Chapter 19
The Promise and Perils of Progressive Reform, 1900–1912

Learning Objectives:

After reading Chapter 19, you should be able to:

1. Explain how newcomers reacted to life in the heartland of the United States.
2. Understand the role the Mexican borderlands played in the development of the Southwest.
3. Discuss how Asian immigrants were impacted by racist exclusion.
4. Detail the influence of new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe on America.
5. Analyze the uses and abuses of science.
6. Explain what scientific management is and how it contributed to mass production.
7. Discuss how sexual morals and dating customs changed during this period.
8. Comprehend the significance of new artistic movements.
9. Explain the vice crusades and the role of muckrakers in moral reform movements.
10. Detail the struggles for women’s suffrage.
11. Understand how radical politics interacted with the labor movement.
12. Discuss what motivated resistance to reform movements.
13. Analyze the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt.
14. Explain new attitudes toward protecting and preserving nature.
15. Detail the growing power of the United States abroad.
16. Discuss the importance of President William Howard Taft.

Time Line

1900
Boxer Rebellion in China

1901
President William McKinley assassinated and Theodore Roosevelt became president

1902
Asian Exclusion Act of 1882 renewed and extended
Panama Canal project approved by Congress

1905
Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) established
Niagara Movement began by W.E.B. DuBois
1906
San Francisco earthquake
Theodore Roosevelt labeled investigative journalists “muckrakers”

1908
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) established
William Howard Taft elected president

1909
“Uprising of the Twenty Thousand” strike by garment workers in New York

1910
Mann Act makes it illegal to transport women across state lines for “immoral purposes”
State of Washington granted women the right to vote

1911
Frederick Winslow Taylor wrote *The Principles of Scientific Management*
Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire
California gave women the vote

1920
Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote

**Chapter Overview**

The first years of the twentieth century saw the United States change dramatically as industrialization changed lives, landscapes, and culture. In response, ordinary people fought against abuses, while a number of reform activities led to legal changes. Because of the wide range of reform, historians call this period the “Progressive Era.”

**I. Migration and Immigration: The Changing Face of the Nation**

In the first decade of the twentieth century, almost 9 million immigrants entered the nation. Once here, many immigrants found that America was not all they had hoped for. They had to deal with slums, sweatshop and factory jobs with long hours, low wages, and terrible working conditions.

Many native-born Americans greeted the newcomers with hostility, thinking them “racially inferior” or as unfair competition for jobs. Other Americans feared that the immigrants would become a burden on taxpayers. Given all this, it is not surprising that one-third of all immigrants to the U.S. returned to their home countries.
Most immigrants settled in cities, as did an increasing number of rural Americans. From 1900-1910, more than four million Americans moved from east to west, while eighty thousand migrated from the south.

A. The Heartland: Land of the Newcomers

The upper Midwest saw the greatest concentration of immigrants. Newcomers from central Europe and Italy populated the growing midwestern cities. In northern Minnesota, the “iron range” became home to over 35 different European immigrant groups who were drawn by jobs in mining.

B. The Southwest: Mexican Borderlands

When, in 1904, a Catholic foundling home allowed Mexican Catholic families to adopt Irish orphans in Arizona, Anglo women pushed their husbands to seize the children from their new families and place them with white families. Despite a lengthy court battle going all the way to the Supreme Court, the children were never returned.

This incident illustrates the class and racial conflicts of this region. That long-time Mexicans residents were being joined by recent arrivals from Mexico caused the Anglos to grow ever more hateful. Throughout this period, especially after the Mexican Revolution, hostility to Mexicans grew.

C. Asian Immigration and the Impact of Exclusion

Between 1890 and 1920, the Chinese community declined by nearly half, as the lack of Chinese women meant males returned to China or died here childless. Only the wives of Chinese men already in the U.S., teachers, students, or merchants could enter the United States. Individual Chinese could immigrate if they had family in America, so resourceful Chinese would create “paper sons” and “paper fathers.” To prevent this, federal officials would keep Chinese newcomers for up to a year on Angel Island, California, as virtual prisoners, hoping to break their stories.

Japanese immigrants were allowed to enter, however, and 300,000 entered between 1890 and 1920, drawn by well-paid jobs in Hawaii and California. Even though Japanese represented less than 1 percent of the population in California, native-born Americans treated them with extreme hostility. A protest against the segregation of Japanese children in San Francisco’s schools led to an international incident. President Theodore Roosevelt interceded to convince San Francisco to change this policy and, in return, the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” of 1907 saw Japan agreeing to limit the number of migrants.
D. Newcomers from Southern and Eastern Europe

East European Jews were one of the largest groups of immigrants in the early twentieth century. By 1920, there were 4 million Jews, mainly from eastern Europe. Fleeing segregation and anti-Semitic riots, or pogroms, Jews fled Tsarist Russia for America.

