Some educated women shunned marriage entirely, believing that only by remaining single could they play the roles they envisioned in the public world. Single women were among the most prominent reformers of the time. Some of these women lived alone. Others lived with other women, often in long-term relationships—some of them secretly romantic—that were known at the time as “Boston marriages.” The divorce rate also rose rapidly in the late nineteenth century, from one divorce for every twenty-one marriages in 1880 to one in nine by 1916; women initiated the majority of divorces.

THE CLUBWOMEN

Among the most visible signs of the increasing public roles of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were women’s clubs, which proliferated rapidly beginning in the 1880s and 1890s and became the vanguard of many important reforms.

The women’s clubs began largely as cultural organizations to provide middle- and upper-class women with an outlet for their intellectual energies. In 1892, when women formed the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, there were more than 100,000 members in nearly 500 clubs. By 1917, there were over 1 million members.

Much of what the clubs did was uncontroversial: planting trees; supporting schools, libraries, and settlement houses; building hospitals and parks. But clubwomen were also an important force in winning passage of state (and ultimately federal) laws that regulated the conditions of woman and child labor. They pushed government to inspect workplaces, regulate the food and drug industries, reform policies toward the Indian tribes, apply new standards to urban housing, and, perhaps most notably, outlaw the manufacture and sale **Clubwomen’s Causes** of alcohol. Women’s clubs were instrumental in pressuring state legislatures in most states to provide “mothers’ pensions” to widowed or abandoned mothers with small children—a system that ultimately became absorbed into the Social Security system. In 1912, they convinced Congress to establish the Children’s Bureau in the Labor Department, an agency directed to develop policies to protect children.

In many of these efforts, the clubwomen formed alliances with other women’s groups, such as the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL), founded in 1903 by female union members and upper-class reformers and committed to persuading women to join unions. In addition to working on behalf of protective legislation for women, WTUL members held public meetings on behalf of female workers, raised money to support strikes, marched on picket lines, and bailed striking women out of jail.

Black women occasionally joined clubs dominated by whites. But most clubs excluded blacks, and so African Americans formed clubs of their own. Some of them affiliated with the General Federation, but most became part of the independent National Association of Colored Women. Some black clubs also took positions on issues of particular concern to African Americans, such as lynching and aspects of segregation.



SUFFRAGE PAGEANT On March 3, 1913—the day before Woodrow Wilson’s presidential inauguration—more than 5,000 supporters of woman suffrage staged a parade in Washington, D.C., that overshadowed Wilson’s arrival in the capital. Crowds estimated at over half a million watched the parade; some of the onlookers attacked the marchers. In this photograph from the event, suffragist Florence Noyce poses as Liberty in front of the U.S. Treasury Building. (The Library of Congress)

WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Perhaps the largest single reform movement of the progressive era, indeed one of the largest in American history, was the fight for woman suffrage.

Throughout the late nineteenth century, many suffrage advocates argued that “natural rights” entitled them to the same rights as men—including, first and foremost, the right to vote. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, wrote in 1892 of woman as “the arbiter of her own destiny . . . if we are to consider her as a citizen, as a member of a great nation, she must have the same rights as all other members.” This was an argument that challenged the views of the many men and women who believed that society required a distinctive female “sphere,” in which women would serve first and foremost as wives and mothers. A powerful antisuffrage movement emerged, dominated by men but with the active support of many women. To these critics, woman suffrage seemed a radical demand.

In the first years of the twentieth century, suffragists were becoming better organized and more politically sophisticated than their opponents. Under the leadership of Anna Howard Shaw, a Boston social worker, and Carrie Chapman Catt, a journalist from Iowa, membership in the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) grew from about 13,000 in 1893 to over 2 million in 1917. The movement gained strength because many of its most prominent leaders began to justify suffrage in “safer,” less threatening ways. Suffrage, some supporters began to argue, would not challenge the “separate sphere” in which women resided. Instead, they claimed that because women occupied a distinct sphere—because as mothers and wives and homemakers they had special experiences and

special sensitivities to bring to public life—woman suffrage would make an important contribution to politics.

In particular, many suffragists argued that enfranchising women would help the temperance movement, by giving its largest group of supporters a political voice. Some suffrage advocates claimed that once women had the vote, war would become a thing of the past, since women would—by their calming, maternal influence—help curb the belligerence of men.

The principal triumphs of the suffrage movement began in 1910, when Washington became the first state in fourteen years to extend suffrage to women. California followed a year later, and four other western states in 1912. In 1913, Illinois became the first state east of the Mississippi to embrace woman suffrage. And in 1917 and 1918, New York and Michigan—two of the most populous states in the Union—gave women the vote. By 1919, thirty-nine states had granted women the right to vote in at least some elections; fifteen had allowed them full participation. In 1920, finally, suffragists won *Nineteenth Amendment* ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which guaranteed voting rights to women throughout the nation.

To some feminists, however, the victory seemed less than complete. Alice Paul, head *Alice Paul* of the militant National Woman's Party (founded in 1916), never accepted the relatively conservative “separate sphere” justification for suffrage. She argued that the Nineteenth Amendment alone would not be sufficient to protect women's rights. Women needed more: a constitutional amendment that would provide full, legal protection for their rights and would prohibit all discrimination on the basis of gender. But Alice Paul's argument found limited favor even among many of the most important leaders of the recently triumphant suffrage crusade.

THE ASSAULT ON THE PARTIES

Sooner or later, most progressive goals required the involvement of government. Only government, reformers agreed, could effectively counter the many powerful private interests that threatened the nation. But American government at the dawn of the new century was poorly adapted to meet progressive demands. Before progressives could reform *Reforming Government* society effectively, they would have to reform government itself. Many reformers believed the first step must be an assault on the dominant role the political parties played in the life of the state.

EARLY ATTACKS

Attacks on party dominance had been frequent in the late nineteenth century. Greenbackism and Populism, for example, had been efforts to break the hammerlock with which the Republicans and Democrats controlled public life. The Independent Republicans (or mugwumps) had attempted to challenge the grip of partisanship.

The early assaults enjoyed some success. In the 1880s and 1890s, for example, most states adopted the secret ballot. Prior to that, the political parties themselves had printed ballots (or “tickets”), with the names of the party's candidates, and no others. They distributed the tickets to their supporters, who then simply went to the polls to deposit them *New Secret Ballot* in the ballot boxes. The old system had made it possible for bosses to monitor the voting behavior of their constituents. The new secret ballot—printed by the

government and distributed at the polls to be filled out and deposited in secret—helped chip away at the power of the parties over the voters.

MUNICIPAL REFORM

Many progressives believed the impact of party rule was most damaging in the cities. Municipal government therefore became the first target of those working for political reform. The muckrakers were especially successful in arousing public outrage at corruption and incompetence in city politics. They struck a responsive chord among a powerful group of urban middle-class progressives, who set out to destroy the power of city bosses and their entrenched political organizations.

