

# Progressivism and the Republican Roosevelt

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1901–1912

WHEN I SAY I BELIEVE IN A SQUARE DEAL I DO NOT  
MEAN . . . TO GIVE EVERY MAN THE BEST HAND. IF  
THE CARDS DO NOT COME TO ANY MAN, OR IF THEY  
DO COME, AND HE HAS NOT GOT THE POWER TO PLAY  
THEM, THAT IS HIS AFFAIR. ALL I MEAN IS THAT  
THERE SHALL BE NO CROOKEDNESS  
IN THE DEALING.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, 1905

Nearly 76 million Americans greeted the new century in 1900. Almost one in seven of them was foreign-born. In the fourteen years of peace that remained before the Great War of 1914 engulfed the globe, 13 million more migrants would carry their bundles down the gangplanks to the land of promise.

Hardly had the twentieth century dawned on the ethnically and racially mixed American people than they were convulsed by a reform movement, the likes of which the nation had not seen since the 1840s. The new crusaders, who called themselves “progressives,” waged war on many evils, notably monopoly, corruption, inefficiency, and social injustice. The progressive army was large, diverse, and widely deployed, but it had a single battle cry: “Strengthen the State.” The “real heart of the movement,” explained one of the progressive reformers, was “to use government as an agency of human welfare.”



## Progressive Roots

The groundswell of the new reformist wave went far back—to the Greenback Labor party of the 1870s and the Populists of the 1890s, to the mounting unrest throughout the land as grasping industrialists concentrated more and more power in fewer and fewer hands. An outworn philosophy of hands-off individualism seemed increasingly out of place in the modern machine age. Social and economic problems were now too complex for the intentionally feeble Jeffersonian organs of government. Progressive theorists were insisting that society could no longer afford the luxury of a limitless “let-alone” (*laissez-faire*) policy. The people, through government, must substitute mastery for drift.

Well before 1900, perceptive politicians and writers had begun to pinpoint targets for the progressive attack. Bryan, Altgeld, and the Populists loudly branded the “bloated trusts” with the stigma of corruption and wrongdoing. In 1894 Henry Demarest Lloyd charged headlong into the Standard Oil Company with his book *Wealth Against Commonwealth*. Eccentric Thorstein Veblen assailed the new rich with his prickly pen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), a savage attack on “predatory wealth” and “conspicuous consumption.” In Veblen’s view the parasitic leisure class engaged in wasteful “business” (or making money for money’s sake) rather than productive “industry” (or making goods to satisfy real needs). He urged that social leadership pass from these superfluous titans to truly useful engineers.

Other pen-wielding knights likewise entered the fray. The keen-eyed and keen-nosed Danish immigrant Jacob A. Riis, a reporter for the *New York Sun*, shocked middle-class Americans in 1890 with *How the Other Half Lives*. His account was a damning indictment of the dirt, disease, vice, and misery of the rat-gnawed human rookeries known as New York slums. The book deeply influenced a future New York City police commissioner, Theodore Roosevelt. Novelist Theodore Dreiser used his blunt prose to batter promoters and profiteers in *The Financier* (1912) and *The Titan* (1914).

Caustic critics of social injustice issued from several other corners. Socialists, many of whom were European immigrants inspired by the strong movement for state socialism in the Old World, began to register appreciable



**Saluting the Flag** Flooded with immigrant children, many of whom could scarcely speak English, schools like this one in New York in 1892 cultivated loyalty to the newcomers’ adopted land by teaching courses in “civics” and encouraging patriotic rituals like the Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S. flag.

strength at the ballot box. High-minded messengers of the social gospel promoted a brand of progressivism based on Christian teachings. They used religious doctrine to demand better housing and living conditions for the urban poor. Feminists in multiplying numbers



**Room in a Tenement Flat, 1910** Tenement life on the Lower East Side of New York City was exposed by the camera of Jacob Riis, who compiled a large photographic archive of turn-of-the-century urban life. Many families counted themselves lucky to share a single room, no matter how squalid.

added social justice to suffrage on their list of needed reforms. With urban pioneers like Jane Addams in Chicago and Lillian Wald in New York blazing the way, women entered the fight to improve the lot of families living and working in the festering cities.



### Raking Muck with the Muckrakers

Beginning about 1902 the exposing of evil became a flourishing industry among American publishers. A group of aggressive ten- and fifteen-cent popular magazines surged to the front, notably *McClure's*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Collier's*, and *Everybody's*. Waging fierce circulation wars, they dug deep for the dirt that the public loved to hate. Enterprising editors financed extensive research and encouraged pugnacious writing by their bright young reporters, whom President Roosevelt branded as “muckrakers” in 1906. Annoyed by their excess of zeal, he compared the mudslinging magazine dirt-diggers to the figure in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* who was so intent on raking manure that he could not see the celestial crown dangling overhead.

Despite presidential scolding, these muckrakers boomed circulation, and some of their most scandalous exposures were published as best-selling books. The reformer-writers ranged far, wide, and deep in their crusade to lay bare the muck of iniquity in American society. In 1902 a brilliant New York reporter, Lincoln Steffens, launched a series of articles in *McClure's* titled “The Shame of the Cities.” He fearlessly unmasked the corrupt alliance between big business and municipal government. Steffens was followed in the same magazine by Ida M. Tarbell, a pioneering journalist who published a devastating but factual exposé of the Standard Oil Company. (Her father had been ruined by the oil interests.) Fearing legal reprisals, the muckraking magazines went to great pains and expense to check their material—paying as much as three thousand dollars to verify a single Tarbell article.

Plucky muckrakers fearlessly tilted their pen-lances at varied targets. They assailed the malpractices of life insurance companies and tariff lobbies. They roasted the beef trust, the “money trust,” the railroad barons, and the corrupt amassing of American fortunes. Thomas W. Lawson, an erratic speculator who had himself made \$50 million on the stock market, laid bare the practices of his accomplices in “Frenzied Finance.” This series of articles, appearing in 1905–1906, rocketed the



**Ida Tarbell (1857–1944) in Her Office** Tarbell was the most eminent woman in the muckraking movement and one of the most respected business historians of her generation. In 1904, she earned a national reputation for publishing a scathing history of the Standard Oil Company, the “Mother of Trusts.” Two years later she joined Ray Stannard Baker, William Allen White, and other muckrakers in purchasing the *American* magazine, which became a journalistic podium in their campaign for honest government and an end to business abuses.

circulation of *Everybody's*. Lawson, by fouling his own nest, made many enemies among his rich associates, and he died a poor man.

David G. Phillips shocked an already startled nation by his series in *Cosmopolitan* titled “The Treason of the Senate” (1906). He boldly charged that seventy-five of the ninety senators did not represent the people at all but the railroads and trusts. This withering indictment, buttressed by facts, impressed President Roosevelt. Phillips continued his attacks through novels and was fatally shot in 1911 by a deranged young man whose family he had allegedly maligned.



*In his muckraker speech (1906), Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) said,*

“Now, it is very necessary that we should not flinch from seeing what is vile and debasing. There is filth on the floor and it must be scraped up with the muck-rake; and there are times and places where this service is the most needed of all the services that can be performed. But the man who never does anything else, who never thinks or speaks or writes, save of his feats with the muck-rake, speedily becomes, not a help to society, not an incitement to good, but one of the most potent forces for evil.”

