

Progressive Era (approximately 1900-1920)

I. Progressivism (in a nutshell)

- **Leaders at the Federal Level** (President Teddy Roosevelt, President William Howard Taft, President Woodrow Wilson, Chief Justice Louis Brandeis)
- **Leaders at the State Level** (Governor Hiram Johnson--California, Governor Robert LaFollette—Wisconsin, Governor Charles Evans Hughes—New York)
- Progressivism was not an organized single political or social organization
- Progressivism was mostly an urban middle class movement supported by the general business community, prosperous farmers, and skilled workers
- Progressivism was a mixture of liberal concern for the poor and conservative efforts to stabilize big business and industry (prevent social chaos)
- Progressives feared “pure” Socialism on one side and the power of Corporations on the other side (truly sought some sort of a middle ground)
- Overall, Progressives accepted American society as sound but in need of adjustment

II. Election of 1912 (only election where all candidates claimed to be Progressives)

- Many significant issues were debated that would have a lasting impact on the future of America
- Candidates (Wilson-Democrat, Roosevelt-Progressive aka “Bull Moose,” Taft-Republican, Debs-Socialist)

1. Woodrow Wilson

- Born in VA, grew up in deep South (GA)---racist attitudes developed
- Graduated from Princeton, PHD from Johns Hopkins (Thesis of his dissertation attacked U.S. Government as inefficient and incapable of taking swift action)
- Served as President of Princeton
- Served as Governor of N J (enacted workers compensation laws, electoral reform, regulation of utilities)
- United a divided Democratic Party
 - northerner and southerner
 - conservative and reformer
 - established politician and political outsider
- “New Freedom” Platform in 1912 (attacked the “Triple Wall of Privilege”----tariff, banks, trusts)

2. Teddy Roosevelt

- As President (1901-1909), he sought to:
 - a. Expand the powers of the Executive branch
 - b. Regulate or dismantle corrupt big business
 - c. Mediate between big business and labor
 - d. Expand America’s Empire
 - e. Conserve natural resources
- “New Nationalism” Platform in 1912 (called for more social welfare programs and to expand the role of government in society)

3. William Howard Taft

- Grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio
- Graduated from Yale
- Practiced law and became a Judge in Ohio
- 1st Governor of the Philippines (1901)
- Secretary of War (1904)
- Groomed by Roosevelt to be his “hand picked” successor
- Poor working relationship with Congress
- Failed to address the tariff issue
- The true “Trust Buster” (broke up far more trusts than Roosevelt)

4. Eugene V. Debs

- Born in Indiana
- was very active in local/state politics and early labor unions
- imprisoned for his role in the Pullman Strike (1894)
- supported Populist goals, ideas, etc.
- founded the Socialist Party in America
- assisted in founding the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)
- protested U.S. involvement in WW I on the grounds that he felt the U.S. was only involved to protect its business interests abroad (imprisoned for violating the Espionage and Sedition Acts)

III. Issues in the Election (some debated throughout the 20th century until today)

1. should America's economy be Capitalist or Socialist
2. should the government protect the social welfare of citizens
3. should women's suffrage finally be granted
4. should democracy continue to expand to the common man (more direct involvement)
5. should the government have some form of control over big business
6. should the government intervene between labor and big business
7. should the government be involved in environmental conservation
8. should the government enact prohibition legislation outlawing alcohol
9. should the government lower tariffs and enact an income tax

***Wilson wins the election by a large margin in 1912

- Republican vote was split in 1912 between Roosevelt and Taft (primarily over the issues of trusts, imperialism, and conservation)

IV. Wilson's Brand of Progressivism

Signed into law many reforms that previous President's stayed away from enacting

- **Underwood Tariff** (reduced the rate down to the minimally protective 25%)
- **16th Amendment** (introduced the graduated Income Tax)
- **Federal Reserve System** (once and for all settled the ongoing dispute about the U.S. banking system that dated back to the days of Jefferson and Hamilton)
- **Federal Trade Commission** (clamped down on the actions of corporations, expanded government guidelines and regulations)
- **Clayton Anti-Trust Act** (illegal to buy up competitor stock) (made labor union strikes and collective bargaining legal)

Social Justice

- supported Women's suffrage and child labor laws but at the **state level** (no special privileges)
- backed away from truly supporting African-Americans and poor whites