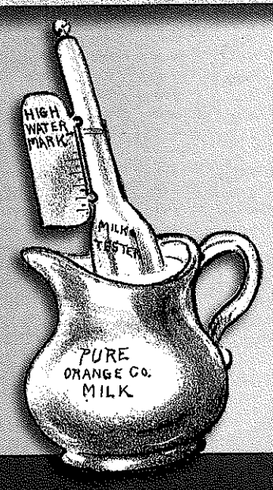


What does the scientist think he will find as he tests the milk and the sugar?

CHAPTER

27

The Progressive Era

27.1 Introduction

"The men who start the great new movements in the world are enthusiasts," said Sam McClure at his college graduation, "whose eyes are fixed upon the end they wish to bring about."

Some of his fellow students may have brushed off McClure's words as mere speech making. They shouldn't have. This immigrant from Ireland was serious about starting "great new movements." And he had just the enthusiasm to do it. But how?

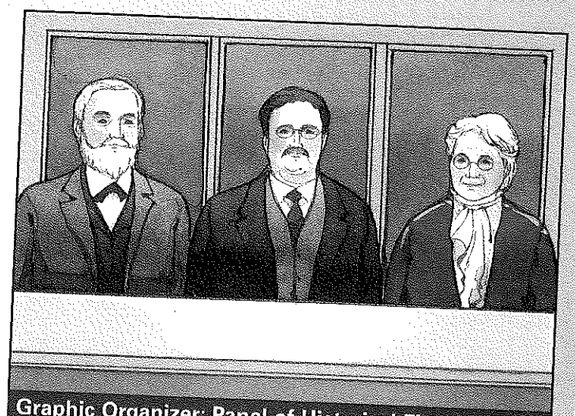
McClure's answer was to start a journal called *McClure's Magazine*. McClure prided himself on knowing what people wanted to read about. "If I like a thing," he said, "then I know that millions will like it."

In 1900, McClure decided that Americans wanted to know the truth about trusts, those giant business monopolies that worked to reduce competition. He hired a reporter named Ida Tarbell to write a history of one of the biggest trusts—John D. Rockfeller's Standard Oil. McClure ran Tarbell's report as a serial, printing one part at a time in issue after issue. The report told about unfair pricing putting Standard Oil's competitors out of business. McClure's popularity soared.

McClure began hiring more journalists to uncover the truth about other evils in America. Some people called his journalists *muckrakers* because they spent so much effort stirring up dirt and filth. Writers like Tarbell adopted this name with pride.

McClure and his muckrakers were part of a larger reform effort known as the **Progressive movement**. Looking back at the century just ended, Progressives could see great progress. Slavery had ended. The United States had become an industrial giant. Still, huge problems remained to be solved.

Progressives did not work as a single group. Some fought railroad monopolies, while others marched with child factory workers. Some worked for equal rights for African Americans, and others to protect forests. Whatever their cause, most Progressives wanted government to play a larger role in helping to cure the nation's ills. And all of them believed that ordinary people could start "great new movements" that would improve American life.



Graphic Organizer: Panel of Historical Figures
You will use this panel to help you understand the views and work of social leaders during this time.

27.2 Sowing the Seeds of Reform

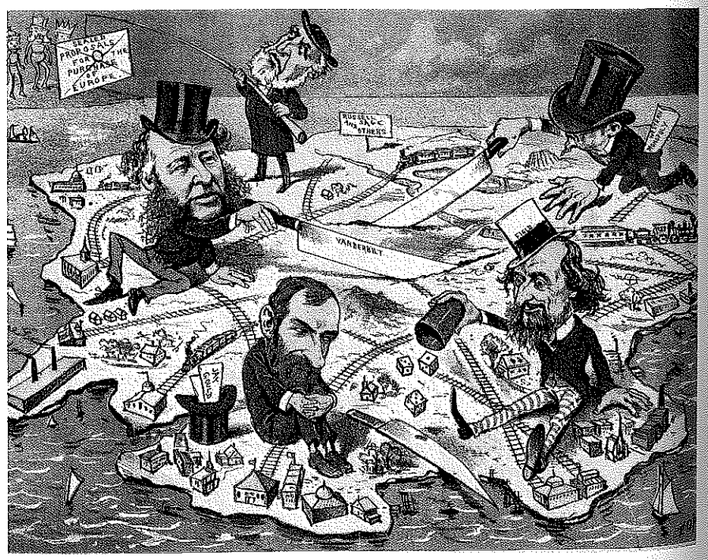
populist devoted to the needs and interests of common people

The Progressives of the early 20th century rebelled against economic and social injustice, the power of big business, and political corruption. But they were not the first to criticize these conditions and propose far-reaching reforms.