Some of the most effective fire of the muckrakers was directed at social evils. The ugly list included the immoral “white slave” traffic in women, the rickety slums, and the appalling number of industrial accidents. The sorry subjugation of America’s 9 million blacks—of whom 90 percent still lived in the South and one-third were illiterate—was spotlighted in Ray Stannard Baker’s *Following the Color Line* (1908). The abuses of child labor were brought luridly to light by John Spargo’s *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (1906).

*In his muckraking classic The Shame of the Cities (1904), Lincoln Steffens (1866–1936) decried the great threat posed by New York City’s Tammany machine:*

“Bribery is no ordinary felony, but treason; . . . ‘corruption which breaks out here and there and now and then’ is not an occasional offense, but a common practice, and . . . the effect of it is literally to change the form of our government from one that is representative of the people to an oligarchy, representative of special interests.”

Vendors of potent patent medicines (often heavily spiked with alcohol) likewise came in for bitter criticism. These conscienceless vultures sold incredible quantities of adulterated or habit-forming drugs, while “doping” the press with lavish advertising. Muckraking attacks in *Collier’s* were ably reinforced by Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, chief chemist of the Department of Agriculture, who with his famous “Poison Squad” performed experiments on himself.

Full of sound and fury, the muckrakers signified much about the nature of the progressive reform movement. They were long on lamentation and short on sweeping remedies. To right social wrongs, they counted on publicity and an aroused public conscience, not drastic political change. They sought not to overthrow capitalism but to cleanse it. The cure for the ills of American democracy, they earnestly believed, was more democracy.



### Political Progressivism

Progressive reformers were mainly middle-class men and women who felt themselves squeezed from above and below. They sensed pressure from the new giant corporations, the restless immigrant hordes, and the aggressive labor unions. The progressives simultaneously sought two goals: to use state power to curb the trusts and to stem the socialist threat by generally improving the common person’s conditions of life and labor. Progressives emerged in both major parties, in all regions, and at all levels of government. The truth is that progressivism was less a minority movement and more a majority mood.

One of the first objectives of progressives was to regain the power that had slipped from the hands of the people into those of the “interests.” These ardent reformers pushed for direct primary elections so as to undercut power-hungry party bosses. They favored the “initiative” so that voters could directly propose legislation themselves, thus bypassing the boss-bought state legislatures. Progressives also agitated for the “referendum.” This device would place laws on the ballot for final approval by the people, especially laws that had been railroaded through a compliant legislature by free-spending agents of big business. The “recall” would enable the voters to remove faithless elected officials, particularly those who had been bribed by bosses or lobbyists.

Rooting out graft also became a prime goal of earnest progressives. A number of the state legislatures

passed corrupt-practices acts, which limited the amount of money that candidates could spend for their election. Such legislation also restricted huge gifts from corporations, for which the donors would expect special favors. The secret Australian ballot was likewise being introduced more widely in the states to counteract boss rule. Bribery was less feasible when bribers could not tell if they were getting their money's worth from the bribed.

Direct election of U.S. senators became a favorite goal of progressives, especially after the muckrakers had exposed the scandalous intimacy between greedy corporations and Congress. By 1900 the Senate had so many rich men that it was often sneered at as the "Millionaires' Club." Too many of these prosperous solons, elected as they then were by trust-dominated legislatures, heeded the voice of their "masters" rather than the voice of the masses.

A constitutional amendment to bring about the popular election of senators had rough sledding in Congress, for the plutocratic members of the Senate were happy with existing methods. But a number of states established primary elections in which the voters expressed their preferences for the Senate. The local legislatures, when choosing senators, found it politically wise to heed the voice of the people. Partly as a result of such pressures, the Seventeenth Amendment to the

*The suffrage campaign of the early twentieth century benefited from a new generation of women who considered themselves "feminists." At a mass meeting in New York in 1914, Marie Jenny Howe (1870–1934), a minister by training as well as a prominent early feminist, proclaimed,*

*"We intend simply to be ourselves, not just our little female selves, but our whole big human selves."*

Constitution, approved in 1913, established the direct election of U.S. senators. (See the Appendix.) But the expected improvement in caliber was slow in coming.

Woman suffrage, the goal of feminists for many decades, likewise received powerful new support from the progressives early in the 1900s. The political reformers believed that women's votes would elevate the political tone, and the foes of the saloon felt that they could count on the support of enfranchised females. The suffragists, with their cry of "Votes for Women" and "Equal Suffrage for Men and Women," protested bitterly against

**Suffragette Parade in Brooklyn, New York** The enormous political effort of American suffragists finally achieved victory with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.



“Taxation Without Representation.” Many of the states, especially the more liberal ones in the West, gradually extended the vote to women. But by 1910 nationwide female suffrage was still a decade away, and a suffragist could still be sneeringly defined as “one who has ceased to be a lady and has not yet become a gentleman.”



### Progressivism in the Cities and States

Progressives scored some of their most impressive gains in the cities. Frustrated by the inefficiency and corruption of machine-oiled city government, many localities followed the pioneering example of Galveston, Texas. In 1901 it had appointed expert-staffed commissions to manage urban affairs. Other communities adopted the city-manager system, also designed to take politics out of municipal administration. Some of these “reforms” obviously valued efficiency more highly than democracy, as control of civic affairs was further removed from the people’s hands.

Urban reformers likewise attacked “slumlords,” juvenile delinquency, and wide-open prostitution (vice-at-a-price), which flourished in red-light districts unchallenged by bribed police. Public-spirited city dwellers also moved to halt the corrupt sale of franchises for streetcars and other public utilities.

Progressivism naturally bubbled up to the state level, notably in Wisconsin, which became a yeasty laboratory of reform. The governor of the state, pompadoured Robert M. (“Fighting Bob”) La Follette, was an undersized but overbearing crusader who emerged as the most militant of the progressive Republican leaders. After a desperate fight with entrenched monopoly, he reached the governor’s chair in 1901. Routing the lumber and railroad “interests,” he wrested considerable control from the crooked corporations and returned it to the people. He also perfected a scheme for regulating public utilities, while laboring in close association with experts on the faculty of the state university at Madison.

Other states marched steadily toward the progressive camp, as they undertook to regulate railroads and trusts, chiefly through public utilities commissions. Oregon was not far behind Wisconsin, and California made giant bootstrides under the stocky Hiram W. Johnson. Elected Republican governor in 1910, this dynamic prosecutor of grafters helped break the dominant grip of the Southern Pacific Railroad on California politics and then, like La Follette, set up a political machine of his own. Heavily whiskered Charles Evans Hughes, the able and audacious

reformist Republican governor of New York, had earlier gained national fame as an investigator of malpractices by gas and insurance companies and by the coal trust.



### Progressive Women

Women proved themselves an indispensable part of the progressive army. A crucial focus for women’s activism was the settlement house movement (see p. 568). At a time when women could neither vote nor hold political office, settlement houses offered a side door to public life. They exposed middle-class women to the problems plaguing America’s cities, including poverty, political corruption, and intolerable working and living conditions. They also gave them the skills and confidence to attack those evils. The women’s club movement provided an even broader civic entryway for many middle-class women. Literary clubs, where educated women met to improve themselves with poetry and prose, had existed for decades. But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of these clubs set aside Shakespeare and Henry James for social issues and current events. “Dante has been dead for several centuries,” observed the president of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1904. “I think it is time that we dropped the study of his *Inferno* and turned our attention to our own.”

