

PROGRESSIVISM AT THE CITY AND STATE LEVELS

During the Progressive Era, political reform took place at all levels of government—city, state, and national.

City Government

Given the Progressives' concern about urban problems, it is not surprising that they first concentrated their efforts on city government. As early as 1890, Americans interested in good government worked to elect reformist mayors. Success in doing so, however, did not always insure permanent improvement. Progressives had to change the way city government worked as well.

Two new types of city government are associated with the Progressive Movement. They were popular in small and medium-sized cities.

- **City Commissioner Plan** Instead of having a mayor and city council, the city is run by a group of commissioners. Each commissioner is in charge of one aspect of city government.
- **City Manager Plan** The city council hires a professional city manager, who runs the various departments.

State Government

Progressives also acted to limit the power of boss-controlled political machines and powerful business interests at the state level. Wisconsin, under Governor **Robert M. LaFollette**, was the model for Progressive reform. The state passed laws to regulate railroads, lobbying, and banking. It also started civil service reforms, shifted more of the tax burden to the wealthy and to corporations, required employers to compensate workers injured on the job, and provided for factory inspections.

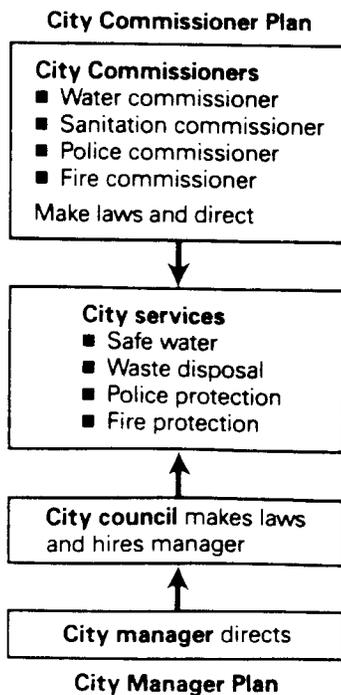
Several other states passed laws like those of Wisconsin. Leading Progressive governors included **Hiram Johnson** of California, who reformed the railroad industry, **Woodrow Wilson** of New Jersey, and **Theodore Roosevelt** of New York.

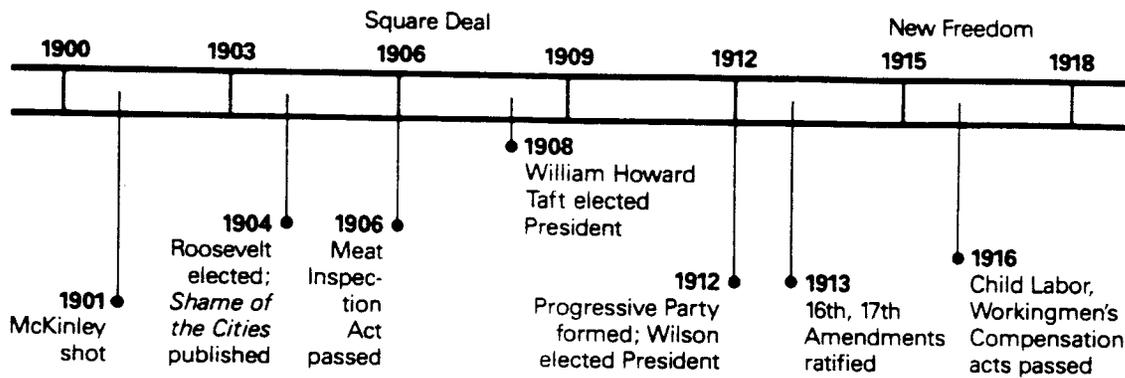
Progressive reforms often proved difficult to enforce, meeting opposition from business interests and the courts. Thus changes in the way state governments worked were also part of the Progressive program. These changes, aimed at increasing citizen participation in government, included the following:

- The **secret, or Australian, ballot**, prevents party bosses (and anyone else) from knowing how people vote.
- The **initiative** is a system that allows voters to petition the legislature to consider a proposed law.
- In a **referendum**, voters decide whether a given bill or constitutional amendment should be passed.
- **Recall** is a form of petition used to force elected officials out of office.
- A **direct primary** allows voters, rather than party leaders, to select candidates to run for office.

Another Progressive reform that affected the national government as well as state governments was the ratification in 1913 of the **17th Amendment**. It provided for the direct election—election by the people—of United States senators. Up to this time senators had been elected by state legislatures, which were often controlled by corporations or political bosses.

