

# Negative aspects and disadvantages of the progressive era

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The Progressive Era from 1900-1920 was not effective in bringing about true progressive reforms at the national level because it had been a slow process by the presidents co-opting the ideas of true progressives, limited trust-busting, which led to corporations expanding abroad, and continuous racial injustice towards African-Americans. Even though there were some improvements made, such as women's suffrage, the reform of unsanitary practices in the food industry, and child labor laws, these changes occurred at a conservative pace, not at all radically. The Progressive Era brought about limited reform movements gradually.

The true progressive movement began with muckrakers, journalists who exposed scandals, corruption, and injustice to public view. They opened the discussion for a better society and first targeted the trusts, particularly the railroads. They considered them dangerously powerful and deeply corrupt. Muckrakers advocated for an uncorrupted politics, which had been a central problem during the Gilded Age. Upton Sinclair was also one of the true progressives, intent on radically changing how poor urban workers lived. His novel, *The Jungle* described horrific conditions in the meatpacking industry in Chicago. As in Document Bin 1906, it describes how the meatpacking process was completely unsanitary, and during the process, 'gathered dirt, splinters, floor filth, and the expectoration of tuberculosis and other diseased workers.' Just as these descriptions were included in the jungle, this led to the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. However, Sinclair's novel was initially supposed to convince Americans that socialism was their only hope (as in *The Jungle*, the protagonist finds socialism as his way of escaping poverty).

As well as meatpacking problems occurring in factories, children were working in factories at a very young age. Reformers such as Jane Addams stated in Document C, '...so caught in the admiration of the astonishing achievements of modern industry that they forget the children themselves?' In 1916 Wilson supported the Keating-Owen Act, the first federal law regulating child labor. Although efforts to place limitations on child labor occurred, they were routinely thwarted by the courts and invalidated it in 1918. It is even shown that the percentage of eligible voters decrease from the 1900s to the 1920s. Although there were improvements made, it was not the initial goal of the true progressives that had sparked the movement.

As the progressive movement began to spread, Theodore Roosevelt began co-opting the progressive movement with his campaign. It was a way to gain votes; however, created a new more conservation progressive view. While he co-opted some reforms of the progressives he did not fulfill all of the progressive goals. It was even stated that Roosevelt was not a trust-buster in heart; however, he did bust a few trusts that he considered bad. Roosevelt is depicted as a hunter, conquering the bad trusts, and letting the meek good trusts alive. While Roosevelt busted some trusts, he did so just to appeal to the people, not because he was truly against the corruptness. However, he was the first president to use the Sherman Anti-trust act against the employers, instead of breaking up strikers.

Wilson also signed the Clayton Antitrust Act in 1914 which stated that it was the agency would have the authority to launch prosecution against unfair trade practices. However, Wilson did little to protect it from conservative

assaults, which greatly weakened it. Roosevelt had other attempts to co-opt the ideas of progressives where he states that direct vote of the people instead of by indirect vote through the Electoral College, would lessen corruption.

A bit ironic, was Taft, who was supposedly also a trust-buster but spread corporations abroad by using the Dollar Diplomacy. Although presidents during the Progressive Era strive to co-opt some progressive reforms, it led to breaking away from the original complete anti-monopoly definition of progressivism. Lastly, socially there was an improvement for women. Middle-class women broke away from sticking to mainly domestic responsibilities, gained their own salaries, and even some advocated for the vote. A woman stands beside a sign advocating for women suffrage. Even though the women were organizing for the cause, Wilson refused to support the movement for national woman suffrage.

Most of all, as the muckrakers advocated for social justice, a majority of African Americans were still treated horribly. DuBois explains how the blacks returning from fighting in WWI expected that there would be more equality. However, ' America represents and gloats in lynching, disfranchisement, caste, brutality and devilish insult...and is yet a shameful land.' African-Americans returned from fighting and saw a lot of white resistance of rights for blacks, especially in the South, it led to brutal violence when both sides fought back against each other. Even as reform movements improved things such as Women's suffrage, it was a slow process, and even slower for the African-Americans.

In conclusion, although the Progressive Era had been marked with reforms and an improved lifestyle for many, it proved to be a slow conservative process. The movement moved farther and farther away from what it had originally had been when presidents began co-opting them to appeal to the people. America still had a long way even though some reform movements were successful.