Nineteenth-century notions of “separate spheres” dictated that a woman’s place was in the home, so most female progressives defended their new activities as an extension—not a rejection—of the traditional roles of wife and mother. Thus they were often drawn to moral and “maternal” issues like keeping children out of smudgy mills and sweltering sweatshops, attacking the scourge of tuberculosis bred in airless tenements, winning pensions for mothers with dependent children, and ensuring that only safe food products found their way to the family table. Female activists agitated through organizations like the Women’s Trade Union League and the National Consumers League, as well as through two new federal agencies, the Children’s Bureau (1912) and the Women’s Bureau (1920), both in the Department of Labor. These wedges into the federal bureaucracy, however small, gave female reformers a national stage for social investigation and advocacy.

Campaigns for factory reform and temperance particularly attracted women foot soldiers. Unsafe and unsanitary sweatshops—factories where workers toiled long hours for low wages—were a public scandal in



many cities. Florence Kelley, a former resident of Jane Addams's Hull House, became the state of Illinois's first chief factory inspector and one of the nation's leading advocates for improved factory conditions. In 1899 Kelley took control of the newly founded National Consumers League, which mobilized female consumers to pressure for laws safeguarding women and children in the workplace. In the landmark case *Muller v. Oregon* (1908), crusading attorney Louis D. Brandeis persuaded the Supreme Court to accept the constitutionality of laws protecting women workers by presenting evidence of the harmful effects of factory labor on women's weaker bodies. Although this argument calling for special protection for women seemed discriminatory by later standards and closed many "male" jobs to women, progressives at the time hailed Brandeis's achievement as a triumph over existing legal doctrine, which afforded employers total control over the workplace. The American welfare state that emerged from female activism focused more on protecting women and children than

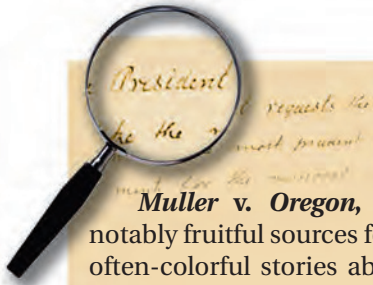
on granting benefits to everyone, as was the case in much of western Europe, with its stronger labor movements.

Crusaders for these humane measures did not always have smooth sailing. One dismaying setback came in 1905, when the Supreme Court, in *Lochner v. New York*, invalidated a New York law establishing a ten-hour day for bakers. Yet the reformist progressive wave finally washed up into the judiciary, and in 1917 the Court upheld a ten-hour law for factory workers.

Laws regulating factories were worthless if not enforced, a truth horribly demonstrated by a lethal fire in 1911 at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City. Locked doors and other flagrant violations of the fire code turned the factory into a death trap. One hundred forty-six workers, most of them young immigrant women, were incinerated or leapt from eighth- and ninth-story windows to their deaths. Lashed by the public outcry, including a massive strike by women in the needle trades, the New York legislature passed much



**Jane Addams and Fellow Pacifists, 1915** Addams cofounded the Women's Peace party in 1915. Its pacifist platform was said to represent the views of the "mother half of humanity." Although the party initially attracted twenty-five thousand members, America's entry into the war two years later eroded popular support, as pacifist internationalism became suspect as anti-American.



## EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

**Muller v. Oregon, 1908** Court records provide notably fruitful sources for historians. They not only tell often-colorful stories about the lives of ordinary men and women caught up in the legal system; they also by their very nature testify to the norms and values that lawyers employ to make their cases and that judges invoke to explain their decisions. The case of *Muller v. Oregon* (see p. 662) is especially instructive on both counts. The official Supreme Court records tell how on September 4, 1905, Joe Haselbock, a supervisor in Curt Muller's Grand Laundry in Portland, Oregon, asked an employee, Mrs. E. Gotcher, to remain after hours to do

an extra load of laundry. That request violated Oregon's law prohibiting women from working more than ten hours per day. Mrs. Gotcher later complained to the authorities, and Muller was fined \$10. Muller refused to pay and took his case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In its landmark decision (below), the Court upheld the constitutionality of the Oregon statute, and Muller at last had to cough up his fine. On what grounds did the Court justify its ruling? What does Justice David J. Brewer's argument on behalf of the Court's decision suggest about the cultural identity and social role of women in early-twentieth-century American society?

**(208 U.S. 412)**  
***CURT MULLER, Plff. in Err.,***  
**v.**  
***STATE OF OREGON.***

. . . That woman's physical structure and the performance of material functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence is obvious. This is especially true when the burdens of motherhood are upon her. . . and as healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, the physical well-being of woman becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race.

Still again, history discloses the fact that woman has always been dependent upon man. He established his control at the outset by superior physical strength, and this control in various forms, with diminishing intensity, has continued to the present. . . It is still true that in the struggle for subsistence she is not an equal competitor with her brother. . . Differentiated by these matters from the other sex, she is properly placed in a class by herself, and legislation designed for her protection may be sustained, even when like legislation is not necessary for men, and could not be sustained. It

is impossible to close one's eyes to the fact that she still looks to her brother and depends upon him. . . The two sexes differ in structure of body, in the functions to be performed by each, in the amount of physical strength, in the capacity for long continued labor, particularly when done standing, the influence of vigorous health upon the future well-being of the race, the self-reliance which enables one to assert full rights, and in the capacity to maintain the struggle for subsistence. This difference justifies a difference in legislation, and upholds that which is designed to compensate for some of the burdens which rest upon her.

We have not referred in this discussion to the denial of the elective franchise in the state of Oregon, for while that may disclose a lack of political equality in all things with her brother, that is not of itself decisive. The reason runs deeper, and rests in the inherent difference between the two sexes, and in the different functions in life which they perform. . . .





**The Wages of Negligence** Officials review the charred remains of some of the survivors of the catastrophic Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in 1911. Outrage over this calamity galvanized a generation of reformers to fight for better workplace safety rules.

stronger laws regulating the hours and conditions of sweatshop toil. Other legislatures followed, and by 1917 thirty states had put workers' compensation laws on the books, providing insurance to workers injured in industrial accidents. Gradually the concept of the employer's responsibility to society was replacing the old dog-eat-dog philosophy of unregulated free enterprise.

Corner saloons, with their shutter doors, naturally attracted the ire and fire of progressives. Alcohol was intimately connected with prostitution in red-light districts, with the drunken voter, with crooked city officials dominated by "booze" interests, and with the blowsy "boss" who counted poker chips by night and miscounted ballots by day (including the "cemetery vote"). By 1900 cities like New York and San Francisco had one saloon for about every two hundred people.

Antiliquor campaigners received powerful support from several militant organizations, notably the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Founder Frances E. Willard, who would fall to her knees in prayer on saloon floors, mobilized nearly 1 million women to "make the world homelike" and built the WCTU into the largest organization of women in the world. She found a vigorous ally in the Anti-Saloon League, which was aggressive, well organized, and well financed.

Caught up in the crusade, some states and numerous counties passed "dry" laws, which controlled, restricted, or abolished alcohol. The big cities were generally "wet," for they had a large immigrant vote accustomed in the Old Country to the free flow of wine and beer. When World War I erupted in 1914, nearly one-half of the population lived in "dry" territory, and nearly three-fourths of



### Out of Work and the Reason Why, 1899

This temperance propaganda from an 1899 magazine illustrates the role of women in the temperance movement. Alcohol abuse threatened the stability of the family, still predominantly the “woman’s sphere” in the late nineteenth century.

the total area had outlawed saloons. Demon Rum was groggy and about to be floored—temporarily—by the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919.