As you have learned, industrialization began remaking American society shortly after the Civil War. To some, the rise of big industry meant endless progress and prosperity. Others, however, felt left behind. As early as the 1870s, some of these "have-nots" began organizing mass movements to work for political and social change. These **populist** revolts sowed the seeds of Progressive reform.

The Farmers Revolt Organized protest against the power of big business began on the farms of the Midwest. After the Civil War, many midwestern farmers were caught between rising costs and falling prices for their crops. Farmers felt victimized. Banks made it hard for people to get cash loans to keep their farms going in lean times. Railroads and grain storage companies charged high rates to transport and store crops. And merchants paid too little for what farmers produced.

In 1867, Oliver Kelley, a clerk in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, began organizing self-help clubs for farmers called Granges. The movement spread rapidly through the Midwest. By the mid 1870s, the Grange had grown into a political force. Farmers used the Grange to protest unfair practices by the railroads. Grangers banded together to negotiate better prices and started their own banks. They campaigned for political candidates and worked for reforms such as an income tax and laws against trusts.



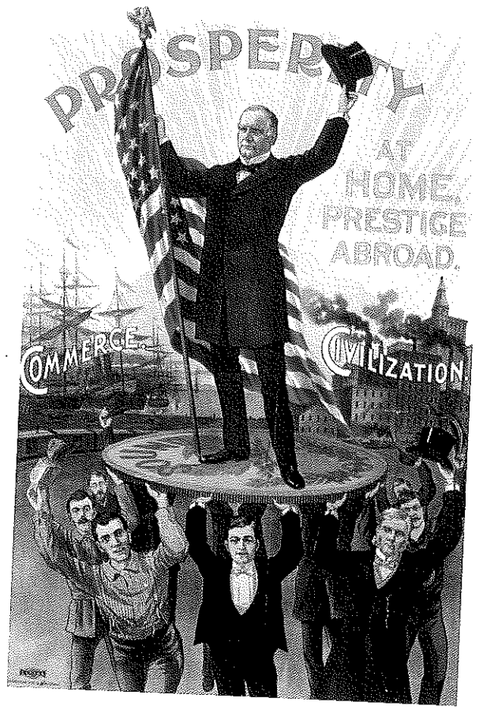
In the 1870s, angry farmers attacked the power of the railroads to set whatever rates they wanted. This cartoon shows wealthy "rail barons" carving up the country for their own profit.

Pressure from the Grangers led some states to pass laws that limited railroad shipping rates and prices for grain storage. Big businesses protested this interference with their "rights." In 1877, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with the Grangers. In a series of cases, the Court ruled that states had the right to regulate private property when it is used in the public interest. The Grangers had won a key victory for the idea that government had a responsibility to help protect the common good.

Membership in the Granges dropped in the 1880s as conditions improved for midwestern farmers. The farmers' revolt continued, however, in the South and West, where organizations called Farmers' Alliances took up the cause of reform.

The Farmers' Alliances angrily challenged the influence of eastern bankers and industrialists. A favorite target was Wall Street in New York City, the nation's financial capital. Mary Elizabeth Lease of Kansas charged:

> *It is no longer a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street, and for Wall Street. The great common people of this country are slaves and monopoly is the master.*



Wealthy industrialists gave huge sums of money to help elect Republican William McKinley to the presidency in 1896.

The People's Party In the 1890s, the Farmers' Alliances took the lead in forming a new People's Party (often called the Populist Party). The party's leaders hoped to forge an alliance between farmers and industrial workers. Such a mass movement, they believed, could break the power of big business to dictate government policy.