Remember that the secret ballot, initiative, referendum, and direct election of senators were all parts of the Populist party program. Adoption of these reforms offers an example of how third parties can influence major parties.





PROGRESSIVISM IN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT: ROOSEVELT

The first three Presidents of this century—Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson—are known as the Progressive Presidents. Roosevelt, elected Vice President in 1900, became President when President William McKinley was assassinated in 1901. He was elected in his own right in 1904.

Although basically conservative, Roosevelt did not hesitate to use the power of the presidency to deal directly with social and economic problems. For example, he influenced passage in 1906 of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act. Roosevelt saw his job as one of **stewardship**—leading the nation in the public interest, like a manager or supervisor. He believed that the President had any powers not specifically denied to the executive in the Constitution.

Roosevelt's administration is often known as the **Square Deal**. His domestic reforms fall into three main categories—business regulation, labor conditions, and conservation.

Regulating Business

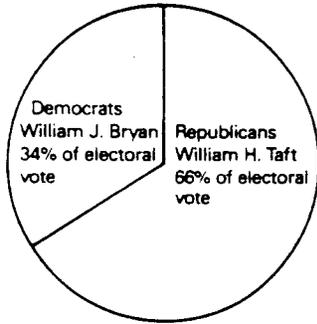
Roosevelt saw a difference between "good trusts," which were to be subject only to regulation, and "bad trusts," which were to be dissolved. The actions he took against big business earned him a reputation as a "**trust buster**."

THE NORTHERN SECURITIES CASE Under the Sherman Antitrust Act, Roosevelt's Justice Department began prosecution of the Northern Securities Company in 1901. This holding company controlled the railroad system of the Pacific Northwest. The Supreme Court upheld the prosecution in *Northern Securities v. United States*, 1904, and ordered the holding company to be dissolved.

THE "BEEF TRUST" Another government antitrust action was directed against a group of meatpackers known as the "beef trust." This prosecution, too, was upheld by the Supreme Court, in *Swift & Co. v. United States*, 1905.

STRENGTHENING THE ICC In 1906 Congress passed the **Hepburn Act**, strengthening the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). It could now set railroad shipping rates. Also, its powers were expanded to include regulation of pipelines, ferries, bridges, and terminals.

Election of 1908



PROGRESSIVISM IN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT: TAFT

Roosevelt had promised not to run for a third term, and was succeeded in office in 1909 by William Howard Taft. Taft began his presidency with the support of Roosevelt and the Progressive wing of the Republican party.

Reforms Under Taft

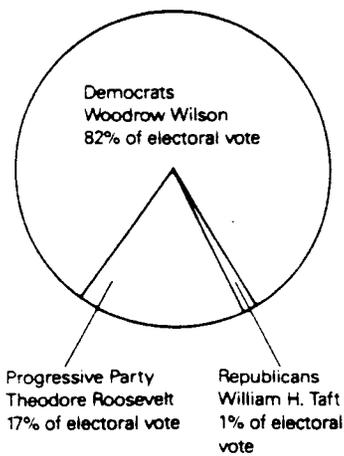
Under Taft, the Justice Department brought twice as many suits against big business as it had under Roosevelt. One of the most important cases involved the **Standard Oil Company**. In its decision in *Standard Oil Co. of New Jersey v. United States*, 1911, the Supreme Court ruled that the monopoly should be dissolved. But it also applied the so-called "rule of reason" to the Sherman Antitrust Act. There was a difference, said the Court, between "reasonable" and "unreasonable" business combinations. Size alone did not mean that a company was "unreasonable."

The Taft era witnessed other reforms, too. The **Mann-Elkins Act**, passed in 1910, gave the ICC the power to regulate communication by telephone and telegraph. In 1913 the **16th Amendment** was ratified, authorizing Congress to impose an income tax.

Problems for Taft

Taft was not as able a politician as Roosevelt, and he soon ran into problems. He wanted to lower the tariff, but Congress, in the **Payne-Aldrich Act** of 1909 set higher rather than lower rates. Taft angered Progressives by calling the law "the best bill that the Republican party ever passed." Taft ran into more trouble the following year. After a conflict between his Secretary of the Interior and Gifford Pinchot, Taft dismissed Pinchot—a favorite of Progressive conservationists—from the Forest Service. Such actions caused the Republican party to split into a Taft faction and a Progressive faction.

