

Progressive Era 7.3

SSUSH13 Evaluate efforts to reform American society and politics in the Progressive Era.

Document Analysis 1

Progressivism: The political orientation of those who favor progress toward better conditions in government and society (<http://define.ansme.com/words/p/progressivism.html>)

Progressive: A person believing in moderate political change and social improvement through political action (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

a. Describe the influence of muckrakers on affecting change by bringing attention to social problems.

Muckrakers

The term “**muckraker**” originated from a speech given by **President Theodore Roosevelt** in which he praised journalists for their role in uncovering corruption and problems often hidden from society. Through their writing in well-circulated newspapers and books that were published during the time period, an awareness of underlying societal problems drove demands for reform from the public and government officials.

Muckraker: Jacob Riis

One area where progressives called for reform was in the living conditions of poor, urban laborers and immigrants. One of the key figures in this reform movement was **Jacob Riis**. Riis, himself an immigrant from Denmark, wrote books like *How the Other Half Lives* that exposed the horrible conditions under which immigrants worked and lived. His writings revealed the cramped space, filthy conditions, and often dangerous hazards that existed in inner city tenements (small, low-income apartments lived in and often shared by more than one family). Riis' efforts contributed largely to New York passing its first laws aimed at improving urban tenements.

Muckraker: Upton Sinclair

“Perhaps no muckraker caused as great a stir as **Upton Sinclair**. An avowed Socialist, Sinclair hoped to illustrate the horrible effects of capitalism on workers in the Chicago meatpacking industry. His bone-chilling account, *The Jungle*, detailed workers sacrificing their fingers and nails by working with acid, losing limbs, catching diseases, and toiling long hours in cold, cramped conditions. He hoped the public outcry would be so fierce that reforms would soon follow.

The clamor that rang throughout America was not, however, a response to the workers' plight. Sinclair also uncovered the contents of the products being sold to the general public. Spoiled meat was covered with chemicals to hide the smell. Skin, hair, stomach, ears, and nose were ground up and packaged as head cheese. Rats climbed over warehouse meat, leaving piles of excrement behind.

Sinclair said that he aimed for America's heart and instead hit its stomach. Even President Roosevelt, who coined the derisive term ‘muckraker,’ was propelled to act. Within months, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act to curb these sickening abuses.”

Source: ushistory.org

b. Examine and explain the roles of women in reform movements.

Women in Social Reform Movement

Jane Addams

In addition to the muckrakers, there were other notable reformers as well. Many of these reformers were women. In fact, women became major players in the progressive movement. **Jane Addams** (nicknamed the "mother of social work") opened **Hull House** as a settlement house in Chicago. Hull Houses were houses established in poor neighborhoods where social activists would live and from which they would offer assistance to immigrants and underprivileged citizens. By 1910, there were more than 400 settlement houses in the United States. Hull House served as a launching pad for investigations into economic, political, and social conditions in the city. It also provided needed help and education for the poor and immigrants, and eventually helped fight for and win new child labor laws and other legislation meant to help those in need.