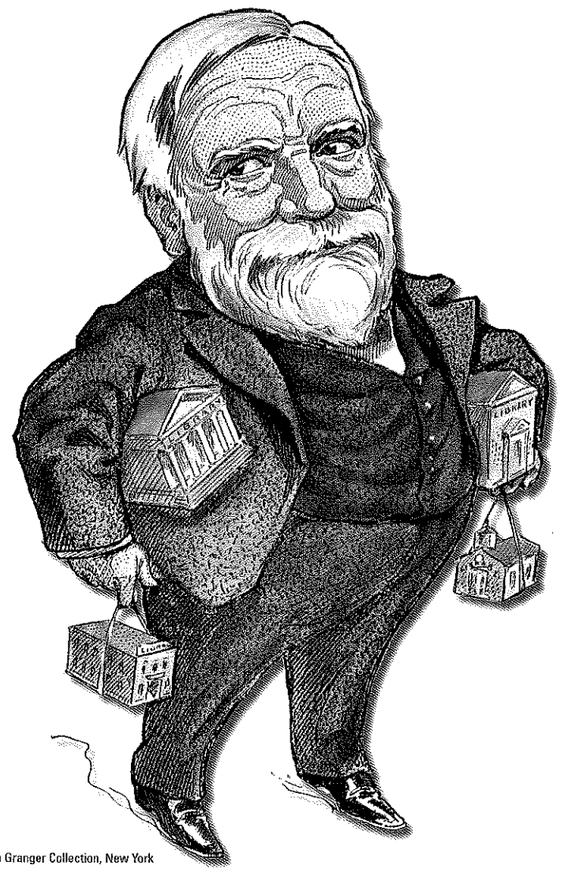
In 1892, the People's Party adopted a **platform** calling for such reforms as an eight-hour working day and government ownership of railroads. That fall, Populist candidates won election to hundreds of state and local offices. The Populist candidate for president, James B. Weaver of Iowa, received over a million votes, winning six of the Mountain and Plains states. But that was the high point for the People's Party.

Four years later, the Democratic Party adopted some Populist ideas as part of its platform. The Populists decided to support the Democratic presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan. The Republican candidate, William McKinley, drew heavy support from business and financial interests. The battle lines were drawn between eastern capitalists and the reform-minded farmers of the South and West.

McKinley won the election handily. His victory was a triumph for those who were opposed to radical change. The People's Party, which had lost its identity after fusing with the Democrats, soon dissolved.

For the moment, big business and its allies reigned supreme. It would be up to other reformers to continue the fight begun by the Grangers and the Populists.

platform a statement of the policies favored by a political party



The Granger Collection, New York

Andrew Carnegie made a huge fortune in the steel industry. When he retired, he began to give away most of his money. Here we see him carrying libraries like gifts, symbolizing the money he gave to thousands of communities for libraries.

27.3 Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller: Captains of Industry

When business leaders like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller looked at the United States in 1900, they saw progress everywhere. Railroads linked towns and cities across the nation. The increased ease of delivering goods by rail had nourished countless new industries, including their own. Both men were proud to be "captains of industry," leading the way in this growth. "Mere money-making has never been my goal," wrote Rockefeller. "I had an ambition to build."

Industry Brings Progress New industries meant more jobs for a growing nation. With immigrants pouring into the country, the population of the United States tripled between 1850 and 1900. Every new factory or mill created jobs for the newcomers. Carnegie Steel alone employed more than 20,000 workers, many of them immigrants.

The nation's new industries turned out a wealth of new products at prices ordinary Americans could afford. "The home of the laboring man in our day boasts luxuries which even in the palaces of monarchs as recent as Queen Elizabeth were unknown," wrote Carnegie. "What were luxuries for some," he noted, "are now necessities for all."

The Benefits of Bigness What made such progress possible? The growth of big business, answered the captains of industry! Only big business enterprises could deliver quality goods at prices everyone could afford. As Carnegie explained in an article defending big business to its critics:

> *[The] cheapness [of goods] is in proportion to the scale of production.... The larger the scale of operation the cheaper the product.... Instead of attempting to restrict [bigness], we should hail every increase as something to be gained, not for the few rich, but for the millions of poor.*

Bigness, in Carnegie's view, was the inevitable result of competition. When many small companies compete in the same industry, some are more likely to do well than others. Those that are run most efficiently will thrive from competition and grow larger. Those that are not well run will perish. "The law of competition," Carnegie argued, "may be sometimes hard for the individual, [but] it is best for the race, because it ensures the survival of the fittest in every department."