Election of 1912



PROGRESSIVISM IN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT: WILSON

In 1912 Roosevelt challenged Taft for the Republican presidential nomination. When the nomination went to Taft, Roosevelt ran as the candidate of a third party, the **Progressive Party**. Woodrow Wilson was the Democratic candidate, and Eugene Debs ran on the Socialist ticket. Roosevelt offered what he called the **New Nationalism**, while Wilson called his program the **New Freedom**. Both were Progressive philosophies. Roosevelt, however, accepted social legislation and business regulation. The more traditional Wilson aimed for a return to competition in the marketplace with enforcement of antitrust laws. Wilson won the election of 1912, although he received only 41 percent of the popular vote. In 1916, he was reelected into office in an even closer race.

Progressive measures of the Wilson presidency fall into three main categories: financial reform, business regulation, and other reforms.

Financial Reform

In 1913 Wilson pressured Congress to pass the **Underwood Tariff Act**, which lowered the tariff for the first time since the Civil War. The law also provided for a **graduated income tax**—one that taxed larger incomes at a higher rate (6 percent) than it did lower ones (1 percent). This kind of tax, which takes a bigger share the higher the income, is known as a **progressive tax**.

Another financial reform of 1913 was the creation of the **Federal Reserve Board**. It heads a national banking system divided into 12 districts, each with a Federal Reserve bank. The federal government could now (1) issue a new, sound currency—Federal Reserve notes; (2) control the amount of money in circulation; and (3) shift money from one bank to another as needed.

Business Regulation

The **Federal Trade Commission Act** of 1914 aimed to prevent unfair competition. It created a commission to investigate such practices as false advertising and mislabeling.

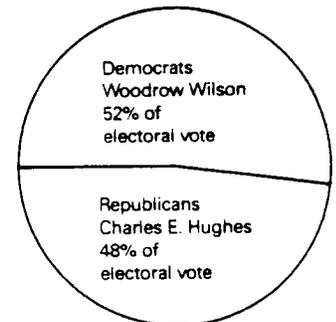
The **Clayton Antitrust Act** of 1914 strengthened government's power to control business practices that threatened competition. Among other things, it prohibited companies from price fixing and from buying stocks in competing firms. The Clayton Act tried to end the practice of using antitrust laws against unions, but later Supreme Court decisions undercut this provision.

Other Reforms

- The **Adamson Act** of 1916 set an eight-hour day for workers on railroads in interstate commerce.
- The **Federal Farm Loan Act**, also passed in 1916, made low-interest loans available to farmers.
- A third 1916 bill, the **Keating-Owen Child Labor Act**, tried to outlaw child labor. But the Supreme Court ruled the law unconstitutional in the case of *Hammer v. Dagenhart*, 1918.
- Ratification of the **19th Amendment** in 1920 gave women the right to vote.

During World War I, American priorities shifted to the war effort, and the Progressive Era came to an end. The 1920s were a time when the trend shifted away from reform and toward acceptance of society as it was.

Election of 1916



Where did the Progressives first concentrate their efforts?

2. What were two new types of city governments associated with the Progressives?

3. Explained how each the new types of city governments worked.

4. Who was Robert LaFollette and what did he do?

5. List three reforms passed by Wisconsin.

6. Name three other Progressive governors and where they served.

7. Who opposed the progressive changes?

What was the secret ballot designed to do?

9. Define initiative.

10. Define referendum.

11. Define recall.

12. Define direct primary.

13. What was the main purpose of all of these changes?

14. What did the 17th amendment do?

15. Why was this amendment passed?

16. Name three Progressive Presidents.

17. Explain Roosevelt's idea of stewardship.

18. What was Roosevelt's administration known as?



1. Who did Taft defeat in the 1908 election?

2. How did Taft compare to the "Trustbuster?"

3. What did the Supreme Court say about the size of monopolies?

4. What did the 16th Amendment begin?

5. Why did Teddy Roosevelt create a third party for the 1912 election?

6. Who were the candidates in the 1912 election?

7. What was the purpose of the Underwood Tariff Act?

8. What is a graduated (progressive) tax?

9. What is the purpose of the Federal Reserve Board?

10. What is the purpose of the Federal Trade Commission?

11. What was the purpose of the Clayton Antitrust Act?

12. What was the purpose of the Adamson Act?

13. Why did the Progressive movement end?