Ida Tarbell

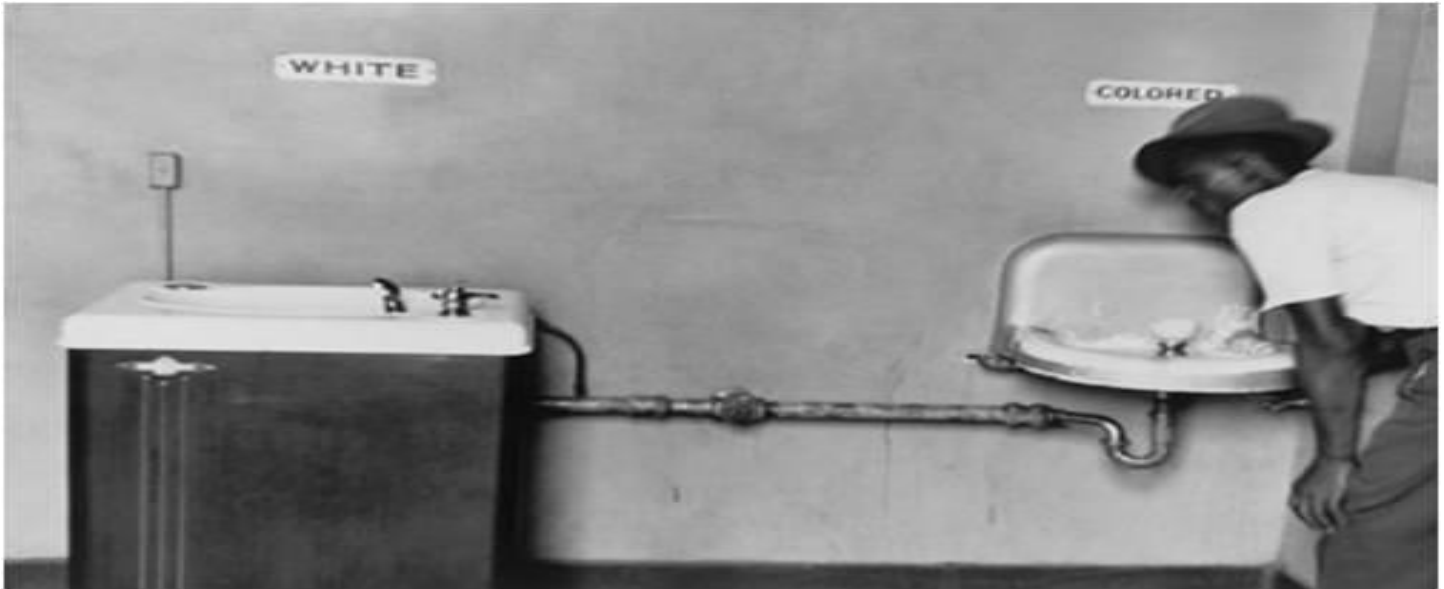
Ida Tarbell was another famous muckraker, whose writing led to reform. Between 1902 and 1904, Tarbell wrote a series of magazine articles exposing Standard Oil's unfair business practices. There were 19 installments of "**The History of the Standard Oil Company**" and marked the beginning of investigative journalism.

Spurred by her father's business loss at the hands of J.D. Rockefeller, Tarbell's methods became a model for other investigative journalists. She researched Standard Oil for two years by examining public records, newspaper coverage, and interviewing former company executives in order to piece together how Rockefeller was able to create the company. The articles told how Rockefeller used his business methods to destroy independent oilmen in Pennsylvania in order to create an oil monopoly. Tarbell concluded her series by examining Rockefeller's character, which she described as "money-mad." She also claimed that Rockefeller had created a national life that was far meaner, poorer, and uglier than had existed prior to his creation of Standard Oil. Tarbell's series was well received because she was not critical of capitalism. Instead, she focused her criticism on the unethical practices of Rockefeller and his associates in building Standard Oil.

During the Progressive movement, women played an important role as guardians or keeps of the homes and tried to end social issues.

c. Connect the decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* to the expansion of Jim Crow laws and the formation of the NAACP.

Document Analysis 2



African American during the Progressive Era

Following Reconstruction, **Jim Crow** laws became common throughout the South. These laws required the segregation of blacks and whites. In other words, blacks and whites were not allowed to share public spaces. They could not sit in the same dining rooms at restaurants, were not to share railway cars, and were restricted from using the same public facilities. In 1896, the Supreme Court actually upheld such laws as constitutional in **Plessy v. Ferguson**. The case involved a 30 year old man named Homer Plessy. Plessy, who was one-eighth African American, violated a Louisiana law by sitting in a "whites only" railway car. After being arrested, he eventually sued, claiming the law was unconstitutional. After considering the case, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation was lawful as long as the separate facilities and services were equal. The Plessy v. Ferguson case stated that segregation was legal so long as separate facilities held to the standard of "**separate but equal**." In reality, however, the facilities for whites were usually far superior to those of blacks. Ironically, many white progressives actually supported segregation and thought it was necessary. They believed that African Americans could only develop and advance culturally in their own, segregated society. Since, in reality, conditions in the "black world" were not equal to those in the "white world," many disagreed with the Progressives stance. One such person was **W.E.B. DuBois**. DuBois was the first black Ph.D. graduate from Harvard University and adamantly rejected justifications for segregation. He argued that blacks should pursue occupations in the humanities and in white collar (managerial or professional) fields. Unlike some other African-American leaders, DuBois believed that blacks must be politically, legally, and socially active in order to obtain true equality. DuBois helped to organize a group of black intellectuals known as the Niagara Movement. Their goal was to outline an agenda for African American progress in the United States. In 1905, these leaders met on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls after being denied hotel accommodations in the US. In 1909, DuBois was instrumental in founding the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)**. The organization devoted itself to the progress of the African-American community. It also founded an official magazine called *The Crisis*, which featured journalism, editorials calling for social reform, and even poetry. Today, the NAACP continues to be a prominent political voice among the African-American community.

