The Muckrakers, Teddy Roosevelt and the Progressive Era

U.S. History
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Defining the Progressive Era

- Lasted from **1890s up to 1920**
  - Direct response to **Gilded Age** (1870s–1890s)
  - Complex and diverse movement

- Seek to expand role of gov’t – esp. on national level
  - Faith that with technology, expertise and rational thought, gov’t can solve society’s problems
  - **But**, need to reform gov’t before gov’t can reform society!

- One historian: the Progressive Era was “a movement to use federal power to address the social and economic ills of the nation due to rapid industrialization, urbanization, and laissez-faire economics”
The “Muckrakers”

- Investigative journalists seeking to expose corruption
  - **Jacob Riis** & **Lewis Hine**: shocking photos of the poor
  - **Ida Tarbell**: Rockefeller’s ruthless actions at Standard Oil
  - **Ida B. Wells**: Jim Crow segregation and lynching
  - **Other issues**: working conditions, child labor, fair wages, patent medicines, corrupt politicians, Senate reform, etc…

Most famous? **The Jungle** (1906) by **Upton Sinclair**
- Unsanitary conditions in Chicago slaughterhouses
- An utterly gross quote...
- So influential, *The Jungle* spurs President Teddy Roosevelt & Congress to create **Food & Drug Administration (FDA)**

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Teddy Roosevelt…Whatta Guy

- Republican president **1901–09** after McKinley assassinated
  - At age 42, becomes youngest president ever
  - *The greatest personality in American History*?!?

- Spoke 6 languages and constantly traveled the world
- Wrote 35 books and **150,000 letters**
- Probably manic-depressive, insomniac
- An imperialist warmonger, yet...
- Won the **Nobel Peace Prize**!
- A ruthless hunter, and yet he helped…
- Start the conservation movement!
- Never touched alcohol…
- But drank a **gallon** of coffee a **DAY**
- Lastly, a crazy assassination story…
The Rise of Conservation

1872: Yellowstone created as 1st ever national park
1892: John Muir founds Sierra Club in SF
   Goal: protect “God’s 1st temples”

TR – our most pro-environment president ever?
   Est’d U.S. Forest Service, 1st national wildlife preserves
   Key role creating 5 nat’l parks
   Protected 230 million acres of public land thru various acts
   Pals w/ Muir (a pic in Yosemite)

   A nifty quote from TR…

TR’s “Square Deal”

TR dubs himself “steward of the public welfare”
   steward = a person who looks after someone or something
   Gov’t as referee – purpose is to ensure fairest outcomes

“Square Deal” = TR’s 3-pronged domestic program:
   1) Conservation of natural resources
   2) Consumer protection
   3) Control of corporations (i.e., “trust-busting/regulating”)
      Takes 44 anti-trust cases before the Supreme Court

   The toughest? #3 – Seeks to defend middle class against the “representatives of predatory wealth”

   A cheesy movie clip…
TR Takes on the Trusts

TR – some companies are “good,” some are “bad”…
- Deems Standard Oil and U.S. Steel good

But, in 1902, goes after big RR conglomerate NSC owned by J.P. Morgan
- Uses Sherman Anti-Trust Act (how was it used before?)
- Wins in Supreme Court => NSC broken up

1902: Supports Coal Mining Strike in Pennsylvania
- First time federal gov’t has ever backed labor > capital

TR sets precedent in regulating trusts, backing labor
- Time to examine a nifty speech from TR…

TR’s Progressive Platform

In 1912 election, TR’s “Bull Moose” platform includes…
- Insurance for the elderly, unemployed and disabled
- An 8-hour workday and workers compensation
- Requiring all lobbyists to register publicly
- Full disclosure & limits for campaign contributions
- A national healthcare system (the 1st ever proposed!)
- Direct election of senators (not through state senates)
- A federal income tax
- Female suffrage

TR gets 27% (highest ever for 3rd party), loses to Wilson
- But, many of TR’s ideas inspire later reforms, including...
Teddy Roosevelt’s “New Nationalism” Speech

On August 31, 1910, Teddy Roosevelt delivered his “New Nationalism” address in Osawatomie, KS, arguably his most famous speech. At the time, Roosevelt had already served two presidential terms as a Republican, and he had vowed not to run again. However, at age 51, Roosevelt enjoyed wild popularity, and he also increasingly clashed with his handpicked successor, current President Taft. Soon after this speech, Roosevelt declared his candidacy as a 3rd party candidate for the newly formed Progressive Party, which he dubbed the “Bull Moose Party”. (The race was TR vs. the Republican Taft vs. Democrat Woodrow Wilson). As you read the excerpts, consider these 2 questions:

1) How does this speech epitomize the Progressive Era?

2) What parallels do you see to politics today?

(Here’s one: on 12/6/11, Obama gave a speech in Osawatomie echoing many of Roosevelt’s themes)

The absence of effective state and especially national restraint upon unfair money-getting has tended to create a small class of enormously wealthy and economically powerful men, whose chief object is to hold and increase their power… We grudge no man a fortune which represents his own power and sagacity, when exercised with entire regard to the welfare of his fellows… No man should receive a dollar unless that dollar has been fairly earned. Every dollar received should represent a dollar’s worth of service rendered – not gambling in stocks, but service rendered… Therefore, I believe in a graduated income tax on big fortunes, and in another tax which is far more easily collected and far more effective – a graduated inheritance tax on big fortunes, properly safeguarded against evasion and increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate.

The people of the United States suffer from periodical financial panics to a degree substantially unknown among the other nations which approach us in financial strength. There is no reason why we should suffer what they escape. It is of profound importance that our financial system should be promptly investigated, and so thoroughly and effectively revised as to make it certain that hereafter our currency will no longer fail at critical times to meet our needs…

Conservation is a great moral issue for it involves the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the nation. Let me add that the health and vitality of our people are at least as well worth conserving as their forests, waters, lands, and minerals, and in this great work the national government must bear a most important part…

No man can be a good citizen unless he has a wage more than sufficient to cover the bare cost of living, and hours of labor short enough so that after his day’s work is done he will have time and energy to bear his share in the management of the community, to help in carrying the general load… We need comprehensive workmen’s compensation acts, both state and national laws to regulate child labor and work for women, and especially, we need in our common schools not merely education in book-learning, but also practical training for daily life and work.

This New Nationalism regards the executive power as the steward of public welfare. It demands of the judiciary that it shall be interested primarily in human welfare rather than in property, just as it demands that the representative body shall represent all the people rather than any one class or section of the people…

The Progressive Amendments

16th Amendment (1913) – Graduated income tax
- Tax rate you pay depends on your wealth
- Applies both to individuals and corporations

17th Amendment (1913) – Senators chosen by popular vote – not state legislatures
- Direct result of muckraking article, TR's 1912 campaign

18th Amendment (1919) – Prohibition (of alcohol)
- Overturned with 21st Amendment in 1933

19th Amendment (1920) – Female suffrage

State Voting Reforms

Primary system: Voters chose candidates
- (Before, party bosses chose)

Recall system: Voters can remove s/o before term ends
- (Before, only court or legislature could)

Initiative: Voters can propose legislation

Referendum: Voters can pass legislation
- (Before, only state legislatures could do either)

Secret ballot: Increasingly popular by 1880s, widespread by 1890s