### TR’s Square Deal for Labor

Theodore Roosevelt, although something of an imperialistic busybody abroad, was touched by the progressive wave at home. Like other reformers, he feared that the “public interest” was being submerged in the drifting seas of indifference. Everybody’s interest was nobody’s interest. Roosevelt decided to make it his. His sportsman’s instincts spurred him into demanding a “Square Deal” for capital, labor, and the public at large. Broadly speaking, the president’s program embraced three C’s:

control of the corporations, consumer protection, and conservation of natural resources.

The Square Deal for labor received its acid test in 1902, when a crippling strike broke out in the anthracite coal mines of Pennsylvania. Some 140,000 besooted workers, many of them illiterate immigrants, had long been frightfully exploited and accident-plagued. They demanded, among other improvements, a 20 percent increase in pay and a reduction of the working day from ten to nine hours.

Unsympathetic mine owners, confident that a chilled public would react against the miners, refused to arbitrate or even negotiate. One of their spokesmen, multimillionaire George F. Baer, reflected the high-and-mighty attitude of certain ungenerous employers. Workers, he wrote, would be cared for “not by the labor agitators, but by the Christian men to whom God in His infinite wisdom has given the control of the property interests of this country.”

As coal supplies dwindled, factories and schools were forced to shut down, and even hospitals felt the icy grip of winter. Desperately seeking a solution, Roosevelt summoned representatives of the striking miners and the mine owners to the White House. He was profoundly annoyed by the “extraordinary stupidity and bad temper” of the “wooden-headed gentry” who operated the mines. As he later confessed, if it had not been for the dignity of his high office, he would have taken

*Roosevelt was a charismatic figure who made a powerful impression on his contemporaries. The journalist William Allen White (1868–1944) later wrote of his first meeting with TR in 1897,*

*“He sounded in my heart the first trumpet call of the new time that was to be. . . . I had never known such a man as he, and never shall again. He overcame me. And in the hour or two we spent that day at lunch, and in a walk down F Street, he poured into my heart such visions, such ideals, such hopes, such a new attitude toward life and patriotism and the meaning of things, as I had never dreamed men had. . . . After that I was his man.”*



one of them “by the seat of the breeches” and “chucked him out of the window.”

Roosevelt finally resorted to his trusty big stick when he threatened to seize the mines and operate them with federal troops. Faced with this first-time-ever threat to use federal bayonets against capital, rather than labor, the owners grudgingly consented to arbitration. A compromise decision ultimately gave the miners a 10 percent pay boost and a working day of nine hours. But their union was not officially recognized as a bargaining agent.

Keenly aware of the mounting antagonisms between capital and labor, Roosevelt urged Congress to create the new Department of Commerce and Labor. This goal was achieved in 1903. (Ten years later the agency was split in two.) An important arm of the newborn cabinet body was the Bureau of Corporations, which was authorized to probe businesses engaged in interstate commerce. The bureau was highly useful in helping to break the stranglehold of monopoly and in clearing the road for the era of “trust-busting.”



### TR Corrals the Corporations

The sprawling railroad octopus sorely needed restraint. The Interstate Commerce Commission, created in 1887 as a feeble sop to the public, had proved woefully inadequate. Railroad barons could simply appeal the commission’s decisions on rates to the federal courts—a process that might take ten years.

Spurred by the former-cowboy president, Congress passed effective railroad legislation, beginning with the Elkins Act of 1903. This curb was aimed primarily at the rebate evil. Heavy fines could now be imposed both on the railroads that gave rebates and on the shippers that accepted them.

Still more effective was the Hepburn Act of 1906. Free passes, with their hint of bribery, were severely restricted. The once-infantile Interstate Commerce Commission was expanded, and its reach was extended to include express companies, sleeping-car companies, and pipelines. For the first time, the commission was given real molar when it was authorized, on complaint of shippers, to nullify existing rates and stipulate maximum rates.

Railroads also provided Roosevelt with an opportunity to brandish his antitrust bludgeon. *Trusts* had come to be a fighting word in the progressive era. Roosevelt believed that these industrial behemoths, with their

efficient means of production, had arrived to stay. He concluded that there were “good” trusts, with public consciences, and “bad” trusts, which lusted greedily for power. He was determined to respond to the popular outcry against the trusts but was also determined not to throw out the baby with the bathwater by indiscriminately smashing all large businesses.

Roosevelt, as a trustbuster, first burst into the headlines in 1902 with an attack on the Northern Securities Company, a railroad holding company organized by financial titan J. P. Morgan and empire builder James J. Hill. These Napoleonic moguls of money sought to achieve a virtual monopoly of the railroads in the Northwest. Roosevelt was therefore challenging the most regal potentates of the industrial aristocracy.

The railway promoters appealed to the Supreme Court, which in 1904 upheld Roosevelt’s antitrust suit and ordered the Northern Securities Company to be dissolved. The *Northern Securities* decision jolted Wall Street and angered big business but greatly enhanced Roosevelt’s reputation as a trust smasher.

**Roosevelt Tames the Trusts** Legend to the contrary, Roosevelt did not attack all trusts indiscriminately. Rather, he pursued a few high-profile cases against a handful of corporate giants, in order to “tame” other businesses into accepting government regulation.





Roosevelt's big stick crashed down on other giant monopolies, as he initiated over forty legal proceedings against them. The Supreme Court in 1905 declared the beef trust illegal, and the heavy fist of justice fell upon monopolists controlling sugar, fertilizer, harvesters, and other key products.

Much mythology has inflated Roosevelt's reputation as a trustbuster. The Rough Rider understood the political popularity of monopoly-smashing, but he did not consider it sound economic policy. Combination and integration, he felt, were the hallmarks of the age, and to try to stem the tide of economic progress by political means he considered the rankest folly. Bigness was not necessarily badness, so why punish success? Roosevelt's real purpose in assaulting the Goliaths of industry was symbolic: to prove conclusively that the government, not private business, ruled the country. He believed in regulating, not fragmenting, the big business combines. The threat of dissolution, he felt, might make the sultans of the smokestacks more amenable to federal regulation—as it did.

In truth, Roosevelt never swung his trust-crushing stick with maximum force. In many ways the huge industrial behemoths were healthier—though perhaps more “tame”—at the end of Roosevelt's reign than they had been before. His successor, William Howard Taft, actually “busted” more trusts than TR did. In one celebrated instance in 1907, Roosevelt even gave his personal blessing to J. P. Morgan's plan to have U.S. Steel absorb the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, without fear of antitrust reprisals. When Taft then launched a

suit against U.S. Steel in 1911, the political reaction from TR was explosive.



### Caring for the Consumer

Roosevelt backed a noteworthy measure in 1906 that benefited both corporations and consumers. Big meat-packers were being shut out of certain European markets because some American meat—from the small packing-houses, claimed the giants—had been found to be tainted. Foreign governments were even threatening to ban all American meat imports by throwing out the good beef with the bad botulism.