When Carnegie wrote about "the law of competition" in business, he was borrowing an idea from the British naturalist Charles Darwin. Darwin had observed that, in nature, animals and plants compete for food and living space. Those that are best adapted to their environments are the most likely to survive. This idea was popularized as "survival of the fittest."

Before long, some people began to apply Darwin's idea to human society. The result was **Social Darwinism**. According to this theory, people and societies competed for survival just as plants and animals did. The most fit became wealthy and successful. The least fit struggled just to survive.

Social Darwinism the idea that people and societies compete for survival, with the fit becoming wealthy and successful while the weak struggle to survive

Social Darwinism seemed to provide a "scientific" justification for huge differences in people's wealth and power. It also lent support to the idea of laissez-faire. Let businesses compete without restraint, argued corporate leaders. Then the best possible economy will emerge naturally. By this line of thinking, it was misguided for government to try to correct such problems as child labor, poor working conditions, or cutthroat business practices.

Giving Away Wealth In 1901, Carnegie sold his steel company for $250 million. Then he retired to devote his life to philanthropy, or generosity to charities. Rich people, he believed, have a responsibility to use their wealth to help others. "The man who dies rich," he wrote, "dies disgraced."

Carnegie used his wealth to build concert halls, universities, and hospitals. Most of all, he loved building libraries. A library, he said, "outranks any other one thing that a community can do to benefit its people." Before 1880, few Americans had access to free public libraries. Just one generation later, 35 million people a day were using libraries that Carnegie had helped to build.

"Your example will bear fruits," Rockefeller wrote to Carnegie. "The time will come when men of wealth will more generally be willing to use it for the good of others."

Rockefeller used his own fortune to fund universities, medical research, the arts, and education for all. During his lifetime, he contributed about $182 million to the Rockefeller Foundation, a charitable organization he established to promote "the well-being of mankind throughout the world."

John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company controlled 90% of the oil refined in the United States at the turn of the century. His business methods were deemed ruthless by his critics and brilliant by his supporters.

regulation: the enforcement of laws that control conduct or practices; government regulations control the way goods, food, and drugs are produced and sold to the public

27.4 Theodore Roosevelt: Trust-Busting President

Not everyone admired big business the way Rockefeller and Carnegie did. Many thought big businesses took unfair advantage of workers and consumers. In 1890, Congress passed the Sherman Antitrust Act to outlaw any form of business monopoly. The law was so vague and big business so powerful, however, that for years the law was not enforced. The Sherman Antitrust Act got its first real test only after Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901.

Breaking a Railroad Trust Roosevelt came into the White House with a reputation as a reformer. As president, he attacked business monopolies with great energy. "We do not want to destroy corporations," he assured the public, "but we do wish to make them [serve] the public good."

Roosevelt's first target was a railroad monopoly called the Northern Securities Company. This company controlled nearly every rail line between Chicago and the Pacific Northwest. Roosevelt had the Justice Department sue Northern Securities for violating the Sherman Antitrust Act. The justices of the Supreme Court ordered the monopoly to be broken up into smaller railroad companies.

"Trust-busting" Teddy Roosevelt is shown here vigorously shaking the railroad trust. Roosevelt tried to break up monopolistic trusts in order to make American business fair for all.

The Granger Collection, New York

Trust-Busting Expands Just after Roosevelt filed suit against Northern Securities, *McClure's Magazine* began publishing Ida Tarbell's history of the Standard Oil Trust. In her report, Tarbell documented how Rockefeller had driven his competitors out of business. She told about secret deals he had made with railroads to ship his oil at lower prices than other oil companies paid. She explained how Rockefeller had cut his oil prices below what the oil cost to produce. This attracted customers away from other oil companies. After his competitors went out of business, he raised prices again.

A shocked public demanded action. Roosevelt filed suit against not only Standard Oil, but against 44 other trusts as well. In 1911, Standard Oil was "busted"—broken up into five major oil companies and several smaller ones.

Roosevelt thought that government **regulation**, or enforcement of laws, was a good long-term solution to bad business behavior. "The great development of industrialism," he said, "means that there must be an increase in the supervision exercised by the Government over business enterprise."

