

Time Line of The Progressive Era From The Idea of America™

Date	Event	Description
March 3, 1870	Pennsylvania Mine Safety Act of 1870 passed	Following an 1869 fire in an Avondale mine that kills 110 workers, Pennsylvania passes the country's first coal mine safety law, mandating that mines have an emergency exit and ventilation.
November 1874	Woman's Christian Temperance Union founded	Barred from traditional politics, groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) allow women a public platform to participate in issues of the day. Under the leadership of Frances Willard, the WCTU supports a national Prohibition political party and, by 1890, counts 150,000 members.
February 4, 1887	Interstate Commerce act passed	The Interstate Commerce Act creates the Interstate Commerce Commission to address price-fixing in the railroad industry. The Act is amended over the years to monitor new forms of interstate transportation, such as buses and trucks.
September 1889	Hull House opens in Chicago	Jane Addams establishes Hull House in Chicago as a "settlement house" for the needy. Addams and her colleagues, such as Florence Kelley, dedicate themselves to safe housing in the inner city, and call on lawmakers to bring about reforms: ending child labor, instituting better factory working conditions, and compulsory education. In 1931, Addams is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
November 1889	"White Caps" released from prison	Led by Juan Jose Herrera, the "White Caps" (Las Gorras Blancas) protest big business's monopolization of land and resources in the New Mexico territory by destroying cattlemen's fences. The group's leaders gain popular support upon their release from prison in 1889. The White Caps later align themselves with the United People's Party.
July 2, 1890	Sherman Antitrust Act becomes law	With only one dissenting vote, Congress passes the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, which prohibits business monopolies by deeming them an unlawful restraint on interstate commerce. The act is the first by the federal government to curb monopolies.
1890	Jacob Riis publishes <i>How the Other Half Lives</i>	Writing for the <i>New York Sun</i> newspaper, Jacob Riis's book <i>How the Other Half Lives</i> documents in words and pictures the squalid living conditions in New York slums. Riis's exposé supports the accusation by many Progressives and Socialists that American capitalism fosters inequality.
March 3, 1891	Forest Reserve Act passed	Signed by President Benjamin Harrison in March 1891, the Forest Reserve Act authorizes the president to keep some forested land in the hands of the federal government and away from private industry. Such preservation of public land becomes a cornerstone of the Progressive agenda.

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May 1893	Anti-Saloon League founded	Led by Wayne Wheeler, the Anti-Saloon League mobilizes church congregations to support political candidates sympathetic to their cause. Founded in Oberlin, Ohio, in 1893, it becomes a nationwide organization two years later. When Prohibition is passed in 1919, Wheeler is one of the drafters of the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act, which enforces the anti-liquor law.
January 1896	John Dewey establishes “progressive” school	Educator John Dewey founds a school in Chicago based on his philosophy of “progressive education.” Breaking with traditional methods of education, which rely on repetition and rote learning, Dewey’s “laboratory school” encourages personal development and expression.
November 1896	Bryan loses presidential bid	Though popular in rural areas for his Populist, anti-monopoly platform, Democrat William Jennings Bryan fails to receive sufficient support in the cities, and loses the presidential election to Republican William McKinley. Bryan’s subsequent campaigns in 1900 and 1908 are also unsuccessful.
1899	National Consumers’ League established	Florence Kelley, a founder of Chicago’s Hull House, organizes the National Consumers’ League to advocate better working conditions for women and children, health care, enforcement of child-labor laws, and a minimum wage. The League demonstrates the increased political clout of women in the Progressive era.
December 27, 1900	Carry Nation wields a hatchet	The prohibition movement gains a powerful symbolic leader when temperance crusader Carry Nation destroys a hotel barroom in Wichita, Kansas, with a hatchet. Nation’s tactics are at odds with the more moderate Woman’s Christian Temperance Union.
September 6, 1901	President McKinley assassinated	Anarchist Leon Czolgosz shoots President William McKinley at a public appearance in Buffalo, New York. McKinley dies from his wounds on September 14. Vice President Theodore Roosevelt assumes the presidency.
1901	Frank Norris publishes <i>The Octopus</i>	Frank Norris’s novel, <i>The Octopus</i> , uses a real incident between California wheat farmers and the Southern Pacific Railroad to illustrate social conflicts in the age of industrial capitalism. The book exemplifies “naturalism,” a literary style conveying the struggles of people against overwhelming forces.
March 1902	Roosevelt’s “trust-busting”	President Roosevelt begins his “trust-busting” crusade by bringing J.P. Morgan’s Northern Securities Company to court for violating the Sherman Antitrust Act. Throughout his two terms in office, Roosevelt uses the act in an ongoing effort to break up business monopolies.