At the same time, American consumers hungered for safer canned products. Their appetite for reform was whetted by Upton Sinclair's sensational novel *The Jungle*, published in 1906. Sinclair intended his revolting tract to focus attention on the plight of the workers in the big canning factories, but instead he appalled the public with his description of disgustingly unsanitary food products. (As he put it, he aimed for the nation's heart but hit its stomach.) The book described in noxious detail the filth, disease, and putrefaction in Chicago's damp, ill-ventilated slaughterhouses. Many readers, including Roosevelt, were so sickened that for a time they found meat unpalatable. The president was moved by the loathsome mess in Chicago to appoint a special investigating commission, whose cold-blooded



**Sausage Making, c. 1906**  
White-jacketed inspectors like those on the right made some progress in cleaning up the septic slaughterhouses after the passage of the Meat Inspection Act in 1906.

report almost outdid Sinclair's novel. It related how piles of poisoned rats, rope ends, splinters, and other debris were scooped up and canned as potted ham. A cynical jingle of the time ran,

*Mary had a little lamb,  
And when she saw it sicken,  
She shipped it off to Packingtown,  
And now it's labeled chicken.*

Backed by a nauseated public, Roosevelt induced Congress to pass the Meat Inspection Act of 1906. It decreed that the preparation of meat shipped over state lines would be subject to federal inspection from corral to can. Although the largest packers resisted certain features of the act, they accepted it as an opportunity to drive their smaller, fly-by-night competitors out of business. At the same time, they could receive the government's seal of approval on their exports. As a companion to the Meat Inspection Act, the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 was designed to prevent the adulteration and mislabeling of foods and pharmaceuticals.

### Earth Control

Wasteful Americans, assuming that their natural resources were inexhaustible, had looted and polluted their incomparable domain with unparalleled speed and greed. Western ranchers and timbermen were especially eager to accelerate the destructive process, for they panted to build up the country, and the environmental consequences be hanged. But even before the end of the nineteenth century, far-visioned leaders saw that such a squandering of the nation's birthright would have to be halted, or America would sink from resource richness to despoiled dearth.

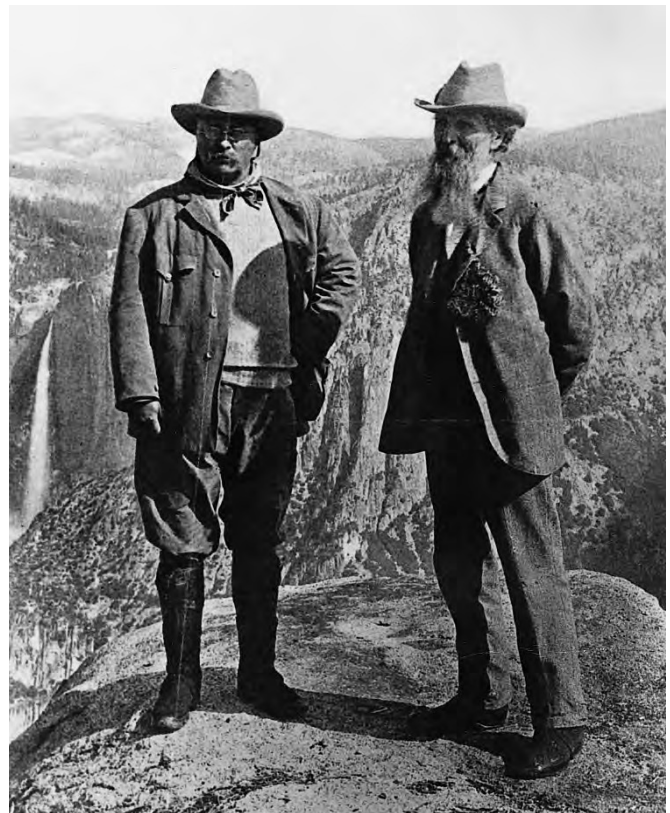
A first feeble step toward conservation had been taken with the Desert Land Act of 1877, under which the federal government sold arid land cheaply on the condition that the purchaser irrigate the thirsty soil within three years. More successful was the Forest Reserve Act of 1891, authorizing the president to set aside public forests as national parks and other reserves. Under this statute some 46 million acres of magnificent trees were rescued from the lumberman's saw in the 1890s and preserved for posterity. The Carey Act of 1894 distributed federal land to the states on the condition that it be irrigated and settled.

A new day in the history of conservation dawned with Roosevelt (see "Makers of America: The Envi-

*In his annual message to Congress in 1907, Roosevelt declared prophetically,*

*"We are prone to speak of the resources of this country as inexhaustible; this is not so. The mineral wealth of the country, the coal, iron, oil, gas, and the like, does not reproduce itself, and therefore is certain to be exhausted ultimately; and wastefulness in dealing with it to-day means that our descendants will feel the exhaustion a generation or two before they otherwise would."*

**High Point for Conservation** Roosevelt and famed naturalist John Muir visit Glacier Point, on the rim of Yosemite Valley, California. In the distance is Yosemite Falls; a few feet behind Roosevelt is a sheer drop of 3,254 feet.







**Loggers in the State of Washington, 1912** It took the sweat and skill of many men to conquer a giant Douglas fir like this one. An ax-wielding “sniper” had rounded the edges of this log so that a team of oxen, driven by a “bullwhacker,” could more easily drag it out of the woods along a “skid road.” *Skid road* (sometimes corrupted as *skid row*) was also a name for the often-sleazy sections of logging towns, where loggers spent their time in the off-season.

ronmentalists,” pp. 670–671). Huntsman, naturalist, rancher, lover of the great outdoors, he was appalled by the pillaging of timber and mineral resources. Other dedicated conservationists, notably Gifford Pinchot, head of the federal Division of Forestry, had broken important ground before him. But Roosevelt seized the banner of leadership and charged into the fray with all the weight of his prestige, his energy, his firsthand knowledge, and his slashing invective.

The thirst of the desert still unslaked, Congress responded to the whip of the Rough Rider by passing the landmark Newlands Act of 1902. Washington was authorized to collect money from the sale of public lands in the sun-baked western states and then use these funds for the development of irrigation projects. Settlers repaid the cost of reclamation from their now-productive soil, and the money was put into a revolving fund to finance more such enterprises. The giant Roosevelt Dam, constructed on Arizona’s Salt River, was appropriately dedicated by Roosevelt in 1911. Thanks to this epochal legislation, dozens of dams were thrown across virtually every major western river in the ensuing decades.

Roosevelt pined to preserve the nation’s shrinking forests. By 1900 only about a quarter of the once-vast virgin timberlands remained standing. Lumbermen had already logged off most of the first-growth timber from Maine to Michigan, and the sharp thud of their axes was beginning to split the silence in the great fir forests of the Pacific slope. Roosevelt proceeded to set aside in federal

reserves some 125 million acres, or almost three times the acreage thus saved from the saw by his three predecessors. He similarly earmarked millions of acres of coal deposits, as well as water resources useful for irrigation and power. To set a shining example, in 1902 he banned Christmas trees from the White House.

Conservation, including reclamation, may have been Roosevelt’s most enduring tangible achievement. He was buoyed in this effort by an upwelling national mood of concern about the disappearance of the frontier—believed to be the source of such national characteristics as individualism and democracy. An increasingly civilized people worried that too much civilization might not be good for the national soul. City dwellers snapped up Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* (1903) and other books about nature, and urban youngsters made the outdoor-oriented Boy Scouts of America the country’s largest youth organization. The Sierra Club, founded in 1892, dedicated itself to preserving the wildness of the western landscape.

The preservationists lost a major battle in 1913 when the federal government allowed the city of San Francisco to build a dam for its municipal water supply in the spectacular, high-walled Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park. The Hetch Hetchy controversy laid bare a deep division among conservationists that persists to the present day. To the preservationists of the Sierra Club, including famed naturalist John Muir, Hetch Hetchy was a “temple” of nature that should be



# MAKERS OF AMERICA

## The Environmentalists

Humans have long been awed by nature, but they have also yearned to be its masters. Native American peoples did what they could to shape the natural environment to serve their purposes—burning forests and grasslands, for example, to improve hunting habitats—but they lacked the tools to make Mother Earth bow deeply to their will. The earliest European colonists saw North America as a “howling wilderness” and toiled mightily with ax and plow to tame it. By the mid-nineteenth century, Americans commanded powerful new technologies like the railroad and steam-powered drills and dredges, which promised unbridled dominion over the natural world. Only then did voices begin to be heard in defense of the wounded earth—the faint first stirrings of what would come to be called “environmentalism.”

