

The progressive era history essay

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



The Progressive era in the United States which lasted from 1890 to 1920 was known for two things, namely that it was a period of progressive social movement and change that sought to reform many aspects of the country such as the government and economy.

It was also known as the era of Prohibition where in their zeal to completely revolutionize all aspects of American society the Progressives, as they were known, actually caused a large percentage of the population to turn to illegal and downright criminal behavior. This divergent set of events came as a result of the various reform movements that Progressives both within and outside of the government were trying to achieve.

It must be noted that initially the Progressive movement began as a social movement within various local areas which slowly progressed towards the national level. It attempted to address issues such as poverty, racism and class warfare under the assumption that most of society's problems could actually be "fixed" by initiating social and political reforms (Leonard, 207).

This involved providing a far reaching education system for all classes, a safe environment for communities and families through political and social reform and finally an efficient workplace where anyone who wished to work would be able to earn a decent living (Leonard, 210).

The Progressive movement actually had far reaching effects which can still be felt to this day such as setting into motion concepts related to corporate monitoring, allowing women and minorities to vote and finally combating public fears against the supposed evils of immigration. While such methods of attempted reform can be considered largely positive it was only when the

Progressives attempted to tackle vices that led to the movement's greatest mistake.

The era of Prohibition, which consisted of outlawing the sale and manufacturing of alcohol, was actually started by various religious groups who rode on the coattails of the Progressive movement stating the “social harm” that alcohol had on the general population. As a result, the ban on alcohol achieved success by 1917 resulting in a general ban on its sale and production.

Despite the ban on alcohol a significant percentage of the local population still demanded the product which as a result caused many of them to either illegally manufacture it themselves or resort to smuggling it into the U. S (Beshears, 198). Millions of dollars were spent on preventing alcohol from reaching U. S. borders which further encouraged people to smuggle even more into the country due to the high prices they commanded.

In fact the era of Prohibition actually caused more alcohol to be consumed as compared to when the ban was not in place (Beshears, 200). As a result of the overzealousness of the Progressives a large percentage of the American population could actually be considered criminals which is more or less a slap in the face for a movement that tried to establish social and political reform.

Based on the facts presented in this paper it can be said that the Progressive movement was both positive and negative. Positive in that it was able to establish sufficient social, economic and political reform ideas that are apparent even today but it can also be considered negative since as a result

of its overzealousness in “ reforming” society it actually caused a period in American history characterized by a large percentage of the population turning to illegal actions.

Beshears, Laura. “ Honorable Style in Dishonorable Times American Gangsters of the 1920s and 1930s.” *Journal of American Culture* 33. 3 (2010): 197-206. EBSCO. Web.

Leonard, Thomas C. “ Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19. 4 (2005): 207-224. EBSCO. Web.