

The Progressive Era Worksheet

The Progressive Era (1890 - 1920)

Progressivism is the term applied to a variety of responses to the economic and social problems rapid industrialization introduced to America during the Industrial Revolution and the Gilded Age. Progressivism began as a social movement and grew into a political movement. The early progressives rejected Social Darwinism. In other words, they were people who believed that the problems society faced (poverty, violence, greed, racism, class warfare) could best be addressed by providing good education, a safe environment, and an efficient workplace.

Progressives lived mainly in the cities, were college educated, and believed that government could be a tool for change. Social reformers, like Jane Addams, and journalists, like Jacob Riis and Ida Tarbell, were powerful voices for progressivism. They concentrated on exposing the evils of corporate greed, combating fear of immigrants, and urging Americans to think hard about what democracy meant. Other local leaders encouraged Americans to register to vote, fight political corruption, and let the voting public decide how issues should best be addressed (the initiative, the referendum, and the recall). Additionally, women's rights movements soared during the Progressive Era.



Child Laborer, Newberry, SC, 1908

National Archives

On a national level, progressivism gained a strong voice in the White House when Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901. TR believed that strong corporations were good for America, but he also believed that corporate behavior must be watched to ensure that corporate greed did not get out of hand (trust-busting and federal regulation of business). (Source: <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teachings/glossary/progressive-era.cfm>)

Introduction to the Progressive Era Web Quest

Use your background knowledge of the Gilded Age and the internet to research the Progressive Era and answer the following questions.

1. In 2-3 sentences, describe what happened during the Gilded Age that caused a need for "progress."
2. How did the new ideas of the Progressive Era conflict with ideas from the Gilded Age (such as Social Darwinism)?
3. What were the four goals of the Progressive Era?

The Progressive Era Worksheet

The Progressive Era, spanning from the 1890s to the 1920s, was a time of significant social, political, and economic change in the United States. This period was marked by a collective effort to address the challenges brought forth by industrialization, urbanization, and political corruption. The Progressive Era worksheet serves as an educational tool that encapsulates the key themes, figures, and events of this transformative time in American history. By delving into the details of the Progressive Era, students and educators can gain a deeper understanding of the reforms that shaped modern America.

Understanding the Progressive Era

The Progressive Era emerged as a response to the excesses of the Gilded Age, a period characterized by rapid economic growth and stark social inequality. Reformers sought to address issues such as labor rights, women's suffrage, and the need for governmental accountability. The movement was diverse, encompassing a wide range of ideologies and goals, but all reformers shared a common desire for progress and improvement in American society.

Key Characteristics of the Progressive Era

1. **Social Justice:** Advocates aimed to tackle social issues, including poverty, child labor, and education reform.
2. **Political Reform:** Progressives pushed for changes such as the direct election of senators, the introduction of initiative and referendum processes, and the establishment of primary elections.
3. **Economic Regulation:** The era saw the rise of antitrust laws designed to combat monopolies and promote fair competition.
4. **Women's Rights:** The women's suffrage movement gained momentum, culminating in the eventual passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920.
5. **Labor Movement:** Workers organized to demand better wages, working conditions, and the right to unionize.

Major Figures of the Progressive Era

The Progressive Era was populated by influential figures who played crucial roles in advocating for reform. Below are some of the notable leaders and their contributions:

Theodore Roosevelt

- As the 26th President of the United States, Roosevelt championed numerous progressive reforms.
- He is well-known for his "Square Deal" domestic program which focused on consumer protection, conservation of natural resources, and curbing corporate excesses.
- Roosevelt's administration was marked by the enactment of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act.

Woodrow Wilson

- Wilson, the 28th President, continued the progressive agenda through his "New Freedom" platform.
- He advocated for tariff reform, the creation of the Federal Reserve System, and the Federal Trade Commission to regulate unfair business practices.

Jane Addams

- A pioneering social worker and reformer, Addams co-founded Hull House in Chicago, which provided services for immigrants and the poor.
- She was a key figure in the settlement house movement, advocating for social reform and women's rights.