One of the first major successes in municipal reform came in Galveston, Texas, where the old city government proved completely unable to deal with the effects of a destructive hurricane in 1900. Capitalizing on public dismay, reformers won approval of a new city charter that replaced the mayor and council with an elected, nonpartisan commission. In 1907, Des Moines, Iowa, adopted its own version of the commission plan, and other cities soon followed.

Another approach to municipal reform was the city manager plan, by which elected officials hired an outside expert—often a professionally trained business manager or engineer—to take charge of the government. The city manager would presumably remain *City-Manager Plan* untainted by the corrupting influence of politics. By the end of the progressive era, almost 400 cities were operating under commissions, and another 45 employed city managers.

In most urban areas, reformers had to settle for lesser victories. Some cities made the election of mayors nonpartisan (so that the parties could not choose the candidates) or moved them to years when no presidential or congressional races were in progress (to reduce the influence of the large turnouts that party organizations produced). Reformers tried to make city councilors run at large, to limit the influence of ward leaders and district bosses. They tried to strengthen the power of the mayor at the expense of the city council, on the assumption that reformers were more likely to succeed in getting a sympathetic mayor elected than they were to win control of the entire council.

STATEHOUSE PROGRESSIVISM

Other progressives turned to state government as an agent for reform. They looked with particular scorn on state legislatures, whose ill-paid, relatively undistinguished members, they believed, were generally incompetent, often corrupt, and totally controlled by party bosses. Reformers began looking for ways to circumvent the boss-controlled legislatures by increasing the power of the electorate. A big victory came in 1913, when the states ratified a constitutional amendment—the seventeenth—that transferred the right to elect U.S. senators from the state legislatures to ordinary voters.

Two other important changes were proposed by Populists in the 1890s: the initiative and the referendum. The initiative allowed reformers to circumvent *Initiative and Referendum* state legislatures by submitting new legislation directly to the voters in general elections. The referendum provided a method by which actions of the legislature could be returned to the electorate for approval. By 1918, more than twenty states had enacted one or both of these reforms.

The direct primary and the recall were other efforts to limit the power of party and improve the quality of elected officials. The primary election was *Direct Primary and Recall*

an attempt to remove the selection of candidates from the bosses and give it to the people. In the South, it was also an effort to limit black voting—since primary voting, many white southerners believed, would be easier to control than general elections. The recall gave voters the right to remove a public official from office at a special election, which could be called after a sufficient number of citizens had signed a petition. By 1915, every state in the nation had instituted primary elections for at least some offices. The recall encountered more strenuous opposition, but a few states (such as California) adopted it as well.

The most celebrated state-level reformer was Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin. Elected **Robert La Follette** governor in 1900, he helped turn his state into what reformers across the nation described as a “laboratory of progressivism.” Under his leadership, Wisconsin progressives won approval of direct primaries, initiatives, and referendums. They regulated railroads and utilities. They passed laws to regulate the workplace and provide compensation for laborers injured on the job. They instituted graduated taxes on inherited fortunes, and they nearly doubled state levies on railroads and other corporate interests.

PARTIES AND INTEREST GROUPS

The reformers did not, of course, eliminate parties from American political life. But they did contribute to a decline in party influence. Evidence of their impact came from, among other things, the decline in voter turnout. In the late nineteenth century, up to 81 percent of eligible voters routinely turned out for national elections. In the early twentieth century, the figure declined markedly. In the presidential election of 1900, 73 percent of the electorate voted. By 1912, turnout had declined to about 59 percent. Never again has voter turnout reached as high as 70 percent.

Why did voter turnout decline in these years? The secret ballot was one reason. Party bosses had less ability to get voters to the polls. Illiterate voters had trouble reading the new ballots. Party bosses lost much of their authority and were unable to mobilize voters as successfully as they had in the past. But perhaps the most important **Decline of Party Influence** reason for the decline of party rule (and voter turnout) was that other power centers were beginning to replace them. They have become known as “interest groups.” Beginning late in the nineteenth century and accelerating rapidly in the twentieth century, new organizations emerged outside the party system: professional organizations, trade associations representing businesses and industries, labor organizations, farm lobbies, and many others. Social workers, the settlement house movements, women’s clubs, and others learned to operate as interest groups to advance their demands without relying on parties.

SOURCES OF PROGRESSIVE REFORM

Middle-class reformers, most of them from the East, dominated the public image and much of the substance of progressivism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But they were not alone in seeking to improve social conditions. Working-class Americans, African Americans, westerners, and even party bosses played crucial roles in advancing some of the important reforms of the era. (For historians’ changing views on who the progressives were and what motivated them, see “Debating the Past: Progressivism.”)

LABOR, THE MACHINE, AND REFORM

Although the American Federation of Labor, and its leader Samuel Gompers, remained largely aloof from many of the reform efforts of the time, some unions nevertheless played important roles in reform battles. Between 1911 and 1913, thanks to political pressure from labor groups such as the newly formed Union Labor Party, California passed a child labor law, a workmen's compensation law, and a limitation on working hours for women. Union pressures contributed to the passage of similar laws in many other states as well.

Party bosses sometimes allowed their machines to become vehicles of social reform. One example was New York's Tammany Hall, the nation's oldest and most notorious city machine. Its astute leader, Charles Francis Murphy, began in the early years of the twentieth century to fuse the techniques of boss rule with some of the concerns of social reformers. Tammany at times used its political power on behalf of legislation to improve working conditions, protect child laborers, and eliminate the worst abuses of the industrial economy.

In 1911, a terrible fire swept through the factory of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York; 146 workers, most of them women, died. Many of them *Triangle Shirtwaist Fire* had been trapped inside the burning building because management had locked the emergency exits to prevent malingering. For the next three years, a state commission studied the disaster and the conditions of factories generally. In 1914, the commission issued a series of reports calling for major reforms in the conditions of modern labor. The report itself was a classic progressive document—based on the testimony of experts and filled



VICTIMS OF THE TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FIRE, 1911 In this bleak photograph, victims of the fire in the Triangle Shirtwaist Company are laid out on the sidewalk of the building, as police and passersby look up at the scene of the blaze. This tragedy galvanized New York legislators into passing laws to protect workers. (© Granger, NYC—All Rights Reserved.)



PROGRESSIVISM

Until the early 1950s, most historians seemed to agree on the central characteristics of early-twentieth-century progressivism. It was just what many progressives themselves had said it was: a movement by the people to curb the power of special interests. More specifically, it was a protest by an aroused citizenry against the excessive power of urban bosses, corporate moguls, and corrupt elected officials.

