

# Good essay on the progressive era

Politics



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The progressives encompassed a wide range viewpoint to economic and social problems that cropped up because of fast industrialization and urbanization that began in late 19th century. Progressivism began a social movement to address social needs but later grew into full-fledged reform movement. The early progressives varied depending with the cause they championed. The progressives were individuals and organizations that were dedicated to overall society change. The changes they advocated included health care reforms, safer environment, workers welfare, quality education, immigrant's welfare, efficient workplace, good leadership and increase public participation in democratic processes. They viewed the equity amongst all people as natural and necessary. All these were aimed to effect social change -make world a better place. Prominent Progressives included Jane Addams, Frederick Taylor, Amoskeag Mills, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Roosevelt, William E. B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington, and Eugene Debs. Altogether these reformers were powerful voices that championed reform agenda from different fronts. They concentrated on exposing evils of society like corrupt government and corporate practices, segregation of immigrant, child labor, stringent women rights, poor education and racism. In the 1900, the city had become the symbol of the new America. There brought immigration from rural to urban and that sparked explosive urban growth. There were six cities with over half a million dwellers by 1900. This rapid urbanization brought the problem of overcrowding, poor public health, pollution and juvenile crime (Toward an Urban Society 2-6). These prompted resurgent nativism. Nativist formed organization to try and limit immigration. By the year 1920, the majority Americans resided in cities, and nearly half of them were descendants of the community who had arrived for economic

reasons, following the revolution. Urban political party machines largely built by diverse immigrant population and headed by “bosses”. A number of bosses were notoriously corrupt like William Tweed of New York, who ruled the city by a chaotic blend of money and politics. They plundered from the public and traded services for votes. Some leaders like George Washington Plunkitt coined the phrase “honest graft” that simply entails pursuing public interest in tandem with one’s personal interest. Most of the “bosses” stayed in power because they had good organizational skills and helped immigrants (Toward an Urban Society, 1870-1900 11-12).

Tension within the progressivism manifested by the co-relation between ideals of social justice and social control. On one hand progressives wanted social justice, for example, they wanted better welfare for the workforce and also wanted to prevent discrimination among women and immigrants. On the other hand, they wanted to have control over social matters like pushing for prohibitions, legalization and other mechanisms of regulation. Thereby trying to make the society agree with your thoughts on what is good or bad. If you succeed then you control the society to a certain extent, and this brings conflict because you want people to make their individual decisions. However, there were fruits of progressivism and social justice observed. There was widespread transformation of government and public sectors at all levels through intelligent planning of development. During this progressive era, problems were forthcoming but specialist fought them. Racism, labor conflicts not completely eradicated. Firm social and economic gains including universal education were apparent. There was widespread optimism that social experimental are achievable. Big firm administrators saw some level of government regulations as another way of promoting

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order and efficiency. Favorable regulation brings about safer and more stable condition for community and economy to thrive. Policies could restore confidence to prospective clients, open markets, directive working conditions that smaller competitors could not provide, or impose efficient measures that aggressive pressures would otherwise weaken. The strides in social control were brought about by the laws enacted. They included; “ New York Tenement House Law (1901), Newlands Act (1902), Hepburn Act (1906), Pure Food and Drug Act (1906), Meat Inspection Act (1906) Sixteenth Amendment (1913), Seventeenth Amendment (1913) and Underwood-Simmons Tariff Act (1913), Federal Reserve Act (1913), Federal Trade Commission Act (1914), Harrison Act (1914), Smith-Lever Act (1914), Keating-Owen Act (1916), Eighteenth Amendment (1919) and Nineteenth Amendment (1920)” (Progressive Era America 73).

Muckrakers –one of Progressive Organization was displeased with rampancy of business exploitations, public corruption and societal evils in the American society. They addressed these vices through investigative journalism and exposed in McClure’s Magazine of 1902. Frederick Taylor after observing wastefulness of time, energy and resources in the business environment, he came up with a scientific management system that included splitting work processes into many tasks thereby increasing efficiency. Roosevelt came up with federal regulation of the economy that ensured wasteful competition practices replaced by efficiency. Women’s Trade Union League formed in 1903 tasked itself in uniting women and their associates to promote union membership and social transformation. They managed to achieve women’s incorporation to the workforce and suffrage. Amoskeag Mills felt that there was an evident disconnect in labor management. He forged a family-based

approach to human resource management. The approach incorporated the whole family in the employment package. Some of the benefits enjoyed included recreation, health care and home-purchasing plans (Progressive Era America 20). Jane Addams –a settlement house movement attempted to improve the livelihood of immigrants through community work and civil advocacy in urban settlements. By 1900, 31 states and territories had obligatory edification laws geared towards universal education. The Purpose of public education was to prepare people for life and work in industrialized society with emphasis on practical education for women and African American (Toward an Urban Society, 1870-1900 18-20)

Another predicament that progressives observed was uncontrolled development and utilization of natural resources. Conservationists favored proficient management and regulation of the natural endowments. Roosevelt, a renowned reformist, introduced the first comprehensive national conservation policy (Progressive Era America 57). It entrenched conservation as a wise use of natural resources. The threat of substandard products was real, and these bore progressives like National consumers' League in 1898 to monitor safety of consumer products. The publication of a socialist like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* revealed anomalies in the Meatpacking industry prompting a federal investigation of the same. These brought forth Meat Inspection Act that outlined guidelines to be followed in sanitary Meatpacking and required government inspection of meat products. After Samuel Hopkins Adams had uncovered deceitful claims in nonprescription medicine, the federal government enacted The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 abolishing false marketing and unsafe additives in food. In settlement Houses many of the workers were women, classical and

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practical education for poor introduced. The depression of 1893 reveals insufficiency of private charity, professionalism in social work and new efforts to understand poverty source and increased call for government intervention. “ Reformers turned to state and federal government for remedies to social ills”(Towards an Urban Society, 1870-1900 31). Popular politics declined, and interest groups got positive legislation through lobbying. Cities reformed through creation of professional, nonpolitical public services with elected commissioners replaced by appointed officials. State regulatory commissions formed to scrutinize business conducts. Through progressive spirit and hopefulness was disrupted during the First World War, they successfully attained transformations to a large extent with certain practices apparent up to date.

## **Works Cited**

Progressive Era America (n. d.): n. pag. Web.

Toward an Urban Society, 1870 - 1900 (n. d.): n. pag. Web.