

DBQ 14: PROGRESSIVISM

Historical Context

For almost a century, historians have argued about progressivism: What were its defining characteristics? What was its meaning? What did progressivism accomplish? They can agree on some points: Yes, the progressive era was generally a period of social, political, and economic reforms; and yes, it lasted for only a few years, from about 1900 to 1917 (though some historians say it began earlier and some say it lasted longer). As to its characteristics, most historians would say that progressives were generally optimists, believing that social ills were curable. Most progressives were middle class and educated. Most were Protestant, and the sense of religious fervor and mission ran through their rhetoric and their work. Much (but certainly not all) of the progressives' focus was on urban America and its problems. And, progressivism's tone was distinctly moral, idealistic, and patriotic. But beyond these few general points, there is little agreement. Perhaps the only thing that *all* historians would agree upon is this: Progressivism is not easily understood, and it was certainly broader, more varied, and more complicated than it is often described in high school history books.

CQ#3: What was Progressivism? Who were the Progressives? How did Progressivism attempt to deal with the profound social, economic and political changes brought about by industrialization?

Instructions: Your goal with this assignment is to try to answer the above content question. You will do this by reading numerous related documents. The documents won't allow you to answer CQ#3 completely but they should give you some insights. For **EACH** document, provide thoughtful written responses to the following prompts.

- (1) What is the source? What type of source is it? Primary/Secondary?
- (2) What is the purpose of the source? What is the source trying to accomplish?
- (3) What from the source is relevant to CQ#3? How does the source make you better able to answer CQ#3?

DBQ 14: PROGRESSIVISM, *CONTINUED***Document 1**

Here is a brief excerpt from a speech given by U.S. Senator Elihu Root in 1913. Root had earlier served in President Theodore Roosevelt's cabinet as Secretary of War and Secretary of State. In 1912, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In this section of his speech, Root is explaining why the progressive reform movement began.

The real difficulty appears to be that the new conditions [growing from] the . . . industrial development of the last half-century are continuously and progressively demanding the readjustment of the relations between [society] and the establishment of new legal rights and obligations not [understood or anticipated in America's early years] when . . . laws were passed or . . . limitations upon the powers of government were [placed] in our Constitution.

Document 2

This short excerpt comes from the first inaugural address of President Woodrow Wilson, given on March 4, 1913. Early in the speech, Wilson reminded Americans that industrialism had brought the nation great material wealth.

We see that in many things [our] life is very great. . . . But . . . evil has come with the good. . . . With riches has come inexcusable waste. We have squandered a great part of what we might have used, and have not stopped to conserve the exceeding bounty of nature. . . . We have been proud of our industrial achievements, but we have not . . . stopped thoughtfully enough to count the human costs. . . . [Our] great Government we loved has too often been made use of for private and selfish purposes, and those who used it had forgotten the people.

At last a vision has been [shown to] us of our life as a whole. We see the bad with the good. . . . With this vision we approach new affairs. Our duty is to cleanse, to reconsider, to restore, to correct the evil . . . to purify and humanize every process of our common life. . . .

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DBQ 14: PROGRESSIVISM, CONTINUED**Document 3**

In 1912, four years after retiring from the presidency, Theodore Roosevelt again ran for president. He ran, not as the Republican Party candidate, but as the candidate of a third party, the Progressive Party. This document is a short excerpt from the keynote address given by U.S. Senator Albert Beveridge at the 1912 Progressive Party convention in Chicago.

We stand for a nobler America. We stand for an undivided Nation. We stand for a broader liberty, a fuller justice. We stand for social brotherhood as against savage individualism. We stand for an intelligent cooperation instead of a reckless competition. We stand for mutual helpfulness instead of mutual hatred. We stand for equal rights, as a fact of life instead of a catchword of politics. We stand for the rule of the people as a practical truth instead of a meaningless pretense. We stand for a representative government that represents the people. We battle for the actual rights of man.

Document 4

John Spargo was a progressive muckraker and, like many other muckrakers, an active socialist. He focused much of his reform efforts on improving the lives of poor children. The following quotation comes from the introduction to a book he wrote in 1908; in it, he advocated government controls over the pasteurization and sale of milk in order to protect the health of babies and children. (From John Spargo, *The Common Sense of the Milk Question*, Macmillan, 1908.)

What I want to do is to place before the American public a calm and dispassionate statement of certain curable ills as a basis upon which to rest an earnest plea for action; to waken, if possible, all those dormant and neglected powers and impulses for good which need to be called into active cooperation in order that the evils may be remedied.

Document 5

Here is another brief quotation from John Spargo. This comes from a letter that he wrote to historian Louis Filler in 1938, in which he tried to explain the goals of socialist muckrakers like himself, Upton Sinclair, Robert Hunter, Rhett Child Dorr, Lincoln Steffens, and many others during the progressive era, years earlier.

The things we were advocating were not advocated with a view to overturning the capitalist system. All that we wrote might as well have been written by an earnest Christian trying to apply Christian principles to a very definite and serious human problem.

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Document 6

Here is an excerpt from a speech given by President Theodore Roosevelt to the National Conservation Congress in 1908.

... there must be the look ahead, there must be a realization of the fact that to waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.

Document 7

This is a brief excerpt from *The Struggle for Self-Government*, a book written by Lincoln Steffens and published in 1906.

Too often we have found both [political] parties representing graft—big business graft. The people, especially in the West, are waking to a realization of this state of things, and ... they are following leaders who see that the way to restore government representative of the common interests of the city or State is to restore to public opinion the control of the dominant party. ... The people of Wisconsin ... are law-abiding, conservative, and fair. ... And they are to be trusted, for no matter how men may differ about Governor La Follette otherwise, his long, hard fight has developed citizenship in Wisconsin—honest, reasonable, intelligent citizenship.

Document 8

This is a list of some of the significant areas of reform during the progressive era.

Women's suffrage	World peace movements	Anti-Trust laws
Food and drug inspection	Child labor laws	Local fire codes
Milk pasteurization laws	Local building codes	Antiprostitution laws
Settlement houses	Prohibition	Professional licensing
Progressive income taxes	Social Gospel	Referendum and Initiative
Election of U.S. Senators	Election reforms	National and State parks
Clean government	Conservation laws	School attendance laws
reforms	Labor laws	Civil Service reforms
Federal Reserve Act	Interstate commerce	Progressive education
Worker safety laws	Tariff reforms	

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DBQ 14: PROGRESSIVISM, *CONTINUED***Document 9**

Here is an excerpt from the "Social Creed of the Methodist Episcopal Church," a statement adopted in 1908.

The Methodist Episcopal Church stands:

For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.

For the abolition of child labor.

For such regulation of the conditions of labor for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.

For a release from employment one day in seven.

For a living wage in every industry.

For the highest wage that each industry can afford and for the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.

For the recognition of the Golden Rule and the mind of Christ as the supreme law of society and the sure remedy for all social ills.