27.5 Robert La Follette: Fighter for Political Reform

In 1890, Robert La Follette of Wisconsin ran for reelection to Congress and lost. Still a young man, he returned to his work as a laywer. Then something happened. Senator Philetus Sawyer, a powerful Republican Party boss, offered La Follette a bribe to "fix" a court case. Sawyer thought that he could pay La Follette to guarantee that he would win the case. An insulted La Follette reported the bribery attempt to the newspapers.

An equally insulted Sawyer decided to crush La Follette. But "Battling Bob" was not an easy man to put down. Sawyer had made him so mad that La Follette decided to run for governor of Wisconsin. As governor, he could put the party bosses out of business.

In Wisconsin and other states, political machines, or groups run by party bosses, controlled local and state governments. To make sure that their candidates were elected, corrupt bosses were known to bribe voters and "stuff" ballot boxes with fake votes.

Thus, the bosses, not the people, chose each party's candidates for office. The candidates, men like lumber millionaire Sawyer, usually represented powerful business interests. Without the party's support, upstart reformers like La Follette had little chance of reaching voters. La Follette was defeated twice by Wisconsin's powerful Republican "machine," but finally won election as governor in 1900.

Party bosses controlled the American political system through a corrupt system of bribery. Reformers like Robert La Follette sought to take power out of the hands of the bosses and return it to the people.

Once elected, La Follette pushed reforms that put the people in charge of politics. Wisconsin became the first state to adopt the direct primary. This election system allowed party members, not bosses, to chose party candidates. By 1916, over half the states had adopted the "Wisconsin Idea." With the people choosing their leaders in primary elections, reform governors swept into office across the nation.

Oregon introduced three other reforms that put political power into the hands of the people. The *initiative* allowed citizens to enact laws by a popular vote. The *referendum* allowed voters to overturn an existing law. The *recall* allowed voters to remove an elected official from office.

What all these reforms had in common, wrote La Follette, was a belief that each state could become a place where "the opportunities of all its people are more equal… [and] human life is safer and sweeter."

27.6 Mother Jones: Champion of Workers' Rights

In 1903, labor leader Mary Harris Jones—known as Mother Jones—went to Pennsylvania to support a strike by 75,000 textile workers. About 10,000 of the strikers were children. Jones wrote of these young workers:

> *Every day little children came into Union Headquarters, some with their hands off, some with the thumb missing, some with their fingers off at the knuckle. They were stooped little things, round shouldered and skinny. Many of them were not over ten years of age.*

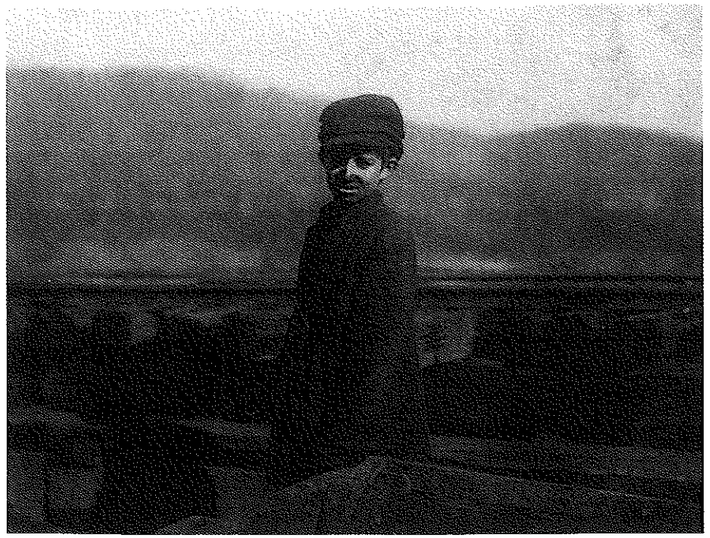
Child Labor Laws The situation Mother Jones found in Pennsylvania was not unusual. In the early 1900s, more than 1 million children under the age of 16 worked in mines and factories for up to 13 hours a day. To publicize their plight, Jones led a "March of the Mill Children" from Pennsylvania all the way to Oyster Bay, New York, to petition President Roosevelt to support child labor laws.

