

# **Progressive Era Activity**

# 1. Social Welfare Reform

The Social Gospel was a Christian intellectual movement that was most prominent in the early 20th century United States. The movement applied Christian ethics to social problems, especially issues of social justice such as economic inequality, poverty, alcoholism, crime, racial tensions, slums, unclean environment, child labor, inadequate labor unions, poor schools, and the danger of war.

In 1880 the Salvation Army was brought to the United States in order to feed poor people in soup kitchens, care for children in nurseries, and send “slum brigades” to instruct poor immigrants in middle class values of hard work and temperance.

Progressive journalists sought to expose critical social problems and exhort the public to take action. In his book, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), journalist and photographer Jacob Riis used photojournalism to capture the dismal and dangerous living conditions in working-class tenements in New York City. His account revealed the dirt, disease, vice, and misery of the New York slums. The book deeply influenced a future New York City police commissioner, Theodore Roosevelt.



## 2. Jacob Riis Photography



Lodgers of tenement, New York, 1888



Boys sleeping in street, New York, 1890



It cost a dollar a week to live in these sheds.



Tenement, 1891

# 3. Moral Reform

The prohibition of liquor, which gained followers through the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Anti-Saloon League, directly linked Progressivism with morality and Christian reform initiatives, and saw in alcohol both a moral vice and a practical concern, as workingmen spent their wages on liquor and saloons, often turning violent towards each other or their families at home. Alcohol was connected with prostitution, drunken voters, crooked city officials, and with party bosses who counted poker chips by night and miscounted ballots by day.

The WCTU and Anti-Saloon League moved the efforts to eliminate the sale of alcohol from a bar-to-bar public opinion campaign to one of city-to-city and state-by-state votes. Through local option votes and subsequent statewide initiatives and referendums, the Anti-Saloon League succeeded in urging 40 percent of the nation's counties to "go dry" by 1906, and a full dozen states to do the same by 1909.

Carrie A. Nation was a famous prohibitionist whose first husband died of alcoholism. With her hatchet she boldly smashed saloon bottles and bars, and her "hatchetations" brought considerable disrepute to prohibition movement because of her violence.

Yet, their political pressure culminated in the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1919, which prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages nationwide.

Saloon in Meeker, CO



Carrie Nation



# 4. Prohibition Images

Image 1



Image 3



Image 2

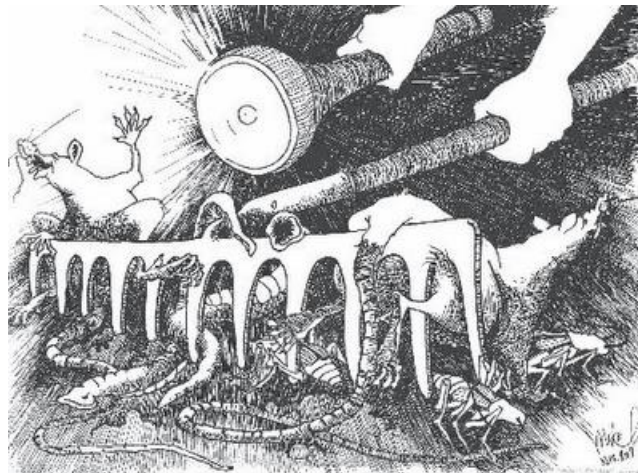
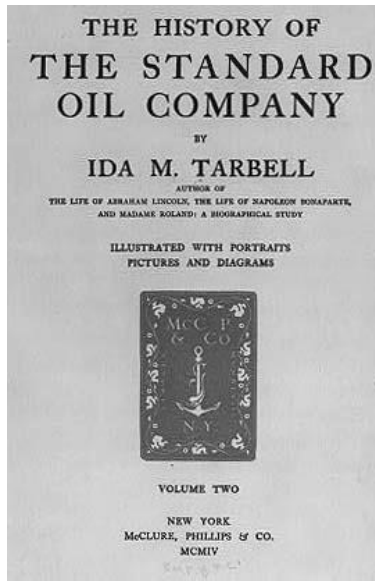


# 5. Economic Reform

Collectively called muckrakers, a brave cadre of reporters exposed injustices so grave they made the blood of the average American run cold.

The first to strike was Lincoln Steffens. In 1902, he published an article in *McClure's* magazine called "Tweed Days in St. Louis." Steffens exposed how city officials worked in league with big business to maintain power while corrupting the public treasury.

Ida Tarbell struck next. Tarbell began her *McClure's* series entitled "History of the Standard Oil Company." She outlined and documented the cutthroat business practices behind John Rockefeller's meteoric rise. Tarbell's motives may also have been personal: her own father had been driven out of business by Rockefeller.



# 6. Worker Reform

Florence Kelley championed many social justice. As the first general secretary of the National Consumers League, Kelley led one of the original battles to try and secure safety in factory working conditions. She particularly opposed sweatshop labor and urged the passage of an eight-hour-workday law in order to specifically protect women in the workplace.

Kelley's efforts were initially met with strong resistance from factory owners who exploited women's labor and were unwilling to give up the long hours and low wages they paid in order to offer the cheapest possible product to consumers. But in 1911, a tragedy turned the tide of public opinion in favor of Kelley's cause. On March 25 of that year, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company on the eighth floor of the Asch building in New York City, resulting in the deaths of 146 garment workers, most of them young, immigrant women... This tragedy provided the National Consumers League with the moral argument to convince politicians of the need to pass workplace safety laws and codes.