Ida B. Wells

- An African American journalist and activist, Wells is best known for her anti-lynching campaign.
- Her work highlighted racial violence and inequality, pushing for civil rights and social justice.

Key Events and Legislation

Throughout the Progressive Era, several key events and pieces of legislation emerged that reflected the era's reformist spirit.

Key Legislation

1. Sherman Antitrust Act (1890): This act was one of the first federal statutes to limit monopolies and maintain competition in the marketplace.
2. Meat Inspection Act (1906): This legislation mandated sanitary conditions in meatpacking plants and established federal inspection of meat products.
3. Pure Food and Drug Act (1906): This act required the labeling of food and drugs and prohibited the sale of misbranded or adulterated products.
4. Federal Reserve Act (1913): Created the Federal Reserve System to regulate the banking industry and stabilize the economy.
5. 18th Amendment (1919): Instituted Prohibition, banning the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages.

Key Events

- The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire (1911): This tragic incident highlighted unsafe working conditions and led to significant labor reforms, including stricter building codes and safety regulations.
- The Suffrage Movement: The fight for women's voting rights gained traction during this era, culminating in the passage of the 19th Amendment.
- The 1912 Presidential Election: This election featured a split in the Republican Party, leading to the election of Woodrow Wilson and the implementation of progressive policies.

Impact of the Progressive Era

The Progressive Era left a lasting impact on American society and governance. The reforms implemented during this period addressed many of the social and economic injustices of the time, setting the stage for future advancements.

Long-Term Effects

1. Expansion of Government Role: The Progressive Era expanded the role of the federal government in regulating the economy and ensuring social welfare.
2. Labor Rights: The reforms led to the establishment of labor laws, including minimum wage standards and the right to unionize.
3. Women's Rights: The success of the women's suffrage movement paved the way for future gender equality initiatives.
4. Civil Rights Movement: The groundwork laid by Progressive reformers in advocating for social justice and equality contributed to the later civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s.

Challenges and Critiques of the Progressive Era

While the Progressive Era is often celebrated for its reforms, it was not without its challenges and critiques. Some reformers faced opposition, and the movement itself had limitations.

Challenges

- Resistance from Political Machines: Many city and state governments were controlled by political machines that resisted reform efforts.

- Racial Discrimination: The Progressive movement often sidelined the issues faced by African Americans and other marginalized groups, leading to criticisms of its inclusivity.

Critiques

- Some historians argue that the Progressive movement was primarily a middle-class initiative that did not adequately address the needs of the working class or racial minorities.
- The era's focus on regulation sometimes led to the overreach of government power, resulting in unintended consequences.

Conclusion

The Progressive Era was a pivotal chapter in American history that sought to address the pressing social, economic, and political issues of its time. Through the collective efforts of dedicated reformers, significant advancements were made toward creating a more equitable society. The Progressive Era worksheet serves as a valuable resource for understanding the complexities of this period, the challenges faced, and the enduring legacy of its reforms. By studying this era, students can appreciate the progress achieved and reflect on the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality in contemporary society.

Frequently Asked Questions

What was the primary goal of the Progressive Era?

The primary goal of the Progressive Era was to address the social, political, and economic injustices that arose from industrialization and urbanization, aiming for reforms to improve American society.

What are some key reforms associated with the Progressive Era?

Key reforms include the establishment of labor laws, women's suffrage, antitrust legislation, and the implementation of regulations to improve public health and safety.

How did the Progressive Era address women's rights?

The Progressive Era significantly advanced women's rights, culminating in the suffrage movement, which led to the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, granting women the right to vote.

Who were some prominent figures of the Progressive Era?

Prominent figures include Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, social reformers like Jane Addams and W.E.B. Du Bois, and muckrakers such as Upton Sinclair and Ida Tarbell.

How did the Progressive Era impact government regulation?

The Progressive Era led to increased government regulation of businesses, including the establishment of agencies like the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to protect consumers and ensure fair competition.

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