The children's march prompted stories and photographs of child workers in newspapers and magazines. Across the country, reformers demanded an end to child labor. Employers claimed that abolishing child labor would produce "a nation of sissies." But, by 1909, 43 states had passed laws that outlawed the hiring of children.

Improving Working Conditions Progressive reformers also worked to improve the lives of adult workers. In 1903, for example, Oregon passed a law that limited women workers to a ten-hour workday. Maryland set up a program to assist workers who had been injured on the job.

New York responded to the tragic 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire by setting up a state committee to investigate conditions in factories. Based on the committee's work, the state legislature passed 56 worker-protection laws. Many of these laws called for improvements in factory safety. One permitted women workers to take pregnancy leaves. (A *leave* is time away from work.) Another required employers to provide garment workers with chairs that had backs, rather than simple stools.

Mother Jones saw progress for the worker in such reforms. "Slowly his hours are shortened, giving him leisure to read and to think," she wrote. "Slowly the cause of his children becomes the cause of all."



At the turn of the century, school-age children worked long hours for meager wages in America's mines and factories.

27.7 John Muir: Protector of the Environment

John Muir was so clever with machines that he might have been a great inventor. But one day in 1867, a file slipped from his hand and hit him in the eye. This accident sent Muir's life down a different path. After recovering from his injury, Muir decided to spend his life roaming wild places. "I might have been a millionaire," he said. "I chose to become a tramp."

Muir found his wilderness home in Yosemite Valley, a place of great natural beauty in California's Sierra Nevada mountains. "God seems to be doing his best here," he wrote of Yosemite.

Humans, in contrast, seemed to be doing their worst. Loggers were felling Yosemite's ancient redwood trees. Herds of sheep were stripping its meadows and hillsides bare. "To let sheep trample so divinely fine a place seems barbarous!" wrote Muir.

Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir are pictured high on a cliff in Yosemite National Park. Muir (on the right) founded the Sierra Club, an organization committed to the preservation of the environment.

Yosemite was not the only wild place threatened by human activity. Rapid industrial growth and urbanization were causing massive environmental changes. Loggers were felling the nation's forests at an alarming rate. Miners were scarring mountains and polluting rivers. Many species of birds and animals were near extinction or already lost forever.

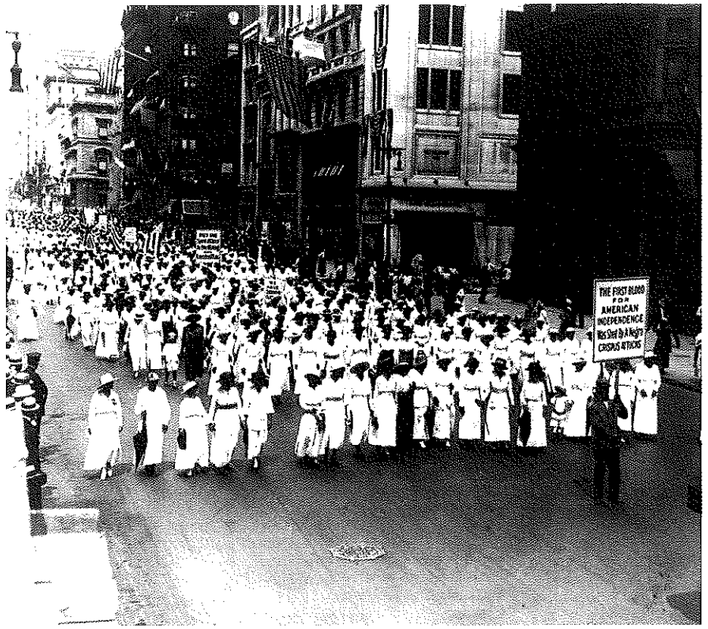
Concerns over such changes had given birth to a small but growing **conservation** movement. Some conservationists worried most about dwindling natural resources. They advocated careful development of the wilderness. Others, like Muir, wanted to preserve wonders like Yosemite in their natural state.

To rally the public to his cause, Muir started publishing articles urging the passage of laws to protect wilderness. By 1890, his writings had attracted enough support to convince Congress to create Yosemite National Park.