Italian immigration was highest between 1900 and 1914. Although a third of Italy’s population migrated between 1870 and 1920, not all chose the United States, while those who did brought their families, Catholic religion, and culture.

II. Work, Science, and Leisure

A. Reform and Science: An Uneasy Alliance

New scientific advances led to improvements in health and medical standards improved. Still, crowding and lack of sanitation fostered the spread of disease, particularly among the poor who typically lacked access to clean water and medical care as well as suffering exposure to other chronic problems of poverty. The case of Mary Mallon, vilified as “Typhoid Mary,” illustrates how social problems would be blamed on individuals despite larger apparent causes.

Blaming social problems on allegedly flawed individuals or groups led to the eugenics movement, which pushed for systematic breeding to improve America’s racial stock. Based on pseudo-science and white racism, eugenicists argued that social problems were caused by inferior individuals and groups with inherited tendencies towards crime and lack of discipline. Some states, like Indiana, even passed laws that called for sterilization of thousands of men and even more women whom officials deemed “feeble-minded.” This practice was upheld by the Supreme Court in the 1920s.

B. Scientific Management and Mass Production

In 1911, Frederick Winslow Taylor wrote The Principles of Scientific Management, a work that detailed a system for increased production in industrial factories. Henry Ford was one of the most successful businessmen to utilize Taylor’s system. In 1913, Ford became an assembly-line production, which increased production while cutting costs. This would allow Ford to sell the Model T automobile for only $360 by 1916. Narrow-minded and bigoted, Ford fought union drives with a private police force and later became an active supporter of Adolf Hitler.
C. New Amusements

Consumer culture was the flipside of business culture in the early twentieth century and it represented a change in leisure-time activities as well as in cultural values. Largely the creation of newcomers and “outsiders,” this popular culture would come to define America to the rest of the world. For example, it was Jewish immigrants who were to develop the motion picture industry that later marked Hollywood as a center of American popular culture. African American music began to be enjoyed by immigrants and even native-born whites.

D. “Sex O’Clock in America”

Sexual beliefs and behaviors of Americans changed dramatically, with unchaperoned dating gaining acceptance among the middle class. Automobiles gave young couples more privacy and physical contact became more common. On the other hand, immigrants often brought traditional systems of courtship with them to the new country. Regardless of background, the young challenged the sexual codes of the past. Young working women looked for fun in their leisure hours, while increasing sexual intimacy reflected new expectations for sexual satisfaction.

As divorce increased, marriages also increased and often at a younger age. Some women formed lifelong attachments to other women in relations described as “Boston marriages.” Homosexuals gained greater visibility in the cities, where they gathered at bars and clubs in certain neighborhoods such as Greenwich Village in New York City.

E. Artists Respond to the New Era

Artists contributed to exploring and presenting the new urban industrial landscape. Some painters began to choose working-class subjects for their paintings, while an artistic movement known as realism infused the writing of fiction. Photography, as practiced in the photo-documentaries of Lewis Hine, exhibited a new realism by showing immigrants, industrial work, and urban life. Popular music flourished, especially jazz with its roots in African, slave, spiritual, and ragtime musical traditions.
II. Reformers and Radicals

A. Muckrakers, Moral Reform, and Vice Crusades

Early in the century, investigative reporters began to expose both the evils of industrial society, such as dishonesty in business, and politics, such as Ida Tarbell’s exposé of Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company and Lincoln Steffens articles on urban political corruption. One of the most important of these so-called “muckrakers,” as Theodore Roosevelt labeled them in 1906, was Upton Sinclair, who wrote The Jungle. In The Jungle, Sinclair tells the story of immigrant workers in the meat-packing industry. Although the author hoped that the book would awaken interest in socialism or at least in worker rights, most readers were more concerned about the vivid descriptions of tainted or adulterated food.

Child labor was used in fields and factories throughout the nation. Although some parents felt that work taught children discipline, the sorts of jobs available to children were often dangerous and unhealthy. Reformers attempted to improve the conditions of child labor or eliminate it altogether. In most of the northern states, reformers were ultimately successful in restricting labor by children although in the South, child labor often persisted. Unable to reform working conditions for all, reformers fought for special protection for female workers and the debate concerning this continued throughout the century.