d. Describe Progressive legislative actions including empowerment of the voter, labor laws, and the conservation movement.

Empowering Voters

During the late nineteenth century, government became known for political scandal. Corruption existed in city and state governments, as well as at the federal level. Most progressives believed that the solution was to make government officials more accountable to the general public. They believed government officials were corrupt because it was too easy for people to gain political office through favors and corrupt dealings behind closed doors, rather than having to win the support of the people. As a result, several political reforms won popular support during the progressive era. For instance, the Seventeenth Amendment prompted changes to the Constitution. Other political reforms included state changes the initiative, recall, and referendum.

Constitutional Amendment during the Progressive Era

Seventeenth Amendment (1913): This law established that US senators would be elected directly by the people of a state, rather than by state legislatures.

State Government Action during the Progressive Era

Initiative: allowed citizens of a state to force a vote on a certain issue without having to wait for public officials to bring it up. If enough citizens signed a petition and/or made their voices heard, then the legislature could be compelled to address a particular concern.

Referendum: this gives the voters the ability to vote on state laws by ballot, the majority of the public vote would pass or defeat a state law

Recall: this gives voters the power to hold special elections to remove corrupt officials from office before their terms were up.

Labor Laws

Most workers' wages were low. As a result, men, women, and even children often had to work long hours for little pay. In addition, workdays tended to run from sunrise to sundown and usually involved dangerous conditions. Many progressives called for shorter workdays, higher wages, and safer work environments for employees. Eventually, reformers succeeded in convincing a number of states to pass minimum age laws. These laws set limits on how young employees could be (ages ranged from 12 to 16). Some states also passed laws restricting the hours and occupations in which women could work. Progressives claimed such legislation was necessary to protect the US home and the important role women played as wives and mothers. Legislatures also passed laws restricting work hours and requiring safer working conditions as a result of progressive reforms. One event that especially contributed to the call for better workplace safety was the **Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire**. On March 25, 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City. Many of the exit doors to the factory were locked to prevent employees from stealing. The fire killed 146 people and led to increased demands for safer working conditions.

Theodore Roosevelt and the Conservation Movement

In the mid to late 19th century, natural resources were heavily exploited, especially in the West. Land speculators and developers took over large tracts of forests and grazing land. Acreage important to water power was seized by private concerns. Mining companies practiced improper and wasteful mining practices. Assuming a seemingly inexhaustible supply of natural resources, Americans developed a "tradition of waste."

Alarmed by the public's attitude toward natural resources as well as the exploitation of natural resources for private gain, **conservationists** called for federal supervision of the nation's resources

and the preservation of those resources for future generations. In **President Theodore Roosevelt**, the conservationists found a sympathetic ear and man of action. Conservation of the nation's resources, putting an end to wasteful uses of raw materials, and the reclamation of large areas of neglected land have been identified as some of the major achievements of the Roosevelt era.

President Roosevelt's concern for the environment was influenced by American naturalists, such as **John Muir**, and by his own political appointees, including **Gifford Pinchot**, Chief of Forestry. Working in concert with many individuals and organizations, the Roosevelt administration was responsible for the following: the **Newlands Act of 1902**, which funded irrigation projects from the proceeds of the sale of federal lands in the West; the appointment of the **Inland Waterways Commission in 1907** to study the relation of rivers, soil, forest, waterpower development, and water transportation; and the **National Conservation Commission of 1909**, which was charged with drawing up long-range plans for preserving national resources. Along with a vocal group of conservationists, the Roosevelt administration created an environmental conservation movement whose words and actions continue to be heard and felt throughout the nation today.