Conservationists found an ally in President Theodore Roosevelt. While Roosevelt was in office, he increased the amount of land set aside as national forest from 47 million to 195 million acres. He also doubled the number of national parks. To Muir's delight, the president also prohibited logging and ranching in Yosemite and other national parks.

"Wilderness is a necessity," said Muir. "Mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."

conservation the effort to protect something valuable from being destroyed or used up



In 1917, the NAACP, which W.E.B. Du Bois helped form, organized this silent protest parade against lynching.

27.8 W. E. B. Du Bois: Spokesman for Equal Rights

In 1897, a black sociologist named W. E. B. Du Bois joined the faculty of Atlanta University. His plan was to study social problems "in the light of the best scientific research."

Everywhere he looked, Du Bois saw the terrible effects of racism on African Americans. In the South, Jim Crow laws segregated schools, trains, parks, and other public places. These laws also banned blacks from voting in most states. Blacks in the North were not legally segregated, but they still faced discrimination, particularly in housing and jobs.

African Americans who fought these injustices risked being lynched, or brutally attacked and killed. Between 1892 and 1903, almost 3,000 African Americans were lynched across the South. "One could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist," Du Bois found, "while Negroes were lynched, murdered, and starved."

Du Bois wanted to do something, but what? Booker T. Washington, the best-known black leader of that time, advised African Americans to make the best of segregation. Washington was a former slave who had founded Tuskegee Institute, a vocational school for blacks. He believed that job skills for African Americans would lead to economic progress and eventual acceptance. "The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly," he said.

Du Bois could not accept such thinking. In 1905, he gathered influential African Americans at Niagara Falls to push directly for voting rights. He wanted to see an end to discrimination, or unfair treatment based on race. "We want the Constitution of the country enforced," they declared. "We are men! We will be treated as men."

This group, known as the Niagara Movement, continued to meet each year. In 1909, they joined a group of white reformers who were also dissatisfied with Booker T. Washington's cautious approach. Together, they formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The new organization pledged to work for equal rights and opportunities for all African Americans. By 1920, the NAACP had over 90,000 members. Their goal was to make 11 million African Americans "physically free from peonage [servitude], mentally free from ignorance, politically free from disenfranchisement [denial of rights], and socially free from insult."

27.9 Upton Sinclair: Truth Writer

When Upton Sinclair wrote a novel about the horrors of slavery, few people bought it. Then a publisher asked if Sinclair would write a book about factory workers who were treated like slaves. Sinclair jumped at the chance. Workers at a Chicago meatpacking plant had just been brutally defeated in a labor dispute. Sinclair would write about them.

Meatpacking Horrors In 1900, Chicago was the home of the nation's biggest meatpacking companies. Disguised as a worker, Sinclair spent seven weeks in the slaughterhouses. There he observed how cattle and hogs became steaks and sausages. He observed employees with missing thumbs, and fingers eaten away by acid. He heard stories of deadly falls into cooking vats.

Based on his research, Sinclair wrote a tragic story of poor immigrants trapped in poverty by greedy meatpackers. In his novel *The Jungle,* he described the horrors of the meatpacking plants in great detail. He told of sick animals being processed into food. He described sausage made from old, rotten meat mixed with everything from sawdust to rodents. "Rats were nuisances," he wrote, "and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together."

The Jungle became America's biggest bestseller since *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* But readers were more upset about the contents of their sausage than the treatment of the "wage slaves." "I aimed at the public's heart," said Sinclair, "and by accident I hit it in the stomach."

Safer Food and Drugs After reading *The Jungle,* President Roosevelt ordered an investigation of the meatpacking industry. When his investigators confirmed that conditions were as bad as Sinclair had claimed, Congress passed the Meat Inspection Act. This set health standards for meatpacking and ordered federal inspection of meat.

Other muckrakers revealed similar problems in the food-canning and drug industries. Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act. This law requires manufacturers to use safe ingredients in their products and to advertise them truthfully. Future decades would bring more laws protecting American consumers.

Upton Sinclair shocked readers with his description of conditions inside meatpacking plants such as this one. The unsanitary conditions prompted the government to begin meat inspections.

