

The Progressive Era

Directions:



Background

The Progressive movement that swept across the United States at the turn of the twentieth century brought changes to many of the nation's social and political institutions, including those in Louisiana. Yet, as it was in much of the South, Progressivism operated in the Pelican State in the face of prevailing social and political customs that proved, in the end, to be remarkably enduring. Thus, while Progressive reformers brought changes to the landscape in Louisiana, many of their triumphs had the dual purpose of maintaining familiar assumptions in a modern age.

Broadly defined, the Progressive movement – both as a grass-roots reform program and as a political organization – emerged at the turn of the twentieth century out of a growing popular belief in the need to address some of the late nineteenth century's grossest abuses. The type of individuals most likely to embrace Progressivism were members of the white middle class, whose education and political inclinations led them to believe that society's ills might be best solved with the rational application of scientific management. In concept, at least, the Progressives hoped to forge a more just republic; one that was responsive to the needs of its citizens and placed checks upon the unbridled power of corporate wealth, corrupt urban machines, and labor radicalism. In the social sphere, Progressives hoped to improve the lifestyles of groups as diverse as the nation's recently arrived immigrant masses, Appalachia's poor, and child laborers.

At its heart, Progressivism was a revolution by the middle class to reshape the rest of the nation in an idealized image of itself. While what constituted a Progressive issue varied from region to region, nobody could doubt the political success of the movement. By the time America had entered a new political paradigm in the 1920s, the Progressives appended four amendments to the U.S. Constitution, including the imposition of a national income tax, direct election of US Senators, prohibition, and women's suffrage. Moreover, both the Presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson endeavored to shape both national and diplomatic policy based in Progressive principles.

The Amendments

"The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes on incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the several States, and without regard to any census or enumeration." -The Sixteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution

The sixteenth amendment, enabling Congress to levy an income tax, was ratified on February 3, 1913. The Constitution previously required that any direct taxes collected be apportioned among the states based on population, which the sixteenth amendment challenged.

The push for an income tax had been debated for several years. In 1894 an amendment proposing a tax on incomes in excess of \$4000 was attached to a tariff bill. That amendment was challenged in the Supreme Court, which decided that income tax qualified as a direct tax and was therefore unconstitutional. In 1909 Nebraska Senator Norris Brown proposed a Constitutional amendment for income tax. Congress passed the resolution proposing the tax, and the matter was submitted to the states. Though Republicans protested, by February 3, 1913, the requisite number of states ratified the amendment, overruling the 1895 court decision.

The sixteenth amendment is viewed as the first of the Progressive Era amendments, signaling a major shift in the way government influenced society. Marked by a push for political and social change and an end to corruption, the Progressive Era ushered in a new period of reform. By establishing a steady revenue source, the amendment gave the government the opportunity to expand and fund programs. It also addressed Progressives' concern about ever-increasing private wealth.

1913 also saw the passage of the seventeenth amendment, establishing the process of electing senators by popular vote. The eighteenth amendment, ratified in 1919, prohibited the "manufacture, sale, or transportation" of alcohol, and the nineteenth amendment, ratified in 1920, gave women the right to vote. Together with the sixteenth amendment, they define the political change that took place during the Progressive Era.

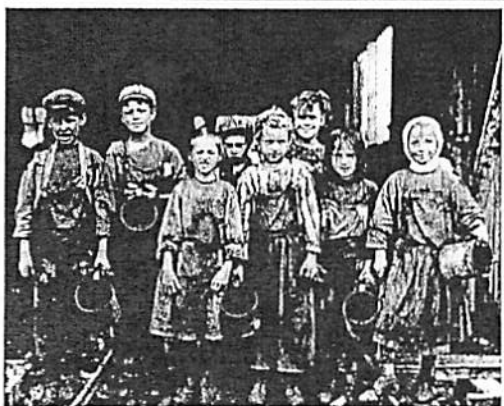
1. What was the purpose of the Progressive movement in the United States? _____

2. Why did the middle class take it upon themselves to start the progressive movement? _____

3. How did the US government change the social injustices and evils of the nation at this time? _____

Impact of the Progressive Movement on Louisiana

Source 1



Excerpt from *Louisiana Legacies: Readings in the History of the Pelican State*
By Janet Allured, Michael S. Martin

Reformers wanted not only to get children into schools but also to keep them out of the work place. In 1908 the *Outlook* magazine hailed the new Louisiana state child labor law as the best one "yet enacted by any Southern State." In 1913 the secretary for the southern states of the National Child Labor Committee praised Louisiana's recent legislation, but cautioned that it needed to be better enforced outside New Orleans. In fact Louisiana's earlier laws of the 1890s and 1902 had been enforced barely at all, determined woman reformers, particularly those who were members of the Era Club of New Orleans, campaigned for better laws... Moran notes that the legislature passed a better law in 1926. And it should be appreciated that the number of children reported as working in Louisiana fell from a most 60,000 in 1910 to approximately 32,000 in 1920.

Source 2

More than \$300,000 of the money sent to the Bureau of Public Roads was spent in Louisiana for highways and bridges." Most of this work cannot be recognized by those who benefit from it. However, one very important bridge for which the money was responsible is identifiable: the northern span across the Mississippi River that connects Vidalia with Natchez.

Source 3

Rural poverty, in the South and elsewhere, was a concern of Progressives, and they looked to schools as the key to modernizing rural life. New, clean, and attractive school buildings would be built and students taught to transform their homes into similarly clean, efficient, and comfortable environments where education would be nurtured. The Progressives originally hoped that the farmers' wives and daughters would lead the farmers to more modern attitudes and practices, which would pull them out of poverty. However, by the end of the 1920s the reform movement had given up on motivating women to change men and hoping the home would change the rural economy. It withdrew to an entirely domestic and genderspecific agenda. The home economic cottages with model kitchens, living rooms, laundries, and bedrooms that were added to many Louisiana high schools were the result of this movement.

Source 4

Concern for the education of African Americans was also visible in the Progressive Era. One of its most important manifestations was a private initiative sponsored by the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Rosenwald was the president of Sears, Roebuck, and Company, the famous mail-order catalog corporation, and his organization helped black communities build their own schools throughout the South. Attention to African Americans came gradually in Louisiana but nonetheless had important results.

Source 5

The Agriculture Department's Bureau of Animal Industries added laboratories and a slaughter, cutting, and curing building to its facility at Jeanerette, along with road, fence, drainage, and shed repairs. The total package was \$65,000. Another \$700 was spent on painting the Soil Fertility Laboratory in Houma and building a new hard-surfaced road to the main highway. To enforce migratory bird legislation, the department spent \$4,000 on new boats.

Formative Assessment Task

Describe the impact that the Progressive Era had on Louisiana.