

# The Progressive Era and Women's Rights

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## *A Snapshot of life in the U.S. 1880 – 1920*

- At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the frontier era of western expansion ended.
- Farming as a way of life was on the decrease, urban living was on the increase.
- The population doubled between 1880 – 1920 and the three largest cities: New York City, Chicago and Philadelphia each had over 1 million people.
- Between 1910 - 1920, life expectancy increased dramatically.
- 4 million soldiers served in World War I and 116,708 American military personnel died.
- 675,000 people died of influenza during the 1918 – 1920 pandemic.
- Between 1880 and 1920 - more than 20 million people immigrated, primarily from Central, Eastern and Southern Europe.
  - The rate of immigration declined with the onset of World War I, followed by legislation limiting immigration.
- Big business and manufacturing exploded in a 2nd Industrial Revolution.
- Extensive railway system made shipping and travel more efficient and timelier. Urban products became readily available in rural areas.
- The average annual wage for manufacturing workers in 1900 was \$435 or \$8.37 a week.
- Unskilled workers were paid ten cents an hour on average, about \$5.50/week.

- Employment options available to women were limited. In 1870, over ½ of all women wage-earners were domestic servants. Others earned a living by sewing, laundering and, to a lesser extent, teaching.
- By World War I, new fields of employment became available to women: nurses, teachers, typists, department store clerks and factory labor. WWI was first war with enlisted women.

### ***What was the Progressive Era?***

- Rapid and dramatic increases in urbanization, industrialization and immigration – led to political corruption and great inequalities in wealth and class
- First comprehensive effort in American history to address issues that arose with the emergence of a modern, diverse, urban and increasingly industrial nation
- Social changes were humanistic in nature and progressive in thought and design.
- Favored reform over radical change.
- Roosevelt's Square Deal

### ***Why Reforms were necessary***

- In 1900, 1.7 million children under 15 worked in factories.
- Average factory worker put in 10 hours/day 6 days/week. Children often put in longer hours. Some lived at the factory and worked 18 hours/day.
- 35,000 workers were killed in industrial accidents and 500,000 were maimed in factory accidents that ranged from severed limbs to burns.
- 1875 – 1895 - more strikes and more people killed or wounded in labor demonstrations in the US than in any country in the world.

## **Major Reforms**

- Social and Moral Reforms
- Economic reformers
- Public reformers

Women played a pivotal role in the Progressive Era reforms – through their work in women’s organizations, political action, journalism, church and education.

## **Women’s Suffrage Movement**

- The suffrage movement began with the Woman’s Rights Convention held on July 19 to 20, 1848 at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York. They wrote Declaration of Sentiments asserting women’s equality in politics, family, education, jobs, religion and morals as well as 11 resolutions
- The Women’s Suffrage movement took 72 years of continual effort on the part of countless women (and men) including lobbying, parades, lectures, organizing and more.

## **Women’s Converge at the AYP**

July 1909 – 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association was held in Seattle at Plymouth Congregational Church in conjunction with the first world’s fair, the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific (A-Y-P) Exposition. Many travelled together to Seattle by train, “The Suffrage Special.”

## **Women’s Organizations Role in the Suffrage Movement**

- Women’s clubs
- Churches
- Aid Societies
- Cultural clubs and groups
- Chautauqua Gatherings
- Suffrage Organizations at the national, state and local levels.

- WCTU - became the largest mass political organization of American women – 10 times more than all suffrage groups combined.
- Jane Cunningham Croly founded 1890 the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1890. Grew to 1.5 million by 1914.
- Mary Church Turrell 1909 – co-founded NAACP
- Terrell was an active member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and addressed the concerns of African American women. She also picketed the White House.
- Women's Century Club was founded in Seattle in 1891 by 10 women, including well-known suffragist, Carrie Chapman Catt.

### **Some well-known suffragists and reformers**

- Jane Addams founded Hull House in Chicago, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 and is recognized as a key figure in the development of the field of social work. "Mother of Social Work"
- Ida Wells Barnett was a journalist, anti-lynching crusader, founding member of NAACP and suffragist.
- Julia Lathrop - President Taft appointed Lathrop Chief of the newly created Children's Bureau in 1912 – making her the first bureau chief in the federal government. She increased awareness of the health issues of pregnant women and infants.
- Florence Kelly - lawyer, social reformer, leading member of the settlement house movement, and advocate for rights of workers and children. Served as Vice President of National American Woman Suffrage Association.
- Dr. Rev. Anna Howard Shaw – both a minister and MD.; she played a key role in merger of American Woman Suffrage Association and National Woman Suffrage Association. Shaw is estimated to have delivered over 10,000 lectures in her career.
- Ida Tarbell took on Standard Oil yet opposed women's right to vote.

## Northwest suffragists

- Abigail Scott Duniway from Portland, Oregon published the New Northwest, a weekly newspaper that demanded equal rights for women. She traveled extensively throughout the NW lecturing and spreading the word about women's suffrage to small communities and large cities.
- Emma Smith Devoe - Washington Equal Suffrage Association president and paid organizer for NAWSA. Used passive and ladylike approach making appeals to family members, known as "still hunt". She was a popular speaker. She was mentored by Susan B. Anthony. At the age of 8, she and her parents attended an Anthony lecture and was the only person in the room to stand in support of women's suffrage.

## Timeline of Washington Suffrage

[https://seagensoc.org/upload/menu/SuffrageTimeline\\_WA\\_State.pdf](https://seagensoc.org/upload/menu/SuffrageTimeline_WA_State.pdf)

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