In 1951, the historian George Mowry began challenging these assumptions by examining progressives in California and describing them as a small, privileged elite of business and professional figures: people who considered themselves the natural leaders of society and who were trying to recover their fading influence from the new capitalist institutions that had displaced them. Progressivism was not, in other words, a popular democratic movement but the effort of a displaced elite to restore its authority. Richard Hofstadter expanded on this idea in *The Age of Reform* (1955) by describing reformers as people afflicted by “status anxiety”—fading elites suffering not from economic but from psychological discontent.

The Mowry-Hofstadter argument soon encountered a range of challenges. Gabriel Kolko, in *The Triumph of Conservatism* (1963), rejected both the older “democratic” view of progressivism and the newer status-anxiety view. Progressive reform, he argued, was not an effort to protect the people from the corporations; it was, rather, a vehicle through which corporate leaders used the government to protect themselves from competition.

A more moderate reinterpretation came from historians embracing what would later

be called the “organizational” approach to twentieth-century American history. Samuel Hays, in *The Response to Industrialism* (1957), and Robert Wiebe, in *The Search for Order* (1967), portrayed progressivism as a broad effort by businessmen, professionals, and other middle-class people to bring order and efficiency to political and economic life. In the new industrial society, economic power was increasingly concentrated in large national organizations, while social and political life remained centered primarily in local communities. Progressivism, Wiebe argued, was the effort of a “new middle class”—a class tied to the emerging national economy—to stabilize and enhance its position in society by bringing those two worlds together.

In the 1970s and 1980s, much of the scholarship on progressivism focused on discovering new groups among whom “progressive” ideas and efforts flourished. Historians found evidence of progressivism in the rising movement by consumers to define their interests; in the growth of reform movements among African Americans; in the changing nature of urban political machines; and in the political activism of working people and labor organizations.

Other scholars attempted to identify progressivism with broad changes in the structure and culture of politics. Richard McCormick, writing in 1981, argued that the crucial change in the progressive era was the decline of political parties and the corresponding rise of interest groups working for particular social and economic goals.

At the same time, many historians have focused on the role of women (and the vast network of voluntary associations they

created in shaping and promoting progressive reform). Some progressive battles, historians such as Kathryn Sklar, Ruth Rosen, Elaine Tyler May, and Linda Gordon have argued, were part of an effort by women to protect their interests within the domestic sphere in the face of jarring challenges from the new industrial world. This protective urge drew women reformers to such issues as temperance, divorce, prostitution, and the regulation of female and child labor. Other women worked to expand their own roles in the public world, particularly through their support of suffrage. The gendered interests of women reformers are, many historians insist, critical to an understanding of progressivism.

More recently, a number of historians have sought to place progressivism in a broader context. Daniel Rodgers's *Atlantic*

Crossings (1998) is an important study of how European reformers shaped the goals of many American progressives. Both Michael McGerr, in *A Fierce Discontent* (2003), and Alan Dawley, in *Changing the World* (2003), see progressivism as a fundamentally moral project—McGerr, as an effort by the middle class to create order and stability, and Dawley, as an effort by groups on the left to attack social injustice. Progressivism, they argue, was not just a political movement but also an effort to remake society and reshape social relations. •

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. What is the gendered view of progressive reform advanced by historians?
2. Was progressivism a “people’s” movement?

with statistics and technical data. When its recommendations reached the New York legislature, its most effective supporters were two Tammany Democrats from working-class backgrounds: Senator Robert F. Wagner and Assemblyman Alfred E. Smith. With the support of Murphy and the backing of other Tammany legislators, they helped pass a series of pioneering labor laws that imposed strict regulations on factory owners and established effective mechanisms for enforcement.

WESTERN PROGRESSIVES

The American West produced some of the most notable progressive leaders of the time: Hiram Johnson of California, George Norris of Nebraska, William Borah of Idaho, and others—almost all of whom spent at least some of their political careers in the United States Senate. For western states, the most important vehicle of reform was the federal government, which exercised a kind of authority in the West that it had never possessed in the East. Disputes over water, for example, almost always involved rivers and streams that crossed state lines. More significant, perhaps, the federal government exercised enormous power over the lands and resources of the western states and provided substantial subsidies to the region in the form of land grants and support for railroad and water projects. Huge areas of the West remained (and still remain) public lands, controlled by Washington. Much of the growth of the West was (and continues to be) a result of federally funded dams, water projects, and other infrastructure undertakings.

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND REFORM

Most white progressives paid little attention to race. But among African Americans themselves, the progressive era produced significant challenges to existing racial norms.

African Americans faced greater obstacles than any other group in seeking reform. So it was not surprising, perhaps, that so many African Americans embraced the message of Booker T. Washington in the late nineteenth century. Washington encouraged black men and women to work for immediate self-improvement rather than long-range social change. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, a powerful challenge to the philosophy of Washington was emerging. The chief spokesperson for this new approach was W. E. B. Du Bois, a sociologist and historian and one of the first African Americans to receive a degree from Harvard.

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois launched an open attack on the philosophy of Washington, accusing him of encouraging white efforts to sustain segregation and of limiting the aspirations of his race. Rather than content themselves with education at trade and agricultural schools, Du Bois encouraged talented blacks to accept nothing less than a full university education and aspire to the professions. They should, above all, fight for their civil rights, not simply wait for them to be granted as a reward for patient striving. In 1905, Du Bois and a group of his supporters met at Niagara Falls—on the Canadian side of the border because no hotel on the American side of the falls would have them—and launched what became known as the Niagara Movement. Four years later, they joined with sympathetic white progressives to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In the years that followed, the new organization worked for equal rights.

Among the many issues that engaged the NAACP and other African American organizations was lynching in the South. The most determined opponents of lynching were southern women, and the most effective crusader was a black woman, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who worked both on her own (at great personal risk) and with such organizations as the National Association of Colored Women and the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Church to try to expose lynching and challenge segregation.



THE CRISIS W. E. B. Du Bois founded *The Crisis*, the magazine of the NAACP, in 1910. Its object was to “show the danger of race prejudice, particularly as manifested today toward colored people.” This photograph shows the magazine’s office. (© Underwood & Underwood/Corbis)

CRUSADES FOR SOCIAL ORDER AND REFORM

Many reformers crusaded on behalf of what they considered moral issues—working to eliminate alcohol, curb prostitution, limit divorce, and restrict immigration.

THE TEMPERANCE CRUSADE

Many progressives considered the elimination of alcohol from American life a necessary step in restoring order to society. Scarce wages vanished as male workers spent hours in saloons. Drunkenness spawned violence, and occasionally murder, within urban families. Many working-class wives and mothers hoped through temperance to reform male behavior and thus improve women's lives. Employers, too, regarded alcohol as an impediment to industrial efficiency; workers often missed time on the job because of drunkenness or came to the factory intoxicated. Critics of economic privilege denounced the liquor industry as one of the nation's most sinister trusts. And political reformers, who (correctly) looked on the saloon as one of the central institutions of the urban machine, saw an attack on drinking as part of an attack on the bosses. Out of such sentiments emerged the temperance movement.