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1902	Lincoln Steffens publishes "The Shame of the Cities"	Journalist Lincoln Steffens writes a series of articles in <i>McClure's</i> magazine titled "The Shame of the Cities." Steffens crusades against political corruption in cities. The usually progressive Theodore Roosevelt coins "muckrakers" as a derisive term for crusading novelists, journalists, and photographers.
June 17, 1902	National Reclamation Act signed	Under the National Reclamation Act, public land in sixteen western states is sold to finance a series of massive irrigation projects and dams carried out by the federal government. The resulting irrigation opens up millions of acres of previously arid land to settlers.
February 14, 1903	Department of Commerce and Labor established	To alleviate tension between labor and management demonstrated by long, bitter strikes, President Roosevelt asks Congress to authorize a Department of Commerce and Labor. The Department regulates workplace affairs and engages in "trust-busting" before being split, in 1913, into two separate departments.
March 14, 1904	<i>Northern Securities Co. v. United States</i>	The Supreme Court upholds the Sherman Antitrust Act and hands Theodore Roosevelt a major trust-busting victory in <i>Northern Securities Co. v. United States</i> . The court's 5-4 decision orders the trust to dissolve, reinstating railroad competition in the Northwest and setting an important precedent.
November 8, 1904	President Roosevelt elected	Roosevelt wins the 1904 presidential election over Democrat Alton B. Parker. Progressives support Roosevelt's "Square Deal" programs: increased food and drug regulations, taxation of the wealthy, and establishment of national parks and wildlife refuges.
January 1905	Robert La Follette elected to Senate	Wisconsin voters elect former governor Robert La Follette to the U.S. Senate, responding to his Progressive platform: strict regulation of industries and railroads, conservation of public lands, and support of farmers and small business. La Follette serves in the Senate until his death in 1925, and ran for president as a Progressive in 1924.
April 17, 1905	<i>Lochner v. New York</i>	The Supreme Court decides in <i>Lochner v. New York</i> that states are forbidden from restricting working hours in private businesses. Labor advocates argue, and four dissenting justices agree, that some hazardous jobs require state oversight. <i>Lochner</i> is a victory for big business.
1906	Upton Sinclair publishes <i>The Jungle</i>	In 1906, writer Upton Sinclair publishes <i>The Jungle</i> , a stark exposé of labor exploitation and unsanitary conditions in meat-packing plants. The novel, based on Sinclair's own research in Chicago slaughterhouses, spurs a call for regulations in the industry. That same year, Sinclair runs for Congress as a Socialist.

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June 29, 1906	Hepburn Act	President Roosevelt is influential in the passage of the Hepburn Act. To combat the economic power of the railroad industry, the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) is expanded. Under the Hepburn Act, railroads cannot raise rates without prior approval by the ICC.
June 30, 1906	Pure Food and Drug Act	President Roosevelt signs a comprehensive Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act. The Acts, passed after “muckraking” journalists reveal unsanitary conditions in food production and the existence of fraudulent medicines, impose fines on companies that endanger the health of consumers.
June 30, 1906	Meat Inspection Act	As a result of Roosevelt's reform agenda and the publication of “muckraking” works like <i>The Jungle</i> , the federal government passes the Meat Inspection Act. As with the Pure Food and Drug Act (passed the same day), the government steps in to restrain big business and protect the public's health and welfare.
December 3, 1906	Roosevelt denounces segregation	Emboldened by blatantly anti-Asian legislation, the San Francisco school board segregates Japanese students into separate schools. President Roosevelt intervenes, calling segregation “a wicked absurdity” in an address to Congress in December 1906. The school board reverses its decision.
1907	Rauschenbusch publishes <i>Christianity and the Social Crisis</i>	Theologian Walter Rauschenbusch articulates the “Social Gospel” movement in his book <i>Christianity and the Social Crisis</i> . Appalled by the living conditions of the urban working poor, Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel seeks to connect reform movements with Christian ideals.
February 24, 1908	<i>Muller v. Oregon</i>	The Supreme Court rules in <i>Muller v. Oregon</i> that a reduced ten-hour workday for women is constitutional. The decision partially overturns <i>Lochner v. New York</i> (1905). The ruling is seen as a breakthrough for the reform movement. (Florence Kelley of the National Consumers' League is instrumental in bringing the case.)
November 3, 1908	Republican William Howard Taft elected president	Though not as outspoken on business and social reform as his predecessor Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft signs into law several measures approved by Progressives. These include antitrust measures, a federal income tax, and a tax on corporations.
February 12, 1909	NAACP founded	The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is organized to challenge discrimination and stem recent outbreaks of racial violence. Founding member Ida B. Wells urges the NAACP to take a united stand against lynching.
September 7, 1909	Freud visits United States	Sigmund Freud makes his first American appearance at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Freud's lectures, entitled “The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis,” provide an introduction to theories that will find a wide American audience.
June 18, 1910	Mann-Elkins Act	The Mann-Elkins Act gives the Interstate Commerce Commission authority to regulate telephone and telegraph companies as entities of interstate commerce, strengthening the Hepburn Act.