In a pattern that would often be repeated, nature’s earliest defenders tended to be well-off townsfolk and city dwellers, like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The Americans most likely to appreciate the value of the pristine wilderness, it seemed, were those who had ceased to struggle against it. (“Cities, not log cabins, produce Sierra Clubbers,” one historian noted.) For the loggers, miners, and farmers who continued to sweat their living out of nature’s grudging embrace, concern for environmental niceties often seemed like the sanctimonious piety of a privileged elite.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, many genteel, urban Americans had come to romanticize their pioneer forebears. They reinvented hunting and fishing as sports for the well-to-do, not simply as ways to put food on the table. Preservationists like John Muir waxed lyrical about the mystic allure of unspoiled nature. Seizing the popular mood, Theodore Roosevelt deliberately constructed a public image of himself as a manly outdoorsman—raising cattle in the Dakotas, shooting lions in Africa, rafting down wild rivers in the Amazon basin—and as president he greatly expanded the system of national forests. But Roosevelt was also a pioneer of another sort—as a prominent promoter of the progressive-era “conservation” movement, composed of a loose coalition of scientists,

bureaucrats, and businesspeople dependent on America’s endowment of natural resources. Progressive conservationists believed that nature must be neither uncritically revered nor wastefully exploited, but must instead be efficiently utilized. Thus the same TR who admired the wonders of Yosemite Valley in the company of John Muir also supported the professional forester Gifford Pinchot, who declared that “the object of our forest policy is not to preserve the forests because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness, but the making of prosperous homes.... Use must be the test by which the forester tries himself.”

Pinchot’s “rational use” philosophy guided America’s natural resource policy until the mid-twentieth century. It justified the systematic harvesting of millions of trees in the sprawling national forests whose boundaries Roosevelt had expanded, and the drowning of vast river valleys behind massive dams that Roosevelt’s Reclamation Service helped to build. This attitude toward nature triumphed in the New

**Gifford Pinchot Going Trout Fishing** The father of the modern Forest Service, Pinchot championed the concept of “rational use” as the guiding principle of the federal government’s natural resource management policies.



Deal era of the 1930s, when the federal government initiated colossal projects that undertook nothing less than reengineering the face of the continent—including the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Soil Conservation Service, and the Shelterbelt tree-planting project on the Great Plains. The huge reach of these New Deal projects also introduced millions of Americans to the concept that nature had to be treated with respect, helping to stimulate the post-World War II grassroots environmental movement.

The rise of ecological science in the post-World War II era fundamentally changed the debate about the relation of nature to civilization. Ecologists charged that the apparent “rationality” of the earlier conservationists dangerously neglected the fateful intricacies of biological systems. They called attention to the stunningly complex webs of interrelationships that linked together seemingly unrelated organisms—and to the perils of tampering even slightly with the delicate biological fabrics that nature had taken millennia to weave. Rachel Carson helped to popularize the new outlook in her sensational 1962 exposé, *Silent Spring*, about the far-reaching effects of pesticides on birds, plants, and animals—including humans.

The advent of ecological studies coincided with a revival of preservationist sentiment, especially in the suburbs, where Americans increasingly dwelled. Hordes of affluent baby boomers took to America’s trails, slopes, and waterways to hike, bike, ski, fish, boat, and otherwise recreate—often on public lands like Arizona’s wondrous Grand Canyon National Park, or public waters like Utah’s shimmering (and man-made) Lake Powell. Membership in environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society soared, as a generation infatuated with nature demanded a clean and green world. The first celebration of Earth Day, on April 22, 1970, marked the political maturation of modern-day environmentalism, which wedded scientific analysis with respect for nature’s majesty. That same year saw the creation of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), soon



followed by the Endangered Species Act and other legislation designed to regulate the relationship between humans and nature.

At the outset of the twenty-first century, developments like global warming served dramatic notice that planet earth was the biggest ecological system of them all—one that did not recognize national boundaries. Yet while Americans took pride in the efforts they had made to clean up their own turf, who were they, having long since consumed much of their own timberlands, to tell the Brazilians that they should not cut down the Amazon rain forest? Who were they, having tamed virtually all their own free-flowing waters, to tell the Chinese not to dam their rivers? For the peoples of the developing world, struggling to match America’s standard of living, environmentalists often seemed like spoiled spoilers, preaching the same privileged pieties that had infuriated generations of working Americans.

**Lake Powell, Utah** Named for the famed explorer John Wesley Powell and formed by one of the several dams on the Colorado River, Lake Powell has been a focus of intense controversy. It drowned the spectacularly beautiful Glen Canyon, but created recreational facilities for countless Americans.



**Earth Day, 1999** Some fifteen hundred schoolchildren gathered on the shoreline near Los Angeles to participate in a beach cleanup project. The “O” represents planet earth; inside it children represent the North and South American continents.



*Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946), a leading conservationist in the Roosevelt administration, wrote,*

“The object of our forest policy is not to preserve the forests because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness, but the making of prosperous homes. Every other consideration comes as secondary. . . . The test of utility . . . implies that no lands will be permanently reserves which can serve the people better in any other way.”

“wilderness was waste.” Pinchot and Roosevelt wanted to *use* the nation’s natural endowment intelligently. In their eyes they had to battle on two fronts: against greedy commercial interests that abused nature, as well as against romantic preservationists in thrall to simple “woodman-spare-that-tree” sentimentality.

Under Roosevelt professional foresters and engineers developed a policy of “multiple-use resource management.” They sought to combine recreation, sustained-yield logging, watershed protection, and summer stock grazing on the same expanse of federal land.

At first many westerners resisted the federal management of natural resources, but they soon learned how to take advantage of new agencies like the Forest Service and especially the Bureau of Reclamation. The largest ranches and timber companies in particular figured out how to work hand in glove with federal conservation programs devoted to the rational, large-scale, and long-term use of natural resources. The one-man-and-a-mule logger or the one-man-and-a-dog sheepherder had little clout in the new resources bureaucracy. Single-person enterprises were shouldered

held inviolable by the civilizing hand of humanity. But other conservationists, among them President Roosevelt’s chief forester, Gifford Pinchot, believed that

**Sunrise, Yosemite Valley, by Albert Bierstadt, c. 1870** A German-born artist, Bierstadt romanticized the already awesome beauty of the American West.







**The Machine and Nature** These hardy sightseers at the Grand Canyon in 1911 ironically and probably unwittingly foreshadowed the mass tourism that arrived with the dawning automobile age. Soon millions of motorized Americans would regularly flee from the cities and suburbs to “get away from it all” in wilderness sites increasingly overrun by their fellow refugees from “civilization.”

aside, in the interest of efficiency, by the combined bulk of big business and big government.

### The “Roosevelt Panic” of 1907

Roosevelt was handily elected president “in his own right” in 1904 and entered his new term buoyed by his enormous personal popularity—the cuddly “teddy bear” honored one of his bear-hunting exploits (when

he saved the life of a cub), and children piped vigorously on whistles modeled on his famous teeth. Yet the conservative Republican bosses considered him as dangerous and unpredictable as a rattlesnake. They grew increasingly restive as Roosevelt in his second term called ever more loudly for regulating the corporations, taxing incomes, and protecting workers. Roosevelt, meanwhile, had partly defanged himself after his election in 1904 by announcing that under no circumstances would he be a candidate for a third term. This was a tactical blunder, for the power of the king wanes when the people know he will be dead in four years.