There had been a major temperance movement before the Civil War, mobilizing large numbers of people in a crusade with strong evangelical overtones. In 1873, the movement developed new strength. Temperance advocates formed the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which was led after 1879 by Frances Willard. By 1911, it had 245,000 **WCTU** members and had become the single largest women's organization in American history to that point. In 1893, the Anti-Saloon League joined the temperance movement and, along with the WCTU, began to press for the legal abolition of saloons. Gradually, that demand grew to include the complete prohibition of the sale and manufacture of alcoholic beverages.

Pressure for prohibition grew steadily through the first decades of the new century. By 1916, nineteen states had passed prohibition laws. America's entry into World **Prohibition** War I, which made the use of grain for alcohol seem wasteful and unnecessary, provided the last push to the advocates of prohibition. In 1917, with the support of rural fundamentalists who opposed alcohol on moral and religious grounds, progressive advocates of prohibition steered through Congress a constitutional amendment. Two years later, after ratification by every state in the nation except Connecticut and Rhode Island (with large populations of Catholic immigrants opposed to prohibition), the Eighteenth Amendment became law, to take effect in January 1920.

IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION

Virtually all reformers agreed that the growing immigrant population had created social problems, but there was wide disagreement on how best to respond. Some progressives believed that the proper approach was to help the new residents adapt to American society. Others argued that the only solution was to limit the flow of new arrivals.

In the first decades of the century, pressure grew to close the nation's gates. New scholarly theories argued that the introduction of immigrants into American society was polluting the nation's racial stock. One of these theories, **eugenics**, began as the science of altering the reproductive processes of plants and animals to produce new hybrids or breeds. But in the late nineteenth century, eugenicists spread the spurious belief that human inequalities were hereditary and that immigration was contributing to the multiplication of the unfit. A special federal commission of "experts," chaired by Senator William

P. Dillingham of Vermont, issued a study filled with statistics and scholarly testimony. It argued that the newer immigrant groups—largely southern and eastern Europeans—had proved themselves less assimilable than earlier immigrants. Immigration, the report implied, should be restricted by nationality. Even many people who rejected these racial arguments supported limiting immigration as a way to solve such urban problems as overcrowding, unemployment, strained social services, and social unrest.

The combination of these concerns gradually won the support of some of the nation's leading progressives to limit immigration—among them former president Theodore Roosevelt. Powerful opponents—employers who saw immigration as a source of cheap labor, immigrants themselves, and their political representatives—managed to block the restriction movement for a time. But by the beginning of World War I, which itself effectively blocked immigration temporarily, the nativist tide was gaining strength.

THE DREAM OF SOCIALISM

Although never a force to rival or even seriously threaten the two major parties, **socialism** gained considerable strength during the early years of the twentieth century. In the election of 1900, the Socialist Party of America attracted the support of fewer than 100,000 voters; **Eugene V. Debs** in 1912, its durable leader and perennial presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs, received nearly 1 million ballots. Strongest in urban immigrant communities, particularly among Germans and Jews, it also attracted the loyalties of a substantial number of Protestant farmers in the South and the Midwest.

Virtually all socialists agreed on the need for basic structural changes in the economy, but they differed widely on the extent of those changes and the tactics necessary to achieve them. Some socialists endorsed the radical goals of European Marxists (a complete end to capitalism and private property); others envisioned more moderate reform that would allow small-scale private enterprise to survive but would nationalize major industries. Some believed in working for reform through electoral politics; others favored militant direct action. Among the militants was the radical labor union the Industrial Workers of the World (**IWW** (“**Wobblies**”)) (IWW), known to opponents as the “Wobblies.” Under the leadership of William (“Big Bill”) Haywood, the IWW advocated a single union for all workers and was one of the few labor organizations to champion the cause of unskilled workers. The Wobblies were widely believed to have been responsible for dynamiting railroad lines and power stations and committing other acts of terror in the first years of the twentieth century.

Moderate socialists who advocated peaceful change through political struggle dominated the Socialist Party. They emphasized a gradual education of the public to the need for change and patient efforts within the system to enact it. But the party refused to support the nation's war effort in World War I. The growing wave of antiradicalism during the war subjected the socialists to enormous harassment and persecution, contributing to socialism's decline.

DECENTRALIZATION AND REGULATION

Most progressives retained faith in the possibilities of reform within a capitalist system. Rather than nationalize basic industries, many reformers hoped to restore the economy to a more human scale. They argued that the federal government should work to break up the largest combinations and enforce a balance between the need for bigness and the need for competition. This viewpoint came to be identified particularly closely with Louis D.

Louis Brandeis Brandeis, a brilliant lawyer and, later, justice of the Supreme Court, who

wrote widely (most notably in his 1913 book *Other People's Money*) about the “curse of bigness.” Brandeis insisted that government must regulate competition in such a way as to ensure that large combinations did not emerge.

Other progressives were less enthusiastic about the virtues of competition. More important to them was efficiency. Government, they argued, should not fight “bigness” but rather should guard against abuses of power by large institutions. It should distinguish between “good trusts” and “bad trusts.” Since economic consolidation was destined to remain a permanent feature of American society, continuing oversight by a strong, modernized government was essential. Thus, many progressives believed that government should play a more active role in regulating and planning economic life. One of those who came to endorse that position (although not fully until after 1910) was Theodore Roosevelt, who once said: “We should enter upon a course of supervision, control, and regulation of those great corporations.” Roosevelt became, for a time, the most powerful symbol of the reform impulse at the national level.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND THE MODERN PRESIDENCY

To a generation of progressive reformers, Theodore Roosevelt was more than an admired public figure; he was an idol. No president before, and few since, attracted such attention and devotion. Yet for all his popularity among reformers, Roosevelt was in many respects decidedly conservative. He earned his extraordinary popularity less because of the extent of the reforms he championed than because he brought to his office a broad conception of its powers. He invested the presidency with something of its modern status as the center of national political life.

THE ACCIDENTAL PRESIDENT

When President William McKinley was assassinated in September 1901, Roosevelt, forty-two years old at the time, became the youngest man ever to assume the presidency. “I told William McKinley that it was a mistake to nominate that wild man at Philadelphia,” party boss Mark Hanna was reported to have exclaimed. “Now look, that damned cowboy is President of the United States!”

As president, Roosevelt rarely openly rebelled against the leaders of his party. He became, rather, a champion of cautious, moderate change. Reform, he believed, was a vehicle less for remaking American society than for protecting it against more radical challenges.

Roosevelt allied himself with those progressives who urged regulation (but not destruction) of the trusts. At the heart of his policy was to give the *Roosevelt's Vision of Federal Power* government the power to investigate corporations and publicize the results.