Reformers, who were overwhelmingly native-born Anglo-Saxon Protestants, also hoped to eliminate vice. Vice Crusaders promoted zoning laws to keep entertainment out of residential neighborhoods as well as fought to eliminate prostitution and police public gathering spots. The passage of the Mann Act in 1910 made it illegal to transport women across state lines for “immoral purposes.” The government used this law not just to fight prostitution but also to punish interracial sex. The most famous latter use of the Act was in the conviction of Jack Johnson, and African American boxer and heavyweight champion who married a white woman, when federal agents convinced a white prostitute to testify against Johnson.

B. Woman Suffrage

The movement for women’s rights gained momentum at the start of the twentieth century. Inspired by the militant English suffrage movement, women developed new tactics and made new alliances. These efforts resulted in several western states granting women the vote and, in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gave American women the franchise.

Largely a movement of white middle-class women, the suffrage movement often made alliances with conservative and even racist men. While many minority women supported the suffrage movement, they failed in their efforts to get white women to denounce lynching or even to accept them as equals.
C. Radical Politics and the Labor Movement

While progressives thought the American capitalist system was basically good with a few flaws, radicals felt passionately that the system itself was the problem. This radicalism took many forms, from the anarchism of Emma Goldman to the socialism of Eugene V. Debs. Although socialism was never as strong in the United States as in other industrialized nations, Debs was to receive nearly a million votes for president in 1912 and hundreds of Socialists were elected to local office.

Another major source of labor radicalism was the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), formed in 1905. The IWW combined socialists, anarchists, and militant trade unionists into an organization that accepted women, blacks, immigrants, and others excluded from AFL unions. Most successful among the unskilled and migratory laborers of the West, the IWW never had more than 150,000 members at any one time.

D. Resistance to Racism

There was nothing progressive about this era for nonwhite Americans. Most reformers were indifferent, if not hostile, towards racial minorities. In addition, most blacks lived in the rural South, far from Progressive urban strongholds. In the first decade of the twentieth century, nearly 100 lynchings took place yearly, the victims being largely African Americans. Overcoming racism in various forms, African Americans formed a number of organizations that flourished, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

IV. Expanding National Power

A. Theodore Roosevelt: The “Rough Rider” As President

Becoming president after William McKinley’s assassination in September 1901, Theodore Roosevelt believed in a strong American military and economic presence abroad. Expanding the federal government, he favored big business and free trade, yet fought for certain limitations on corporate power. Roosevelt believed that government regulation would help keep big business strong.

Along with strengthening the state, President Roosevelt fostered American nationalism by arguing that all immigrants should be considered equal to native-born citizens, provided they renounced their original homeland and culture.
B. Protecting and Preserving the Natural World

Air pollution was a problem in cities and industry was depleting natural resources in the countryside. More than any previous president, Theodore Roosevelt used the federal government to push both preservation and conservation. Roosevelt doubled the number of national parks, created new national monuments, and established over 50 wildlife refuges.

C. Expanding National Power Abroad

President Roosevelt believed that the U.S. should be an imperial power and dominate those nations and peoples he considered less “civilized.” In his quest to expand American power abroad, he sent troops to China in 1900 and pushed for the construction of the Panama Canal a few years later. Roosevelt continued the war against Filipino rebels and had the U.S. military establish firm colonial rule in the Philippines.

D. William Howard Taft: The One-Term Progressive

When Roosevelt honored a pledge not to seek re-election in 1908, Republicans turned to William Howard Taft. Taft, who had been hand-picked by Roosevelt, was expected to act to fulfill the former president’s reform agenda. Over time, however, he fell out with Roosevelt and began to turn towards the conservative old guard of the Republican Party.

Theodore Roosevelt returned to politics to challenge Taft for the Republican nomination in 1912. Although Roosevelt was by far the most popular candidate, the old guard dominated the Republican convention and re-nominated Taft. The next day, Roosevelt and his supporters formed the Progressive Party. The Democrats nominated Woodrow Wilson, a Progressive governor of New Jersey, while Eugene V. Debs ran for the Socialists. All the candidates, save Taft, argued on the need for reform but argued about the means to achieve it. Wilson won the election with 42 percent of the vote, but the combined total of the reformers was 75 percent, an overwhelming mandate for reform.