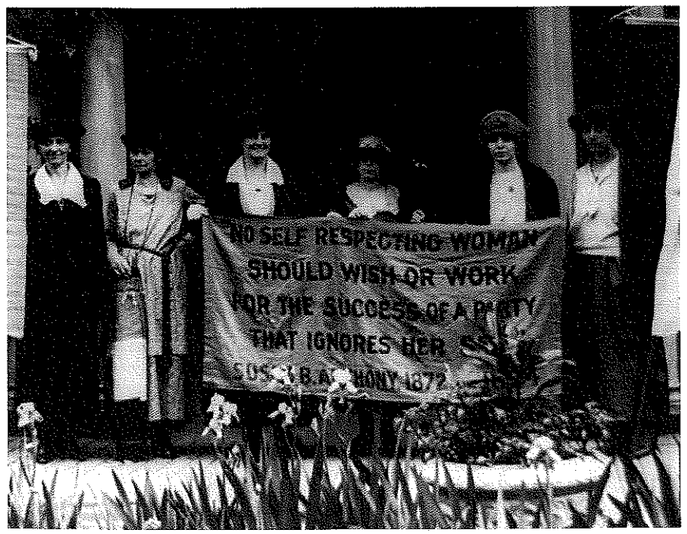
suffrage the right to vote

27.10 Alice Paul: Heroine of Women's Rights

By 1900, women had won their fight for **suffrage**, or the right to vote, in four western states. Elsewhere, the drive for voting rights seemed stalled. The Progressive movement, however, breathed new life into the campaign begun at Seneca Falls in 1848. Many Progressives believed that their reforms would be adopted more quickly if women had the right to vote.

A New Suffrage Movement In 1916, a young reformer named Alice Paul formed what came to be known as the National Woman's Party. Older women's groups had worked to win the right to vote state by state. Paul and her supporters were determined to win the vote by a constitutional amendment.

To build momentum for a suffrage amendment, Paul organized a parade in Washington, D.C. More than 5,000 women marched amidst jeers and insults from onlookers. Newspapers applauded the courage of the "suffragettes," as the activists came to be known.



Women across the country made banners, marched, and banded together to demand the right to vote.

Passing the Nineteenth Amendment By 1918, women could vote in 12 states, but they had made little progress on the suffrage amendment. The Woman's Party began holding silent vigils outside the White House. The protesters held banners that read, "Mr. President, What Will You Do for Woman Suffrage?" and "How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty?"

Police arrested 200 women for blocking the sidewalk. While in jail, Paul and her supporters went on a hunger strike. When the jailers tried to force-feed them, the public became enraged. The women were released to a hero's welcome.

Less than two months later, a suffrage amendment was approved by the House of Representatives by just one vote more than the two-thirds majority required. The amendment had been introduced by Jeanette Rankin of Montana, the first woman elected to Congress. Senate approval took another 18 months. The states finally ratified the Nineteenth Amendment on August 26, 1920. That year, women across the country voted in their first national election.

Paul went on to draft another amendment guaranteeing equal rights to women. "I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction," she said, even though the amendment was never ratified. "Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality."

27.11 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the Progressive movement of the early 20th century. You used a panel of historical figures to help understand the views and work of social leaders during this time.

As early as the 1870s, farmers had organized in protest against government's laissez-faire policies and the growing power of big business. The Granger and Populist movements championed the cause of the "common man." Their ideas helped sow the seeds of Progressive reform.

To men of industry like Rockefeller and Carnegie, calls for reform were misguided. All of America, they argued, had benefited from industrialization. They saw a country that was growing in wealth. Ordinary Americans enjoyed luxuries that were unheard of just a short time before.

Progressives agreed that many industrial advances were good for the country. But they also saw continuing problems in American society. They used newspapers, magazines, and books to draw attention to such issues as child labor, fair business practices, conservation, and equal rights. Government regulation, they said, was needed to soften the negative effects of the industrial age.

Progressives fought for many different causes, such as the rights of workers, women, African Americans, and consumers. Their efforts convinced many people that government had a role to play in correcting social problems.

The work of Progressives gave hope for a better future for millions of Americans. In the next chapter, you will read about how America's successes helped the country to become a powerful world leader.

The Progressive Era was characterized by a spirit of reform. Americans faced a host of serious problems and tried to correct them. Did they succeed, or are some of the problems still evident today?