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Dr. Varley

The Progressive Era

The Progressive Era was a period of time marked by much change and reform in multiple aspects of American Society. The progressive era was sparked by the reaction to the industrialization and modernization of America. After industrialization, the belief in equal rights as well as the belief that the moral standard had diminished caused the push for much reform, mainly political reform, in the time from the late 1890s-1916, forming the Progressive Era[[1]](#footnote-1). These reforms affected different areas in life including politics, business, race, gender, and culture.

The Progressive Era was marked by people who worked and pushed for reform in different areas, known as progressives. Progressives were people and groups who worked for some cause for political reform to benefit their cause, whether that cause be better sanitation, equal rights or any other problem of the progressive Era. These progressives consisted of people such as Muckrakers, and activist groups that fought for a cause or causes that they believed contaminated American society the most. Muckrakers, such as author of ‘The Jungle,’ Upton Sinclair, were progressives who would often risk reputation and life to pose under cover in some of the hidden but common industries to expose problems within. Upton Sinclair, in particular, went undercover in the meat-packing industry and found large problems with food safety and sanitation, publishing these experiences and findings in his book, ‘The Jungle.’ Muckrakers, like Sinclair, were a crucial part of the progressive era in that they helped expose problems that led to new reform laws such as the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Activist groups were also integral parts of the Progressive Era in their influence over the policies passed both locally and federally. There were multiple ways they influenced the policies of the government. For example, the Women’s Association for the Betterment of Public School Houses, or WABPSH, steered education reform through their example than protests or working through smaller changes. The WABPSH worked actively improving and changing schoolhouses and soon had influenced enough for state and federal reforms of education.[[3]](#footnote-3) In contrast to the WABPSH, other organizations, such as the Anti-Saloon League, worked their way up through different organizations and government to reach their ultimate goal of nation-wide prohibition. The Anti-Saloon League worked to get candidates, who supported their views, voted into small local political office. Once the candidate was in and a prohibition bill for that government had been passed, they moved on to do the same through another government. Through this method, they were able to get prohibition bills passed in numerous states across the country. Seeing the wide support nation-wide, the federal government then went on to pass their own constitutional amendment on prohibition.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The progressive era is an era of great importance and interest for multiple reasons. First, since the Progressive Era followed the 2nd American Industrial Revolution, many of the problems encountered were never really thought of, much less tackled, before. People, for the first time, tackled social and political reform and this has led to people always standing up against corruption since, even today.[[5]](#footnote-5) Secondly, the effect of activist groups and citizens, especially women, on the formation of policies was unprecedented. With women of the time period taking the reins on many major issues, such as women’s rights and sanitation and prohibition, their work and effect of their work was unprecedented and unheard of before, causing the formation of several constitutional amendments. Lastly, the Progressive Era was also such an important part of American history because the reforms of the time period lasted or shaped the future reforms and policies, and even cultural aspects of our nation. For example, some prominent reformation groups formed during the time, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or NAACP, have lasted the test of time and are still around today. The NAACP was formed as an organization focused on civil rights and equality for African Americans, an issue they must still deal with and actively work towards today.[[6]](#footnote-6) In addition, many policies created during the era, such as Child Labor Reforms and the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote, still exist and have shaped the policies of today. The Child Labor Reforms were something not thought of or taken seriously before the Progressive Era but have since set into motion and influenced child labor polices of today.[[7]](#footnote-7) Though not all amendments and reforms of the period lasted, such as the 18th amendment, they all did have an influence on the future culture of the period. For example, the 18th Amendment was soon repealed by the 21st Amendment in 1933, though the influence that the time of prohibition had on the culture was long-lasting. The prohibition time led to the illegal manufacturing and transportation of liquor or ‘bootlegging.’[[8]](#footnote-8) Bootlegging lasted long after prohibition was repealed and even remains today. Prohibition even influenced culture enough that it even eventually led to the birth to the racing sport of NASCAR.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In conclusion, the Progressive Era was a reforming era that had unprecedented activism, reform and long-lasting effects. The Progressive Era influenced not only policy and culture of the future but also how reform was created from then on. Today, people still protest, form organizations and lobby for their causes, using the influence of progressives and the Progressive Era as their guide.

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