

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

Many changes happened in American society during the 1900s including inventions in science and technology, an increase in the production of goods, mass communication and mass entertainment improvements, health and living standards changes, the equal treatment of men and women, and ideas of freedom.

With these changes, a movement to address social problems emerged known as the Progressive Era. Progressivism is a label for a wide range of economic, political, and social reforms. Some of the reforms included efforts to outlaw the sale of alcohol, stop child labor and sweatshops, manage natural resources, “Americanize” immigrants, and regulate businesses.

Progressive reformers wanted to get rid of corruption in government, address health dangers, and improve working conditions. They also fought to give voters more direct control over government through direct election of candidates for public office, the ability to remove elected officials, and by voting on issues directly through state questions. Journalists called muckrakers brought attention to working conditions in factories, the horror of lynching, and cruel practices of rich businessmen like John D. Rockefeller.

Locally, many progressives wanted to increase public education, build playgrounds, and replace dishonest city political machines with more efficient systems of government. At the state level, progressives fought for minimum wage laws for women workers, started industrial accident insurance, stopped child labor, and improved factory regulations. At the national level, Congress passed laws establishing federal regulation of meatpacking factories, drug, and railroad industries and strengthened anti-trust laws. It also lowered the taxes on imports and exports, created federal control over the banking system, and passed laws to improve working conditions. Four constitutional amendments were adopted during the Progressive Era including the start of an income tax, direct election of senators, the right for women to vote, and outlawing the production and sale of alcohol.

*Mintz, S., & McNeil, S. (2016). Overview of the Progressive Era. Digital History.*  
<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/era.cfm?eraID=11&smtid=1>

*Encyclopedia Britannica, inc. (n.d.). The Progressive Era timeline. Encyclopedia Britannica*  
<https://www.britannica.com/summary/The-Progressive-Era-Timeline>

## FROM THE HISTORY OF THE STANDARD OIL COMPANY BY IDA M. TARBELL, 1904

While Mr. Rockefeller produces only about a third of the entire production, he controls all but about ten percent, of it; that is, all but about ten percent, goes immediately into his custody on coming from the wells. It passes entirely out of the hands of the producers when the Standard pipeline takes it. The oil is in Mr. Rockefeller's hands, and he, not the producer, can decide who is to have it. The greater portion of it he takes himself, of course, for he is the chief refiner of the country.

...The Standard owns stock in most of the great [railroad] systems. It is represented on the board of directors of nearly all the great systems, and it has an immense freight not only in oil products, but in timber, iron, acids, and all of the necessities of its factories. It is allied with many other industries, iron, steel, and copper, and can swing freight away from a road which does not oblige it. It has great influence in the money market and can help or hinder a road in securing money. It has great influence in the stock market and can depress or inflate a stock if it sets about it. Little wonder that the railroads, being what they are, are afraid to "disturb their relations with the Standard Oil Company," or that they keep alive a system of discriminations the same in effect as those which existed before 1887.

...We are a commercial people. We cannot boast of our arts, our crafts, our cultivation; our boast is in the wealth we produce. As a consequence, business success is sanctified, and, practically, any methods which achieve it are justified by a larger and larger class.

...What necessity was there for Mr. Rockefeller trying to prevent the United States Pipeline doing business? —only the greed of power and money. Every great campaign against rival interests which the Standard Oil Company has carried on has been inaugurated, not to save its life, but to build up and sustain a monopoly in the oil industry. These are not more affirmations of a hostile critic; they are facts proved by documents and figures.

...Very often people who admit the facts, who are willing to see that Mr. Rockefeller has employed force and fraud to secure his ends, justify him by declaring, "It's business." That is, "it's business" has to come to be a legitimate excuse for hard dealing, sly tricks, special privileges.

... That our first task is to secure free and equal transportation privileges by rail, pipe and waterway is evident. It is not an easy matter. It is one which may require operations which will seem severe; but the whole system of discrimination has been nothing but violence, and those who have profited by it cannot complain if the curing of the evils they have wrought bring hardship in turn on them. At all events, until the transportation matter is settled, and settled right, the monopolistic trust will be with us, a leech on our pockets, a barrier to our free efforts.