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March 25, 1911	Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire	The deaths of one hundred forty-six workers in a fire at New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Company raise awareness of urban work environments and spur reform efforts. The factory's sweatshop conditions included overcrowding, blocked exits, and flimsy fire escapes.
May 15, 1911	Antitrust suit triggers breakup of Standard Oil	Alleging that Standard Oil's dominance of the oil industry amounts to an illegal restriction of free trade under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, the government wins its antitrust case against Standard Oil, and the company is broken into smaller companies.
October 1911	Antitrust suit brought against U.S. Steel	President Taft invokes the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in ordering that the government bring suit against U.S. Steel. After years of maneuvering on both sides, the government loses its case in 1920.
1912	Bull Moose Party	With Theodore Roosevelt as their presidential candidate, the short-lived independent "Bull Moose"/ Progressive political party pledges a "New Nationalism" that puts individuals' interests over those of corporations. The party's platform includes an endorsement of women's right to vote.
November 5, 1912	Woodrow Wilson elected president	With Republicans divided between incumbent William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt, running for the Bull Moose Party, Democrat Woodrow Wilson wins the White House. Socialist Eugene Debs receives more than 900,000 votes, or 6% of the total, the highest number the party receives in a presidential election.
February 3, 1913	16th Amendment ratified	The Sixteenth Amendment is ratified, instituting a federal income tax four years after then-President Taft recommended its passage. Progressives support the income tax, believing it to be a fairer method of collecting revenue, especially from the wealthy.
April 8, 1913	17th Amendment ratified	U.S. senators are elected not by the people of their states, but by their state legislatures—until the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment, which allows for direct election of senators. Progressives are instrumental in this change, believing it will eliminate corruption and lead to better public representation.
December 23, 1913	Federal Reserve Act	Responding to Progressives' concerns regarding the nation's money supply, Congress passes the Federal Reserve Act. The Federal Reserve Act establishes twelve district banks and a Board of Governors who oversee the reserve banks' dealings and policies.
September 26, 1914	Federal Trade Commission established	An outgrowth of the antitrust movement, the Wilson administration forms the Federal Trade Commission to regulate fair competition among business and industry. The Commission is granted unprecedented power of enforcement on issues such as price fixing, mergers, and truth in advertising.

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October 15, 1914	Clayton Antitrust Act	The Clayton Antitrust Act, vigorously advocated by President Wilson, revises the 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act. It outlaws monopolistic practices by business, including price fixing and the purchase of a company's stock by a competitive firm to create a virtual monopoly. The Act also affirms workers' right to go on strike.
March 4, 1915	Seaman's Act passed	Sponsored by Senator Robert La Follette, the Seamen's Act regulates safety, living conditions, and food standards on merchant vessels and passenger ships, granting merchant marines many of the same protections as their factory counterparts.
July 17, 1916	Federal Farm Loan Act	Combining Wilson's Progressive ideals with the needs advocated by rural Populists, the Federal Farm Loan Act allows farmers to borrow money at favorable rates of interest.
September 1, 1916	Keating-Owen Child Labor Act	The Keating-Owen Child Labor Act limits how many hours children are allowed to work, and bans interstate transport of goods produced by child labor. The act is far reaching, as over two million American children are employed in manufacturing. The Supreme Court invalidates the Act in 1918 as a restraint on trade.
September 3, 1916	Adamson Act passed	The Adamson Act establishes an eight-hour workday for railroad workers. Like the Hepburn Act, the Adamson Act demonstrates the government's willingness to regulate the railroad industry for the public's safety and welfare.
September 7, 1916	Workingmen's Compensation Act	Seeking a measure of Progressive support in an election year, President Woodrow Wilson signs the Workingmen's Compensation Act, extending financial help to federal employees who are injured on the job.
April 6, 1917	United States enters World War I	The United States' entry into World War I requires an unprecedented mobilization of resources and political maneuvering. As a result, the Progressive agenda, with its focus on domestic issues, loses much of its influence.
January 16, 1919	Eighteenth Amendment ratified	The Eighteenth Amendment is ratified, prohibiting the sale and manufacture of alcoholic beverages. The measure was long advocated by temperance societies and many grass-roots Progressives.
August 18, 1920	Nineteenth Amendment ratified	Women are guaranteed the right to vote in a simple, two-sentence amendment that is passed by both houses of Congress and sent to the states for ratification on June 4. After receiving the needed three-fourths majority of states, the Nineteenth Amendment is officially ratified on August 18.
December 1923	Equal Rights Amendment proposed	An Equal Rights Amendment is introduced into Congress, in part to mark the 75th anniversary of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. Written by Alice Paul, a leader of the suffragist movement, the amendment calls for equal protection for men and women under the law. It garners limited support from what remains of the Progressive movement, and is not ratified.