

Progressive movement term paper examples

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Introduction

The American people from the 1870s found themselves living in an era characterized by instability and transition. The society experienced changes in lifestyle and traditional values and views were being challenged. The response to this period of transition and instability resulted into a movement towards reforms and an ever-increasing need for control and order amongst people. During this period, American journalists, politicians, professionals, and volunteers mobilized on behalf of reforms aimed at dealing with a variety of social problems associated with industrialization. The major focus of this paper is on women's participation in the progressive movement, starting from 1901 towards the end of 1917.

During this period, women activists, especially from middle and prosperous backgrounds accentuated the special contribution that women could make in addressing these issues. With issues such as child labor, public health and safety, and women working under dangerous conditions so prevalent, women were better placed to address the issues. Majoring on issues that appealed to women as mothers and wives, and endorsing the notion that women could adequately tackle such concerns led to emergence of female activists. One activist was Carrie Chapman Catt, who served as president of the National American Women Suffrage Association helped amend the constitution thereby allowing women to vote.. With the increase in focus on social reforms, some women activists successfully secured employment position in state and government institutions even before they had the right to vote. They created new opportunities for paid labor in careers like social work and public health. These women activists also highlighted on the social

needs of vulnerable women and children in an attempt to create support for early American welfare state.

Despite of sex, activists did not always support same reforms, nor did they agree on the nature of issues, but as part of the progressive movement, concerns of these activists shared some basic characteristics. According to historian Daniel Rodgers, progressive movement revolved around three clusters of ideas. The first involved discontent with escalating corporate monopoly, while the second involved the increasing conviction that individualism was not good for the appreciation of social bonds and had to be tampered with in order to progress as a society. Additionally, progressives believed that the modern ideas on social planning and efficiency could provide solution to prevailing social problems. Even though the ideas fail to present a coherent ideology, Rodgers argues that they tended to show distrust with unregulated individual power. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, sporadic economic downturns signaled the dangers associated with relying solely on the mechanisms of a free market economy to ensure general prosperity.

Disquiet about social problems was not new for women. From the antebellum era, middle-class black and white women participated in various forms of civic activities aimed at addressing the social welfare of women and the less fortunate. Before the civil war, abolition, temperance, and moral reforms activities dominated the women's political landscape. By the late 1870s, women had gained considerable influence by working with national organizations such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which addressed the plight of

single women in America. During the same period, W. E. B. Du Bois, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) advocated for enlistment of Black Americans in the army during the World War I. The Progressive era brought in a moral-reform agenda motivated by many women, with organizations such as WCTU, which amplified their activities in response to prohibition and ban on prostitution.

However, the issues surrounding social welfare gained massive support after 1890. The factors that contributed to such sense of urgency include the impacts of industrialization that led to influx of slums across American cities, increase in labor strife, and the influx of immigrants from Europe. Middle-class and affluent women started addressing how these social problems affected women and children. The national General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) sensitized local women's clubs on how to address the issues associated with urbanization. On the other hand, many black American women's clubs affiliated with the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) engaged in ensuring that the government addressed the needs and welfare of African Americans. Another important organization was The National Congress of Mothers (later the Parent Teacher Association) instituted in 1897 to address the needs of American families and the responsibility of women in addressing those needs. Additionally, activist women throughout the nation focused their effort on improving public schools, especially in poor neighborhoods.

In order to address the problems associated with urbanization, American women copied what their counterparts in Europe had adopted in addressing such issues. One such efforts involved an American woman who visited

England in the 1880s and got inspired by Toynbee Hall, a settlement houses located in poverty-stricken area in East End, London. These efforts of people at Toynbee to bridge class divide inspired Jane Adams, who founded Chicago's Hull House in 1889, as well as graduates from Smith College who founded the College Settlement House in New York around the same period. Throughout the century, the settlement house movement received significant growth. These houses served as residence for middle-class and prosperous women, and some men who chose to stay close to the poor people they helped. Only activist women resided in the settlement house but their less fortunate neighbors visited the houses and participating in classes and clubs, including day school for children. These houses also sent volunteers to the communities to offer services, especially in the area of public health. Workers for settlement houses and other women reformers also fought for public milk stations in slums to help reduce infant mortality. Resorting to settlement houses appealed to women who wanted to pursue non-traditional lifestyle, where they could chose the best meaningful way of living. By 1895, the core Hull House community consisted of Jane Adams, one of the most celebrated female reformers of her day and Florence Kelley, the first State Factory Investigator in Illinois, who later moved to New York as the head of the National Consumers League (NCL). These hoses also attracted Dr. Alice Hamilton, the founder of industrial medicine in America and Julia Lathrop, a reformer in the field of child welfare. Historian Sklar Kathryn writes that the Hull House community provided women with what none could provide for them including friendship, livelihood, contact with the world, and how to change it. Only a few women elected to stay in the

settlement houses, but many women staying in towns and cities worked as volunteers for these houses, including Eleanor Roosevelt, who was a volunteer at the Riverside Settlement before marrying Franking.

The work of these women did not end at the settlement houses as they engaged in a variety of social initiatives. One of such initiatives involved endeavors to improve the working conditions of factories in America, especially textile and garments factories that employed majority of immigrants at low pay. Such organizations engaged in human rights activities including addressing the issues of longer working hours as well child. In addition, they requested state government to provide inspectors that could ensure that factories followed the new labor laws. Some progressive women also resorted to empowering poor women through collective bargaining rather than campaigning on their behalf. This was however difficult as many people viewed them as marginalized workers, rather than breadwinners who had families to feed.

As other women concentrated in philanthropic activities, some persuaded the government to look into financial needs of poor, single mothers who had children attending school. For example, some women activists campaigned for the government to give financial assistance to widowed mothers. Given the high mortality among males due to poor working conditions and work-related accidents, the increasing number of poor widows was a major problem. By the early nineteenth century, several welfare experts concluded that it would be better for poor children to remain at home, rather than go to orphanage, which had been the case in the nineteenth century. Their efforts were fruitful, as many states had enacted some pension program for

mothers by 1920. These state-funded programs marked the birth of the Aid to Dependent Children Program, which later became federal law.

Conclusion

The achievements of women during the progressive era resulted into impacts that outlasted the postwar backlash. Many young women got employment in government institutions such as Women's Bureau and Children's Bureau. Issues of social welfare took a center stage in 1933 following the economic impacts of the great depression. Progressive movement orchestrated by women continued with their role after Franklin Roosevelt assumed power in March 1933 due to the support of progressive women.

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