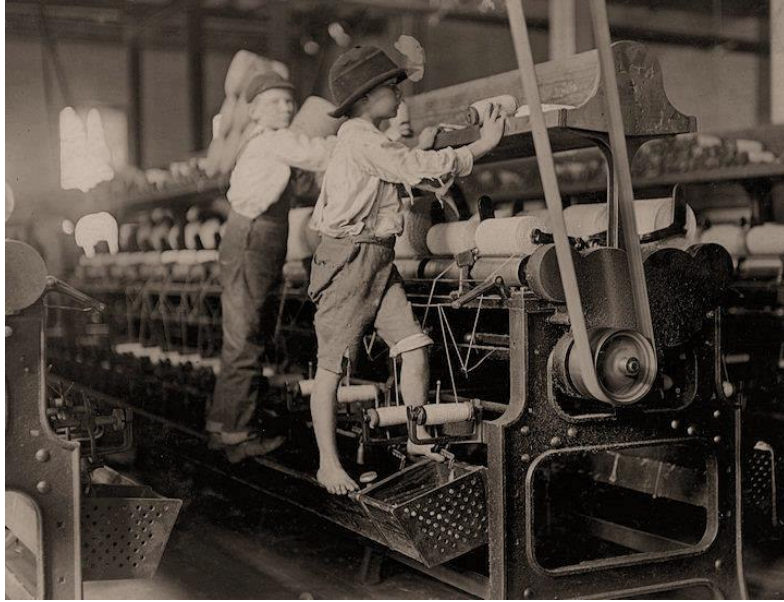
## **Children:**

Children often worked long hours in dangerous factory conditions for very little money. Children were useful as laborers because their size allowed them to move in small spaces in factories or mines where adults couldn't fit, children were easier to manage and control and perhaps most importantly, children could be paid less than adults. Child laborers often worked to help support their families, but were forced to forgo an education.

The National Child Labor Committee (NCLC), formed in 1904, urged the passage of labor legislation to ban child labor in the industrial sector. In 1900, U.S. census records indicated that one out of every six children between the ages of five and ten were working, a 50-percent increase over the previous decade. If the sheer numbers alone were not enough to spur action, the fact that managers paid child workers noticeably less for their labor gave additional fuel to the NCLC's efforts to radically curtail child labor. The committee employed photographer Lewis Hine to engage in a decade-long pictorial campaign to educate Americans on the plight of children working in factories.



# 7. Lewis Hine Images



The Mill: Some boys and girls were so small they had to climb up on to the spinning frame to mend broken threads and to put back the empty bobbins.



The Factory: Some of the young knitters



Miners: At the close of day. Waiting for the cage to go up. The cage is entirely open on two sides and not very well protected on the other two, and is usually crowded like this.



Newsies: A small newsie downtown on a Saturday afternoon.



# 8. Political Reform

At the state level, perhaps the greatest advocate of Progressive government was Wisconsin Governor Robert La Follette. During his time as governor, from 1901 through 1906, La Follette introduced the Wisconsin Idea, wherein he hired experts to research and advise him in drafting legislation to improve conditions in his state. “Fighting Bob” supported numerous Progressive ideas while governor: He signed into law the first workman’s compensation system, approved a minimum wage law, developed a progressive tax law, adopted the direct election of U.S. senators before the subsequent constitutional amendment made it mandatory, and advocated for women’s suffrage. His major targets were regulating big businesses and the railroads.

Texas Governor James J. Hogg was also a reform governor who helped drive illegal insurance companies from the state and championed anti-trust legislation. His chief interest was in regulating the railroad. He pointed out abuses in rates, noting, for example that it cost more to ship lumber from east Texas to Dallas than to Nebraska. A railroad commission, established largely as a result of his efforts, helped increase milling and manufacturing in Texas by lowering the rates.

Progressives also pushed for reform that affected the federal government. In an effort to achieve a fairer representation of state constituencies in the U.S. Congress, they lobbied for approval of the Seventeenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which mandated the direct election of U.S. senators. The Seventeenth Amendment replaced the previous system of having state legislatures choose senators.

# 9. Women's Rights

The woman suffrage movement actually began in 1848, when the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York. For the next 50 years, woman suffrage supporters worked to educate the public about the validity of woman suffrage.

At the turn of the century, women reformers in the settlement house movement wanted to pass reform legislation. However, many politicians were unwilling to listen to a disenfranchised [non-voting] group. Thus, over time women began to realize that in order to achieve reform, they needed to win the right to vote.

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton formed the National Woman Suffrage Association and pressed for a constitutional amendment granting women's suffrage.

They began by actively lobbied state governments. Wyoming became the first state to grant full women's suffrage in 1869, and Utah followed suit the following year. But then it stopped. No other states granted full suffrage until the 1890s. (Colorado in 1893)

"In order to be rated as good as a man in the field of her earnings, she must show herself better than he. She must be more steady, or more trustworthy, or more skilled, or more cheap in order to have the same chance at employment."

Florence Kelley