Identification

*Explain the significance of each of the following:*

1. Frederick Winslow Taylor:

2. Emma Goldman:

3. Henry Ford:
4. Triangle Shirtwaist fire:

5. Progressive Era:


7. “Ashcan School” of art:

8. Industrial Workers of the World:

9. “Big Bill” Haywood:

10. NAACP:

11. Eugene V. Debs:

12. “Dollar Diplomacy”:

13. Progressive Party:

14. Niagara Movement (1905):

15. William Howard Taft:

16. Women’s Trade Union League:

17. *Sister Carrie*:
18. “Boston marriages”:

19. Muckrakers:

20. Helen Keller:

21. Mann Act (1910):

22. *The Crisis*:

23. Booker T. Washington:

24. Hiram W. Johnson:

25. “Bull Moose” Party:

**Multiple Choice Questions:**

1. The Mexican Revolution had the effect of causing
   A. fewer Mexican citizens to enter the United States.
   B. increased migration to the southwest of the U.S.
   C. the Mexican-American War.
   D. all of the above.
   E. none of the above.

2. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
   A. was renewed and extended in 1902.
   B. was repealed in 1901 by President Theodore Roosevelt.
   C. is generally said to have encouraged Chinese immigrants to the U.S.
   D. only applied to Chinese from Hong Kong.
   E. none of the above.
3. Among the most numerous of the “new” immigrants in the early twentieth century were
   A. Chinese.
   B. Japanese.
   C. Jews.
   D. French.
   E. English.

4. The majority of Italians who came to the United States
   A. were fleeing from pogroms.
   B. returned to Italy within the year.
   C. were Protestants and Jews.
   D. arrived with their families and were committed Catholics.
   E. had fled religious persecution by the Protestant Italian government.

5. Most supporters of eugenics
   A. believed in theories of white racial superiority.
   B. agreed with Theodore Roosevelt about the danger of “race suicide.”
   C. thought the “feeble-minded” should be sterilized.
   D. all of the above.
   E. none of the above.

6. Frederick Winslow Taylor
   A. was seen as a dangerous socialist leader.
   B. decried the alienation of modern people from nature and their true feelings.
   C. wrote The Principles of Scientific Management.
   D. was a founder of modern social reform in the United States.
   E. none of the above.

7. Henry Ford
   A. did not invent the automobile.
   B. fought unionization with a private police force.
   C. was an active supporter of Adolf Hitler.
   D. built a nostalgic theme park in Deerfield Village, Michigan.
   E. all of the above.

8. Young working women who exchanged physical intimacies for “treats” were called
   A. prostitutes.
   B. charity girls.
   C. Boston wives.
   D. lots of fun.
   E. all of the above.
9. The Mann Act (1910) was used to
A. police prostitution.
B. sentence world heavyweight champion Jack Johnson to a year in prison.
C. regulate interracial sex.
D. all of the above.
E. none of the above.

10. The Socialist Party under Eugene V. Debs
A. received nearly a million votes in the 1912 Presidential election.
B. never elected anyone to local office.
C. excluded immigrants from their organization.
D. was opposed to trade unions as a restraint of free trade.
E. was almost completely funded by France.

11. In the first decade of the twentieth century, lynching was
A. continuing, with about 100 people lynched a year.
B. almost nonexistent outside the northern states.
C. opposed firmly by almost all white Protestant reformers except Jane Addams.
D. all of the above.
E. none of the above.

12. Which of the following was Theodore Roosevelt NOT interested in?
A. expanded U.S. military power overseas
B. limitations on corporate power
C. weakening big business
D. fostering economic competition
E. fighting socialism.

13. Which of the following was NOT done by Theodore Roosevelt?
A. troops sent to China to help suppress the Boxer Rebellion
B. Puerto Rico given her independence
C. Panama Canal project pushed through Congress
D. Filipino nationalist revolt crushed
E. an income tax established.

14. William Howard Taft was
A. President of the United States.
B. the first U.S. governor-general of the Philippines.
C. appointed Secretary of War in 1904 by Roosevelt.
D. all of the above.
E. none of the above.
15. In 1912, Theodore Roosevelt was the presidential nominee of which political party?
   A. Republican Party
   B. Socialist Party
   C. Democratic Party
   D. Progressive Party
   E. “Real Republican” Party

MAP QUESTION:

Map 19.1 on page 645 shows the foreign-born population as of 1900. After studying the map, what conclusions can you draw about where immigrants settled? Why wasn’t immigration more evenly spread across the country?

CONNECTING HISTORY

Imagine you were Rose Rosenfeld Freedman in 1911. Explain what it must have been like to be at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company the day of the fire. Now, explain what it is like to think back on that day at the age of 107.

INTERPRETING HISTORY

Based on the discussion of Finns, analyze what the concept of “whiteness” actually means. What purpose does it serve?

Answers to Multiple Choice Questions

1. B
2. A
3. C
4. D
5. D
6. C
7. E
8. B
9. D
10. A
11. A
12. C
13. B
14. D
15. D