Roosevelt suffered a sharp setback in 1907, when a short but punishing panic descended on Wall Street. The financial flurry featured frightened “runs” on banks, suicides, and criminal indictments against speculators.

The financial world hastened to blame Roosevelt for the storm. It cried that this “quack” had unsettled industry with his boat-rocking tactics. Conservatives damned him as “Theodore the Meddler” and branded the current distress the “Roosevelt panic.” The hot-tempered president angrily lashed back at his critics when he accused “certain malefactors of great wealth” of having deliberately engineered the monetary crisis to force the government to relax its assaults on trusts.

Fortunately, the panic of 1907 paved the way for long-overdue fiscal reforms. Precipitating a currency shortage, the flurry laid bare the need for a more elastic medium of exchange. In a crisis of this sort, the hard-pressed banks were unable to increase the volume of money in circulation, and those with ample reserves were reluctant to lend to their less fortunate competitors. Congress in 1908 responded by passing the Aldrich-Vreeland Act, which authorized national banks to issue emergency currency backed by various kinds of collateral. The path was thus smoothed for the momentous Federal Reserve Act of 1913 (see p. 684).

### The Rough Rider Thunders Out

Still warmly popular in 1908, Roosevelt could easily have won a second presidential nomination and almost certainly the election. But he felt bound by his impulsive postelection promise after his victory in 1904.

The departing president thus naturally sought a successor who would carry out “my policies.” The man of his choice was amiable, ample-girthed, and huge-framed William Howard Taft, secretary of war and a mild progressive. As an heir apparent, he had often been



**Baby. Kiss Papa Good-bye** Theodore Roosevelt leaves his baby, “My Policies,” in the hands of his chosen successor, William Howard Taft. Friction between Taft and Roosevelt would soon erupt, however, prompting Roosevelt to return to politics and challenge Taft for the presidency.

called upon in Roosevelt’s absence to “sit on the lid”—all 350 pounds of him. At the Republican convention of 1908 in Chicago, Roosevelt used his control of the party machinery—the “steamroller”—to push through Taft’s nomination on the first ballot. Three weeks later, in mile-high Denver, in the heart of silver country, the Democrats nominated twice-beaten William Jennings Bryan.

The dull campaign of 1908 featured the rotund Taft and the now-balding “Boy Orator” both trying to don the progressive Roosevelt mantle. The solid Judge Taft read cut-and-dried speeches, while Bryan griped that Roosevelt had stolen his policies from the Bryanite camp. A majority of voters chose stability with Roosevelt-endorsed Taft, who polled 321 electoral votes to 162 for Bryan. The victor’s popular count was 7,675,320 to 6,412,294. The election’s only surprise came from the

Socialists, who amassed 420,793 votes for Eugene V. Debs, the hero of the Pullman strike of 1894 (see pp. 617–618).

Roosevelt, ever in the limelight, left soon after the election for a lion hunt in Africa. His numerous enemies clinked glasses while toasting “Health to the lions,” and a few irreverently prayed that some big cat would “do its duty.” But TR survived, still bursting with energy at the age of fifty-one in 1909.

Roosevelt was branded by his adversaries as a wild-eyed radical, but his reputation as an eater of errant industrialists now seems inflated. He fought many a sham battle, and the number of laws he inspired was certainly not in proportion to the amount of noise he emitted. He was often under attack from the reigning business lords, but the more enlightened of them knew that they had a friend in the White House. Roosevelt should be remembered first and foremost as the cowboy who started to tame the bucking bronco of adolescent capitalism, thus ensuring it a long adult life.

TR’s enthusiasm and perpetual youthfulness, like an overgrown Boy Scout’s, appealed to the young of all ages. “You must always remember,” a British diplomat cautioned his colleagues, “that the president is about six.” He served as a political lightning rod to protect capitalists against popular indignation—and against socialism, which Roosevelt regarded as “ominous.” He strenuously sought the middle road between unbridled individualism and paternalistic collectivism. His conservation crusade, which tried to mediate between the romantic wilderness-preservationists and the rapacious resource-predators, was probably his most typical and his most lasting achievement.

Several other contributions of Roosevelt lasted beyond his presidency. First, he greatly enlarged the power and prestige of the presidential office—and masterfully developed the technique of using the big stick of publicity as a political bludgeon. Second, he helped

*Roosevelt, who preached the doctrine of the “strenuous life,” practiced it until almost the end. In 1913 he sent a political message on a still-preserved phonograph recording to the Boys’ Progressive League:*

*“Don’t flinch, don’t foul, and hit the line hard.”*



shape the progressive movement and beyond it the liberal reform campaigns later in the century. His Square Deal, in a sense, was the grandfather of the New Deal later launched by his fifth cousin, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Finally, to a greater degree than any of his predecessors, TR opened the eyes of Americans to the fact that they shared the world with other nations. As a great power, they had fallen heir to responsibilities—and had been seized by ambitions—from which there was no escaping.



### Taft: A Round Peg in a Square Hole

William Howard Taft, with his ruddy complexion and upturned mustache, at first inspired widespread confidence. “Everybody loves a fat man,” the saying goes, and the jovial Taft, with “mirthquakes” of laughter bubbling up from his abundant abdomen, was personally popular. He had graduated second in his class at Yale and had established an enviable reputation as a lawyer and judge, though he was widely regarded as hostile to labor unions. He had been a trusted administrator under Roosevelt—in the Philippines, at home, and in Cuba, where he had served capably as a troubleshooter.

But “good old Will” suffered from lethal political handicaps. Roosevelt had led the conflicting elements of the Republican party by the sheer force of his person-

ality. Taft, in contrast, had none of the arts of a dashing political leader and none of Roosevelt’s zest for the fray. Recoiling from the clamor of controversy, he generally adopted an attitude of passivity toward Congress. He was a poor judge of public opinion, and his candor made him a chronic victim of “foot-in-mouth” disease.

“Peaceful Bill” was no doubt a mild progressive, but at heart he was more wedded to the status quo than to change. Significantly, his cabinet did not contain a single representative of the party’s “insurgent” wing, which was on fire for reform of current abuses, especially the tariff.



### The Dollar Goes Abroad as a Diplomat

Though ordinarily lethargic, Taft bestirred himself to use the lever of American investments to boost American political interests abroad, an approach to foreign policy that his critics denounced as “dollar diplomacy.” Washington warmly encouraged Wall Street bankers to sluice their surplus dollars into foreign areas of strategic concern to the United States, especially in the Far East and in the regions critical to the security of the Panama Canal. By preempting investors from rival powers, such as Germany, New York bankers would thus strengthen American defenses and foreign policies, while bringing further prosperity to their homeland—and to themselves. The almighty dollar thereby supplanted the big stick.



Ex-President Theodore Roosevelt Watches President Taft Struggle with the Demands of Government, 1910

China's Manchuria was the object of Taft's most spectacular effort to inject the reluctant dollar into the Far Eastern theater. Newly ambitious Japan and imperialistic Russia, recent foes, controlled the railroads of this strategic province. President Taft saw in the Manchurian railway monopoly a possible strangulation of Chinese economic interests and a consequent slamming of the Open Door in the faces of U.S. merchants. In 1909 Secretary of State Philander C. Knox blunderingly proposed that a group of American and foreign bankers buy the Manchurian railroads and then turn them over to China under a self-liquidating arrangement. Both Japan and Russia, unwilling to be jockeyed out of their dominant position, bluntly rejected Knox's overtures. Taft was showered with ridicule.