Although Roosevelt was not a trustbuster at heart, he made a few highly publicized efforts to break up combinations. In 1902, he ordered the Justice Department to invoke the Sherman Antitrust Act against a great new railroad monopoly in the Northwest, the Northern Securities Company, a \$400 million enterprise pieced together by J. P. Morgan and others. Roosevelt filed more than forty additional antitrust suits during *Antitrust Suits* the remainder of his presidency, but he made no serious commitment to reverse the prevailing trend toward economic concentration.

When a bitter 1902 strike by the United Mine Workers endangered coal supplies for the coming winter, Roosevelt asked both the operators and the miners to accept impartial federal



BOYS IN THE MINES These young boys, covered in grime and no more than twelve years old, pose for Lewis Hine outside the coal mine in Pennsylvania where they worked as “breaker boys,” crawling into newly blasted areas and breaking up the loose coal. The rugged conditions in the mines were one cause of the great strike of 1902, in which Theodore Roosevelt intervened. (The Library of Congress)

arbitration. When the mine owners balked, Roosevelt threatened to send federal troops to seize the mines. The operators finally relented. Arbitrators awarded the strikers a 10 percent wage increase and a nine-hour day, although no recognition of their union—less than the miners had wanted but more than they would likely have won without Roosevelt’s intervention.

THE “SQUARE DEAL”

During the 1904 campaign for the presidency, Roosevelt boasted that he had worked in the anthracite coal strike to provide everyone with a “square deal.” One of his first targets after winning the election was the powerful railroad industry. The Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, establishing the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), had been an early effort to **Hepburn Act** regulate the industry, but over the years, the courts had sharply limited its influence. The Hepburn Railroad Regulation Act of 1906 sought to restore some regulatory authority to the government by giving the ICC the power to oversee railroad rates.

Roosevelt also pressured Congress to enact the Pure Food and Drug Act, which **Pure Food and Drug Act** restricted the sale of dangerous or ineffective medicines. *The Jungle*, a powerful novel published by Upton Sinclair in 1906, included appalling descriptions of conditions in the meatpacking industry. Roosevelt pushed for passage of the Meat Inspection Act, which helped eliminate many diseases once transmitted in impure meat. Starting in 1907, he proposed even more stringent reforms: an eight-hour day for workers, broader compensation for victims of industrial accidents, inheritance and income taxes, and regulation of the stock market. Conservative opposition blocked much of his agenda, widening the gulf between the president and the conservative wing of his party.

ROOSEVELT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Roosevelt's aggressive policies on behalf of conservation contributed to that gulf. Using executive powers, he restricted private development on millions of acres of undeveloped government land—most of it in the West—by adding them to the previously modest national forest system. When conservatives in Congress restricted his authority over public lands in 1907, Roosevelt and his chief forester, Gifford Pinchot, seized all the forests and many of the water power sites still in the public domain before the bill became law.

Roosevelt was the first president to take an active interest in the new and struggling American conservation movement. In the early twentieth century, many people who considered themselves **conservationists**—including Pinchot, the first director of the U.S. Forest Service (which he helped create)—promoted policies to protect land for carefully managed development.

Roosevelt also supported public reclamation and irrigation projects. In 1902, the president backed the National Reclamation Act, which provided federal funds for the construction of dams, reservoirs, and canals in the West—projects that would open new lands for cultivation and (years later) provide cheap electric power.

Despite his sympathy with Pinchot's vision of conservation, Roosevelt also shared some of the concerns of the naturalists—those committed to protecting the natural beauty of the land and the health of its wildlife from human intrusion. Early in his presidency, Roosevelt spent four days camping in the Sierras with John Muir, the nation's leading preservationist and the founder of the Sierra Club. Roosevelt also added significantly to the still-young National Park System, whose purpose was to protect public land from exploitation or development. (For Muir's views on the system, see “Consider the Source: John Muir on the Value of Wild Places.”)



ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL PARKS AND FORESTS This map illustrates the steady growth throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the systems of national parks and national forests in the United States. Although Theodore Roosevelt is widely and correctly remembered as a great champion of national parks and forests, the greatest expansions of these systems occurred after his presidency. Note, for example, how many new areas were added in the 1920s. • *What is the difference between national parks and national forests?*

CONSIDER THE SOURCE

JOHN MUIR ON THE VALUE OF WILD PLACES, 1901

John Muir is often called the “father of the national parks” for his role as advocate on behalf of legislation to designate certain wilderness areas as off-limits for commercial development. In this excerpt from his book *Our National Parks*, he argues for the restorative benefits of visiting unspoiled nature.

The tendency nowadays to wander in wildernesses is delightful to see. Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life. Awakening from the stupefying effects of the vice of over-industry and the deadly apathy of luxury, they are trying as best they can to mix and enrich their own little ongoings with those of Nature, and to get rid of rust and disease. Briskly venturing and roaming, some are washing off sins and cobweb cares of the devil’s spinning in all-day storms on mountains; sauntering in rosinny pinewoods or in gentian meadows, brushing through chaparral, bending down and parting sweet, flowery sprays; tracing rivers to their sources, getting in touch with the nerves of Mother Earth; jumping from rock to rock, feeling the life of them, learning the songs of them, panting in whole-souled exercise, and rejoicing in deep, long-drawn breaths of pure wildness. This is fine and natural and full of promise. So also is the growing interest in the care and preservation of forests and wild places in general, and in the half wild parks and gardens of towns. . . .

When, like a merchant taking a list of his goods, we take stock of our wildness, we are glad to see how much of even the most destructible kind is still unspoiled.

Looking at our continent as scenery when it was all wild, lying between beautiful seas, the starry sky above it, the starry rocks beneath it, to compare its sides, the East and the West, would be like comparing the sides of a rainbow. But it is no longer equally beautiful. . . . [T]he continent’s outer beauty is fast passing away, especially the plant part of it, the most destructible and most universally charming of all.

Only thirty years ago, the great Central Valley of California, five hundred miles long and fifty miles wide, was one bed of golden and purple flowers. Now it is ploughed and pastured out of existence, gone forever,—scarce a memory of it left in fence corners and along the bluffs of the streams. . . . The same fate, sooner or later, is awaiting them all, unless awakening public opinion comes forward to stop it. . . .

The Grand Cañon Reserve of Arizona, of nearly two million acres, or the most interesting part of it, as well as the Rainier region, should be made into a national park, on account of their supreme grandeur and beauty. . . . No matter how far you have wandered hitherto, or how many famous gorges and valleys you have seen, this one, the Grand Cañon of the Colorado, will seem as novel to you, as unearthly in the color and grandeur and quantity of its architecture, as if you had found it after death, on some other star; so incomparably lovely and grand and supreme is it above all the other cañons in our fire-moulded, earthquake-shaken, rain-washed, wave-washed, river and glacier sculptured world.