*Ida M. Tarbell. (1904). "The History of the Standard Oil Company," Energy History. <https://energyhistory.yale.edu/library-item/ida-m-tarbell-history-standard-oil-company-1904>*

## FROM THE JUNGLE BY UPTON SINCLAIR, 1906

It was only when the whole ham was spoiled that it came into the department of Elzbieta. Cut up by the two-thousand-revolutions- a-minute flyers, and mixed with half a ton of other meat, no odor that ever was in a ham could make any difference. There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was moldy and white--it would be dosed with borax and glycerine, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption. There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together.

This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shoveled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one-- there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit. There was no place for the men to wash their hands before they ate their dinner, and so they made a practice of washing them in the water that was to be ladled into the sausage. There were the butt-ends of smoked meat, and the scraps of corned beef, and all the odds and ends of the waste of the plants, that would be dumped into old barrels in the cellar and left there. Under the system of rigid economy which the packers enforced, there were some jobs that it only paid to do once in a long time, and among these was the cleaning out of the waste barrels. Every spring they did it; and in the barrels would be dirt and rust and old nails and stale water--and cartload after cartload of it would be taken up and dumped into the hoppers with fresh meat and sent out to the public's breakfast. Some of it they would make into "smoked" sausage--but as the smoking took time, and was therefore expensive, they would call upon their chemistry department, and preserve it with borax and color it with gelatine to make it brown. All of their sausage came out of the same bowl, but when they came to wrap it they would stamp some of it "special," and for this they would charge two cents more a pound.

*Sinclair, U. (1906). The Jungle. Project Gutenberg. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/140/140-h/140-h.htm>*

## FROM HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES BY JACOB RIIS, 1890

...Be a little careful, please! The hall is dark and you might stumble over the children pitching pennies back there. Not that it would hurt them; kicks and cuffs are their daily diet. They have little else. Here where the hall turns and dives into utter darkness is a step, and another, another. A flight of stairs. You can feel your way, if you cannot see it. Close? Yes! What would you have? All the fresh air that ever enters these stairs comes from the hall-door that is forever slamming, and from the windows of dark bedrooms that in turn receive from the stairs their sole supply of the elements God meant to be free, but man deals out with such niggardly hand. That was a woman filling her pail by the hydrant you just bumped against. The sinks are in the hallway, that all the tenants may have access—and all be poisoned alike by their summer stench. Hear the pump squeak! It is the lullaby of tenement-house babes. In summer, when a thousand thirsty throats pant for a cooling drink in this block, it is worked in vain. But the saloon, whose open door you passed in the hall, is always there. The smell of it has followed you up. Here is a door. Listen! That short hacking cough, that tiny, helpless wail—what do they mean? They mean that the soiled bow of white you saw on the door downstairs will have another story to tell—Oh! a sadly familiar story—before the day is at an end. The child is dying with measles. With half a chance it might have lived; but it had none. That dark bedroom killed it.

...Come over here. Step carefully over this baby—it is a baby, spite of its rags and dirt—under these iron bridges called fire-escapes, but loaded down, despite the incessant watchfulness of the firemen, with broken household goods, with wash-tubs and barrels, over which no man could climb from a fire. This gap between dingy brick-walls is the yard. That strip of smoke-colored sky up there is the heaven of these people. Do you wonder the name does not attract them to the churches? That baby's parents live in the rear tenement here. She is at least as clean as the steps we are now climbing. There are plenty of houses with half a hundred such in. The tenement is much like the one in front we just left, only fouler, closer, darker—we will not say more cheerless. The word is a mockery. A hundred thousand people lived in rear tenements in New York last year. Here is a room neater than the rest. The woman, a stout matron with hard lines of care in her face, is at the wash-tub. "I try to keep the children clean," she says, apologetically, but with a hopeless glance around. The spice of hot soap-suds is added to the air already tainted with the smell of boiling cabbage, of rags and uncleanness all about. It makes an overpowering compound. It is Thursday, but patched linen is hung upon the pulley-line from the window. There is no Monday cleaning in the tenements. It is washday all the week round, for a change of clothing is scarce among the poor.

*Riis, J. A.. (1890). How the Other Half Lives. Project Gutenberg. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45502/45502-h/45502-h.htm>*