Another dangerous new trouble spot was the revolution-riddled Caribbean—now virtually a Yankee lake. Hoping to head off trouble, Washington urged Wall Street bankers to pump dollars into the financial vacuums in Honduras and Haiti to keep out foreign funds. The United States, under the Monroe Doctrine, would not permit foreign nations to intervene, and consequently felt obligated to put its money where its mouth was to prevent economic and political instability.

Again necessity was the mother of armed Caribbean intervention. Sporadic disorders in palm-fringed Cuba, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic brought American forces to these countries to restore order and protect American investment. A revolutionary upheaval in Nicaragua, partly fomented by American interests, resulted in the landing of twenty-five hundred marines in 1912. The marines remained in Nicaragua for thirteen years. (See the map on p. 686.)



### Taft the Trustbuster

Taft managed to gain some fame as a smasher of monopolies. The ironic truth is that the colorless Taft brought 90 suits against the trusts during his 4 years in office, as compared with some 44 for Roosevelt in 7½ years.

By fateful happenstance the most sensational judicial actions during the Taft regime came in 1911. In that year the Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of the mighty Standard Oil Company, which was judged to be a combination in restraint of trade in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890. At the same time, the Court handed down its famous "rule of reason." This doctrine held that only those combinations that "unreasonably" restrained trade were illegal. This fine-print proviso ripped a huge hole in the government's antitrust net.

Even more explosively, in 1911 Taft decided to press an antitrust suit against the U.S. Steel Corporation. This initiative infuriated Roosevelt, who had personally been involved in one of the mergers that prompted the suit. Once Roosevelt's protégé, President Taft was increasingly taking on the role of his antagonist. The stage was being set for a bruising confrontation.



### Taft Splits the Republican Party

Lowering the barriers of the formidable protective tariff—the "Mother of Trusts"—was high on the agenda of the progressive members of the Republican party, and they at first thought they had a friend and ally in Taft. True to his campaign promises to reduce tariffs, Taft called Congress into special session in March 1909. The House proceeded to pass a moderately reductive bill, but senatorial reactionaries, led by Senator Nelson W. Aldrich of Rhode Island, tacked on hundreds of upward tariff revisions. Only items such as hides, sea moss, and canary seed were left on the duty-free list.

After much hand-wringing, Taft signed the Payne-Aldrich Bill, thus betraying his campaign promises and outraging the progressive wing of his party, heavily drawn from the Midwest. Taft rubbed salt in the wound by proclaiming it "the best bill that the Republican party ever passed."

Taft revealed a further knack for shooting himself in the foot in his handling of conservation. The portly president was a dedicated conservationist, and his contributions actually equaled or surpassed those of Roosevelt. He established the Bureau of Mines to control mineral resources, rescued millions of acres of western coal lands from exploitation, and protected water-power sites from private development. But those praiseworthy accomplishments were largely erased in the public mind by the noisy Ballinger-Pinchot quarrel that erupted in 1910.

When Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger opened public lands in Wyoming, Montana, and Alaska to corporate development, he was sharply criticized by Gifford Pinchot, chief of the Agriculture Department's Division of Forestry and a stalwart Rooseveltian. When Taft dismissed Pinchot on the narrow grounds of insubordination, a storm of protest arose from conservationists and from Roosevelt's friends, who were legion. The whole unsavory episode further widened the growing rift between the president and the former president, onetime bosom political partners.





Roosevelt the Take-Back Giver



The reformist wing of the Republican party was now up in arms, while Taft was being pushed increasingly into the embrace of the stand-pat Old Guard. By the spring of 1910, the Grand Old Party was split wide open, owing largely to the clumsiness of Taft. A suspicious Roosevelt returned triumphantly to New York in June 1910 and shortly thereafter stirred up a tempest. Unable to keep silent, he took to the stump at Osawatomie, Kansas, and shocked the Old Guard with a flaming speech. The doctrine that he proclaimed—popularly known as the “New Nationalism”—urged the national government to increase its power to remedy economic and social abuses.

Weakened by these internal divisions, the Republicans lost badly in the congressional elections of 1910. In a victory of landslide proportions, the Democrats emerged with 228 seats, leaving the once-dominant Republicans with only 161. In a further symptom of the reforming temper of the times, a Socialist representative, Austrian-born Victor L. Berger, was elected from Milwaukee.\* The Republicans, by virtue of holdovers, retained the Senate, 51 to 41, but the insurgents in their midst were numerous enough to make that hold precarious.

### **The Taft-Roosevelt Rupture**

The sputtering uprising in Republican ranks had now blossomed into a full-fledged revolt. Early in 1911 the National Progressive Republican League was formed, with the fiery, white-maned Senator La Follette of Wisconsin its leading candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. The assumption was that Roosevelt, an anti-third term, would not permit himself to be “drafted.”

But the restless Rough Rider began to change his views about third terms as he saw Taft, hand in glove with the hated Old Guard, discard “my policies.” In February 1912 Roosevelt formally wrote to seven state governors that he was willing to accept the Republican nomination. His reasoning was that the third-term tradition applied to three *consecutive elective* terms. Exuberantly he cried, “My hat is in the ring!” and “The fight is on and I am stripped to the buff!”

Roosevelt forthwith seized the Progressive banner, while La Follette, who had served as a convenient path-breaker, was protestingly elbowed aside. Girded for battle, the Rough Rider came clattering into the presidential primaries then being held in many states. He shouted through half-clenched teeth that the president had fallen under the thumb of the reactionary bosses and that, although Taft “means well, he means well feebly.” The once-genial Taft, now in a fighting mood, retorted by branding Roosevelt supporters “emotionalists and neurotics.”

A Taft-Roosevelt explosion was near in June 1912, when the Republican convention met in Chicago. The Rooseveltites, who were about 100 delegates short of winning the nomination, challenged the right of some 250 Taft delegates to be seated. Most of these contests were arbitrarily settled in favor of Taft, whose supporters held the throttle of the convention steamroller. The Roosevelt adherents, crying “fraud” and “naked theft,” in the end refused to vote, and Taft triumphed.

Roosevelt, the supposedly good sportsman, refused to quit the game. Having tasted for the first time the bitter cup of defeat, he was now on fire to lead a third-party crusade.

\*He was eventually denied his seat in 1919, during a wave of anti-red hysteria.

## Chronology

- 1901** Commission system established in Galveston, Texas  
Progressive Robert La Follette elected governor of Wisconsin
- 1902** Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell publish muckraking exposés  
Anthracite coal strike  
Newlands Act
- 1903** Department of Commerce and Labor established  
Elkins Act
- 1904** *Northern Securities* case  
Roosevelt defeats Alton B. Parker for presidency
- 1905** *Lochner v. New York*
- 1906** Hepburn Act  
Upton Sinclair publishes *The Jungle*
- 1906** Meat Inspection Act  
Pure Food and Drug Act
- 1907** “Roosevelt panic”
- 1908** *Muller v. Oregon*  
Taft defeats Bryan for presidency  
Aldrich-Vreeland Act
- 1909** Payne-Aldrich Tariff
- 1910** Ballinger-Pinchot affair
- 1911** Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire  
Standard Oil antitrust case  
U.S. Steel Corporation antitrust suit
- 1912** Taft wins Republican nomination over Roosevelt
- 1913** Seventeenth Amendment passed (direct election of U.S. senators)  
Federal Reserve Act