UNDERSTAND, ANALYZE, & EVALUATE

1. What benefits does Muir describe as a result of spending time in the “wilderness”?

What maladies does Muir believe the “wilderness” will correct? How do his arguments reflect the economic and social history of his time?

2. What is Muir’s purpose? Is he attempting primarily to instruct or to persuade? How does that purpose affect the tone of the writing?

Source: Library of Congress, Materials from the General Collection and Rare Book and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress.

The contending views of the early conservation movement came to a head beginning in 1906 in a controversy over the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite *Fight over Hetch Hetchy* National Park—a spectacular high-walled valley popular with naturalists. But many residents of San Francisco worried about finding enough water to serve their growing population. They saw Hetch Hetchy as an ideal place for a dam, which would create a large reservoir for the city.

In 1906, San Francisco suffered a devastating earthquake and fire. Widespread sympathy for the city strengthened the case for the dam, and Roosevelt turned the decision over to Pinchot, who approved its construction.

For over a decade, a battle raged between naturalists and the advocates of the dam, a battle that consumed the energies of John Muir for the rest of his life and that eventually, many believed, led him to an early death. To Pinchot, the needs of the city were more important than the claims of preservation. Muir helped place a referendum question on the ballot in 1908, certain that the residents of the city would oppose the project. Instead, San Franciscans approved the dam by a huge margin. Construction of the dam finally began after World War I.

This setback for the naturalists was not, however, a total defeat. The fight against Hetch Hetchy helped mobilize a new coalition of people committed to preservation of wilderness.

PANIC AND RETIREMENT

Despite the flurry of reforms Roosevelt was able to enact, the government still had relatively little control over the industrial economy. That became clear in 1907, when a serious panic and recession began. Conservatives blamed Roosevelt’s “mad” economic policies for the disaster. And while the president naturally (and correctly) disagreed, he nevertheless acted quickly to reassure business leaders that he would not interfere with their recovery efforts.

The financier J. P. Morgan helped construct a pool of the assets of several important New York banks to prop up shaky financial institutions. The key to the arrangement, Morgan told the president, was a purchase by U.S. Steel of the shares of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, currently held by a threatened New York bank. Morgan insisted that he needed assurances that the purchase would not prompt antitrust action. Roosevelt tacitly agreed, and the Morgan plan proceeded. Whether or not as a result, the panic soon subsided.

Roosevelt loved being president, and many people assumed that he would run for reelection in 1908, despite the long-standing tradition of presidents serving no more than two terms. But the Panic of 1907 and Roosevelt’s reform efforts so alienated conservatives in his own party that he might have had difficulty winning the Republican nomination. In 1904, moreover, he had made a public promise to step down four years later. And so in 1909, Roosevelt, fifty years old, retired from public life—briefly.

THE TROUBLED SUCCESSION

William Howard Taft, who assumed the presidency in 1909, had been Theodore Roosevelt's most trusted lieutenant and his handpicked successor; progressive reformers believed him to be one of their own. But Taft was also a restrained and moderate jurist, a man with a punctilious regard for legal process; conservatives expected him to abandon Roosevelt's aggressive use of presidential powers. By seeming acceptable to almost everyone, Taft easily won election to the White House in 1908 over William Jennings Bryan, running for the Democrats for the third time.

Four years later, however, Taft would leave office the most decisively defeated president of the twentieth century, his party deeply divided and the government in the hands of a Democratic administration for the first time in twenty years.

TAFT AND THE PROGRESSIVES

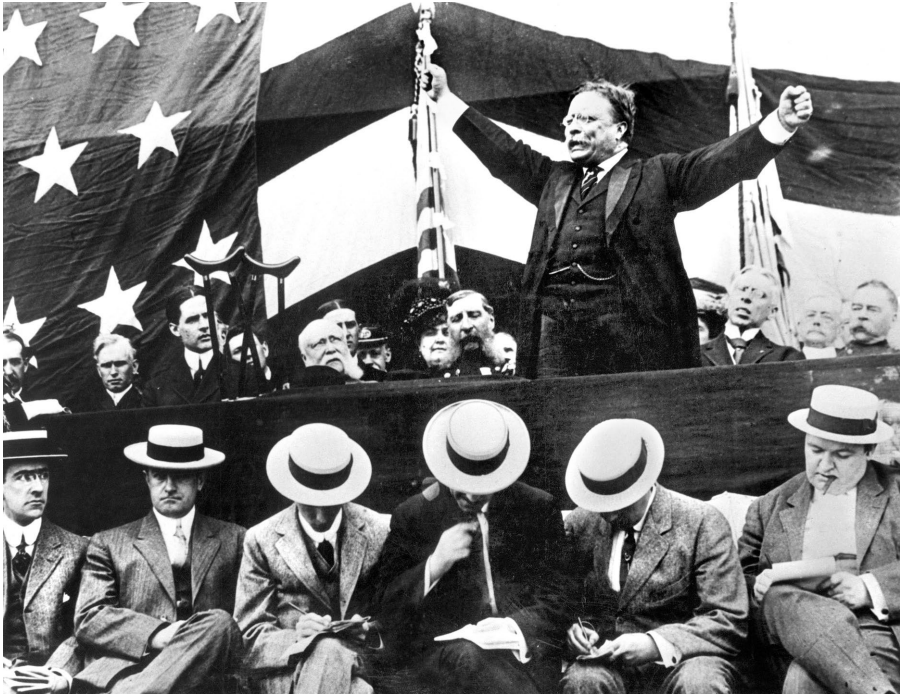
Taft's first problem arose in the opening months of the new administration, when he called Congress into special session to lower protective tariff rates, an old progressive demand. But the president made no effort to overcome the opposition of the congressional Old Guard, arguing that to do so would violate the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers. The result was the feeble Payne-Aldrich Tariff, which reduced tariff rates scarcely at all.

A sensational controversy that broke out late in 1909 helped destroy Taft's popularity with reformers for good. Many progressives had been unhappy when Taft replaced Roosevelt's secretary of the interior, James R. Garfield, an aggressive conservationist, with Richard A. Ballinger, a conservative corporate lawyer. Suspicion of Ballinger grew when he attempted to invalidate Roosevelt's removal of nearly 1 million acres of forests and mineral reserves from private development.

In the midst of this mounting concern, Louis Glavis, an Interior Department investigator, charged Ballinger with having once connived to turn over valuable public coal lands in Alaska to a private syndicate for personal profit. Glavis took the evidence to Gifford Ballinger-Pinchot Dispute Pinchot, still director of the U.S. Forest Service and a critic of Ballinger's policies. Pinchot took the charges to the president. Taft investigated them and decided they were groundless. Unsatisfied, Pinchot leaked the story to the press and asked Congress to investigate the scandal. The president discharged him for insubordination, and the congressional committee appointed to study the controversy, dominated by Old Guard Republicans, exonerated Ballinger. But progressives throughout the country supported Pinchot. The controversy aroused as much public passion as any dispute of its time. By the time it was over, Taft had alienated the supporters of Roosevelt completely—and, it seemed, irrevocably.

