
Progressive Era: Social And Economic Changes

The Progressive Era was a time of development of new reforms and changes in which society was bursting with enthusiasm to change America for good. Before the progressive era started, the nation had continued to struggle with issues surrounding basic rights and equality for different social groups. Big corporations were also causing trouble, and they were taking over businesses, making it hard for smaller businesses to grow and thrive. During this time, reformers in the United States such as Jacob Riis, John Spargo, and Upton Sinclair sought to fix many of the problems that existed in American society too. Along with serious environmental issues occurring, health and safety issues were also getting out of hand. During the progressive era, the positive changes that were made are seen today due to changes in quality of life, regulation of money and businesses, and movements for more democracy and access to the government.

A theme commonly brought up during the progressive era is socialism, which made many influential changes to children, women, and the health of American society. One of the major problems that were occurring prior to the Progressive era was child labor. Children had to grow up quickly and were put to work in mines and factories in harsh working conditions while earning low pay. In 1900 1.7 million children under 16 worked out of the home and having to drop out of school. These kids would soon be deprived of a proper education making it harder for them to get a better job when they grow older. Later on, the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) saw the problem with child labor and the NCLC decided to abolish child labor resulting in more jobs for adults and releasing the stress of off kids and allowing them to be kids. Another factor that fought for rights was the 19th amendment. Before this amendment was even thought of, women couldn't do things such as vote and many of them didn't have jobs. Soon enough the suffrage movement began. Women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony started the National Woman Suffrage Association and became major role models for women who wanted to have more rights. Other women who also influenced the making of this amendment were Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe who created the American Woman Suffrage Association and fought to change state laws. As these associations grew and gained more attention these groups combined in 1890 to create the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). In 1912 states started changing laws and in 1920 the 19th amendment was created which allowed women to vote. One last example of socialism was the food and drug inspection followed by the meat inspection laws. Before these laws came out consumers would not know what went into their food and medicine. Many people didn't think of that to be monumental until a reformer named Upton Sinclair released his book titled, *The Jungle*. This book showed the dark side of making food, giving readers detailed descriptions of chemicals and dirty workplaces. As the book blew up in the public, readers did not buy products until changes were made. In 1906 congress then passed health laws and the FDA was created to prevent further problems with food and drugs. Along with changes such as new laws, and amendments many other changes were needed to be made.

After social changes were made it was time to move on to the country's economy, making new federal systems and regulating money between big businesses. With new economic changes, banks played a crucial role during this shift. Banks now had more power that could help regulate the nation's money such as the federal reserve system. This system was created in 1913 to

provide the nation with a safer and more stable financial system. Banks could now give out loans and one of them was the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916. This provided farmers with reliable credit and services such as insurance. Instead of congress passing a law, the president, Theodore Roosevelt at the time introduced the country to the expedition act. This act broke up trusts by the meatpacking, oil, steel and railroad industries after ordering the Justice Department to use anti-trust laws against these them. Roosevelt did this because he believed that these industries controlled the country too much and took advantage of that by limiting competition. Roosevelt then left many more problems for future president Woodrow Wilson who was elected during the development of the progressive era. President Woodrow Wilson passed the Federal Trade Commission Act of 1914 when he realized the problem the country was in with businesses and corporations. This act outlawed unfair methods or acts that interfered with commerce. This is was important because monopolies were soon broken and trusts were hard to keep between bug corporations. Overall, economic changes made in the country largely improved the nation for further circumstances involving the management and regulation of money.

While economic changes were being made the government was improving by adding more laws and in including more citizens due to an effort of becoming more of a democracy. The idea of a stronger democracy united the nation, making citizens feel they are a crucial part if the country. One example of this was the 17th amendment which allowed the public to vote openly for the Senators of the country. The amendment also states that the U.S. senate includes two senators from each state and they are elected for six-year terms. One of the earliest changes made was the idea of a direct primary. A direct primary allowed citizens members of a party to directly vote for a candidate. The candidate with the most votes won, giving people a say in who's hands they put their country in. Another transformation of elections was the initiative, referendum, and recall. The "initiative" factor of this allowed voters to sign or make a petition and get it put on a ballot. "Referendum" let voters counteract legislation by putting an existing law on the ballot for voters to either affirm or reject. The last factor known as "recall," allowed citizens to remove a public official from office through a process of petition and vote. These three ideas showed how more and more citizens were getting involved in the country's leaders and concerns. In conclusion, the main reason the country's government changed for the better was because of the inclusion of its citizens.

Overall the progressive era brought new ideas to the country leaving the nation in better hands and conditions than it was before by changing social, economic, and political factors. The nation went from slowly crumbling and being destroyed by big businesses to uniting citizens with a new democracy and giving rights to women and children. From the 1890s to the 1920s Americans fought for what they believed was right and eventually created a nation to help many. This era was one of the most influential times in American history and changed the country for good.