THE RETURN OF ROOSEVELT

During most of these controversies, Theodore Roosevelt was out of the country on a long hunting safari in Africa and an extended tour of Europe. To the American public, however, Roosevelt remained a formidable presence. His return to New York in the spring of 1910 was a major public event. Roosevelt insisted that he had no plans to reenter politics, but within a month he announced that he would embark on a national speaking tour before



ROOSEVELT AT OSAWATOMIE Roosevelt's speech at Osawatimie, Kansas, in 1910 was the most radical of his career and openly marked his break with the Taft administration and the Republican leadership. "The essence of any struggle for liberty," he told his largely conservative audience, "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." (© Granger, NYC—All Rights Reserved.)

the end of the summer. Furious with Taft, he was becoming convinced that he alone was capable of reuniting the Republican Party.

The real signal of Roosevelt's decision to assume leadership of Republican reformers came in a speech he gave on September 1, 1910, in Osawatimie, Kansas. In it he outlined a set of principles, which he labeled the "New Nationalism," that made *"New Nationalism"* clear he had moved a considerable way from the cautious conservatism of the years of his presidency. He argued that social justice was possible only through a strong federal government whose executive acted as the "steward of the public welfare." He supported graduated income and inheritance taxes, workers' compensation for industrial accidents, regulation of the labor of women and children, tariff revision, and firmer regulation of corporations.

SPREADING INSURGENCY

The congressional elections of 1910 provided further evidence of how far the progressive revolt had spread. In primary elections, conservative Republicans suffered defeat after defeat, while almost all the progressive incumbents were reelected. In the general election, the Democrats won control of the House of Representatives for the first time in sixteen years and gained strength in the Senate. But Roosevelt still denied any

presidential ambitions and claimed that his real purpose was to pressure Taft to return to progressive policies. Two events, however, changed his mind. The first, on October 27, 1911, was the announcement by the administration of a suit against U.S. Steel, which charged, among other things, that the 1907 acquisition of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company had been illegal. Roosevelt had approved that acquisition in the midst of the 1907 panic, and he was enraged by the implication that he had acted improperly.

Roosevelt was still reluctant to become a candidate for president because Senator Robert La Follette, the great Wisconsin progressive, had been working since 1911 to secure the presidential nomination for himself. But La Follette's candidacy stumbled in February 1912 when, exhausted and distraught over the illness of a daughter, he appeared to suffer a nervous breakdown during a speech in Philadelphia. Roosevelt announced his candidacy on February 22.

ROOSEVELT VERSUS TAFT

For all practical purposes, the campaign for the Republican nomination had now become a battle between Roosevelt and Taft. Roosevelt scored overwhelming victories in all thirteen presidential primaries. Taft, however, remained the choice of most party leaders, who controlled the nominating process.

The battle for the nomination at the Chicago convention revolved around an unusually large number of contested delegates: 254 in all. Roosevelt needed fewer than half the disputed seats to clinch the nomination. But the Republican National Committee, controlled by the Old Guard, awarded all but 19 of them to Taft. At a rally the night before the convention opened, Roosevelt addressed 5,000 cheering supporters. "We stand at Armageddon," he told the roaring crowd, "and we battle for the Lord." The next day, he led his supporters out of the convention, and out of the party. The convention then quietly nominated Taft on the first ballot.

Roosevelt summoned his supporters back to Chicago in August for another convention, this one to launch the new Progressive Party and to nominate himself as its presidential candidate. Roosevelt approached the battle feeling, as he put it, "fit as a bull moose" (thus giving his new party an enduring nickname). But Roosevelt was also aware that his cause was almost hopeless, partly because many of the insurgents who had supported him during the primaries refused to follow him out of the Republican Party. It was also because of the man the Democrats had nominated for president.

WOODROW WILSON AND THE NEW FREEDOM

The 1912 presidential contest was not simply one between conservatives and reformers. It was also one between two brands of progressivism. And it matched the two most important national leaders of the early twentieth century in an unequal contest.

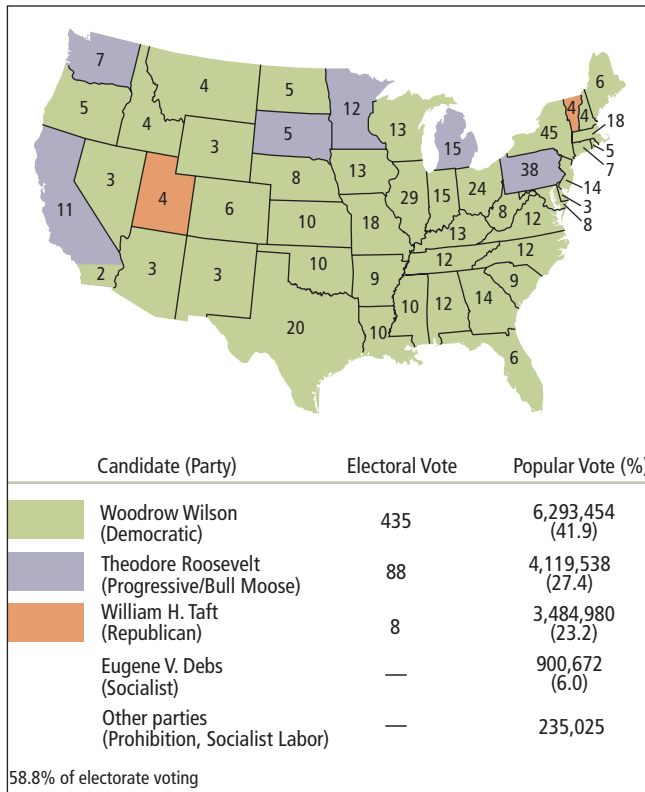
WOODROW WILSON

Reform sentiment had been gaining strength within the Democratic Party as well as the Republican Party in the first years of the century. At the June 1912 Democratic Convention in Baltimore, Champ Clark, the conservative Speaker of the House, was

unable to assemble the two-thirds majority necessary for nomination because of progressive opposition. Finally, on the forty-sixth ballot, Woodrow Wilson, the governor of New Jersey and the only genuinely progressive candidate in the race, emerged as the party's nominee.

Wilson had been a professor of political science at Princeton until 1902, when he was named president of the university. Elected governor of New Jersey in 1910, he quickly earned a national reputation for winning passage of progressive legislation. As a presidential candidate in 1912, Wilson presented a progressive program that came to be called the "New Freedom." Roosevelt's New Nationalism supported economic concentration and using government to regulate and control it. *Wilson's "New Freedom"* Wilson seemed to side with those who (like Louis Brandeis) believed that bigness was both unjust and inefficient, that the proper response to monopoly was not to regulate it but to destroy it.

The 1912 presidential campaign was an anticlimax. Taft, resigned to defeat, barely campaigned. Roosevelt campaigned energetically (until a gunshot wound from a would-be assassin forced him to the sidelines during the last weeks before the election), but he



THE ELECTION OF 1912 The election of 1912 was one of the most unusual in American history because of the dramatic schism within the Republican Party. Two Republican presidents—William Howard Taft, the incumbent, and Theodore Roosevelt, his predecessor—ran against each other, opening the way for a victory by the Democratic candidate, Woodrow Wilson, who won with only 42 percent of the popular vote. A fourth candidate, the socialist Eugene V. Debs, received a significant 6 percent of the vote. • *What events caused the schism between Taft and Roosevelt?*

failed to draw any significant number of Democratic progressives away from Wilson. In November, Roosevelt and Taft split the Republican vote; Wilson held on to most Democrats and won. He received only 42 percent of the popular vote, compared with 27 percent for Roosevelt, 23 percent for Taft, and 6 percent for the socialist Eugene Debs. But in the electoral college, Wilson won 435 of the 531 votes.

THE SCHOLAR AS PRESIDENT

Wilson was a bold and forceful president. He exerted firm control over his cabinet, and he delegated real authority only to those who were loyal to him. His most powerful adviser, Colonel Edward M. House, was an intelligent and ambitious Texan who held no office and whose only claim to authority was his personal intimacy with the president.

In legislative matters, Wilson skillfully welded together a coalition that would support his goals. Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress made his task easier. Wilson's first triumph as president was the fulfillment of an old Democratic (and



WOODROW WILSON Woodrow Wilson, the 28th President of the United States, was a Virginian (the first southerner to be elected president since before the Civil War), a professor of political science and later president of Princeton University, governor of New Jersey, and a progressive. His election to the presidency brought the first Democrat to the White House since 1896. (The Library of Congress)

progressive) goal: a substantial lowering of the protective tariff. The Underwood-Simmons Tariff provided cuts significant enough, progressives believed, to introduce real competition into American markets and thus to help break the power of trusts. To make up for the loss of revenue under the new tariff, Congress *Lowering the Tariff* approved a graduated income tax, which the recently adopted Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution now permitted. This first modern income tax imposed a 1 percent tax on individuals and corporations earning more than \$4,000 a year, with rates ranging up to 6 percent on incomes over \$500,000 annually.

Wilson held Congress in session through the summer to work on a major reform of the American banking system: the Federal Reserve Act, which *Banking System Reform* Congress passed and the president signed on December 23, 1913. It created twelve regional banks, each to be owned and controlled by the individual banks of its district. The regional Federal Reserve banks would hold a certain percentage of the assets of their member banks in reserve; they would use those reserves to support loans to private banks at an interest (or “discount”) rate that the Federal Reserve system would set; they would issue a new type of paper currency—Federal Reserve notes—that would become the nation’s basic medium of trade and would be backed by the government. Most important, they would be able to shift funds quickly to troubled areas—to meet increased demands for credit or to protect imperiled banks. Supervising and regulating the entire system was a national Federal Reserve Board, whose members were appointed by the president.

In 1914, turning to the central issue of his 1912 campaign, Wilson proposed two measures to deal with the problem of monopoly, which took shape as the *Corporate Oversight* Federal Trade Commission Act and the Clayton Antitrust Act. The Federal Trade Commission Act created a regulatory agency that would help businesses determine in advance whether their actions would be acceptable to the government. The agency would also have authority to launch prosecutions against “unfair trade practices,” and it would have wide power to investigate corporate behavior. Wilson signed the Federal Trade Commission Bill happily, but he seemed to lose interest in the Clayton Antitrust Bill, which proposed stronger measures to break up trusts. Wilson did little to protect it from conservative assaults, which greatly weakened it.

RETREAT AND ADVANCE

By the fall of 1914, Wilson believed that the New Freedom program was essentially complete and that agitation for reform would now subside. He refused to support the movement for national woman suffrage. Deferring to southern Democrats, he condoned the reimposition of segregation in the agencies of the federal government (in contrast to Roosevelt, who had ordered the elimination of many such barriers). When congressional progressives attempted to enlist his support for new reform legislation, Wilson dismissed their proposals as unconstitutional or unnecessary.

The congressional elections of 1914, however, shattered the president’s complacency. Democrats suffered major losses in Congress, and voters who in 1912 had supported the Progressive Party began returning to the Republicans. Wilson realized he would not be able to rely on a divided opposition when he ran for reelection in 1916. By the end of 1915, therefore, Wilson had begun to support a second flurry of reforms. In January 1916, he appointed Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court,

making him not only the first Jew but also the most advanced progressive to serve there. Later, Wilson supported a measure to make it easier for farmers to receive credit, and another measure creating a system of workers' compensation for federal employees.

In 1916, Wilson supported the Keating-Owen Act, which prohibited the shipment of goods produced by underage children across state lines, thus giving an expanded **Child-Labor Laws** importance to the constitutional clause assigning Congress the task of regulating interstate commerce. The president similarly supported measures that used federal taxing authority as a vehicle for legislating social change. After the Court struck down Keating-Owen, a new law attempted to achieve the same goal by imposing a heavy tax on the products of child labor. (The Court later struck down that law too.) The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 offered matching federal grants to support agricultural extension education. Over time, these innovative uses of government overcame most of the constitutional objections and became the foundation of a long-term growth in federal power over the economy.

CONCLUSION

The powerful surge of reform efforts in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century caused many Americans to identify themselves as “progressives.” That label meant many different things to many different people, but at its core was a belief that human effort and government action could improve society. By the early twentieth century, progressivism had become a powerful, transformative force in American life.

This great surge of reform eventually reached the federal government and national politics, as progressives came to believe that success required the engagement of the federal government. Two national leaders, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, contributed to a period of national reform that made the government in Washington a great center of power for the first time since the Civil War—a position it has never relinquished. Progressivism did not solve the nation's problems, but it gave movements, organizations, and governments new tools to deal with them.

KEY TERMS/PEOPLE/PLACES/EVENTS

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RECALL AND REFLECT

1. What “moral” crusades did progressives undertake in their efforts to reform the social order?
2. How did W. E. B. Du Bois’s philosophy on race relations differ from that of Booker T. Washington?
3. What were some of the approaches progressives used to challenge the power and influence of capitalist corporate America?
4. What was the difference between Theodore Roosevelt’s “New Nationalism” and Woodrow Wilson’s “New Freedom”?