

Year 2:

Unit 6

Extra, Extra! The Progressive Era (1890 - 1925): Introduction

Unit Purpose: Why This Unit?

As the United States became an industrialized, imperial power, a number of Americans dedicated themselves to confronting the social ills that resulted from these new developments. These Americans ushered in the Progressive Era at the turn of the 20th century. Some reformers worked as journalists, hoping to expose such issues as tenement housing or political corruption, whereas others used politics as a means to fight the increasing power of trusts or protect the natural environment. Women propelled the suffrage movement, which had begun in the antebellum era, further into the public sphere, leading to significant backlash from antisuffrage activists.

Although these reformers exposed many social ills to the shock and horror of society, other issues were left unaddressed. In particular, despite the efforts of civil rights leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells, few progressive reformers paid attention to the plight of African Americans living under Jim Crow segregation and white Southern terrorism. Furthermore, the response of the U.S. Government to these reform efforts was uneven. Known as the progressive presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson did pass significant legislation that limited the power of trusts and monopolies and established a number of basic protections for Americans. New amendments to the Constitution further responded directly to the efforts of activists, leading to a national income tax, the direct election of senators, the prohibition of alcohol, and suffrage for women. However, the government failed to respond fully to many other issues. The government did little to address Jim Crow and the lynchings terrorizing the South, nor did the government pass significant legislation to protect urban laborers from poor working and living conditions.

The Progressive Era in many respects changed the nature of American politics; after decades of laissez-faire approach, the government took it upon itself to take charge and attempt to remedy the ills that had emerged in American society as a result. The Progressive Era ultimately laid the groundwork for future government efforts throughout the rest of American history to use policy and the law to protect and control American society, as well as empower citizens to fight for change against perceived injustice.

Unit 6 Learning Goals

Essential Question

If you are successful in this unit, your scholars will be able to answer the Unit 6 Essential Question: *How “progressive” was the Progressive Era?*

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas, outlined below, help answer the Unit 6 Essential Question and reflect the key ideas that scholars must master by the end of this unit. As you teach Unit 6, connect every lesson back to the Big Idea(s) that the lesson helps illustrate. The Unit 6 Big Ideas were adapted from the UCLA National History Standards United States History Era 7.

- **Big Idea 1: The Progressive Era emerged in response to the social, economic, and political ills of the Gilded Age and promoted efforts to reform the United States and improve American society.**
 - Inspired by earlier reform movements in American history, individuals used journalism and activism to challenge the societal ills of the Gilded Age. These reformers challenged problems ranging from poor working and living conditions to the dangers of alcohol and the power of big business.
 - Progressive reforms worked to expand democracy at the local and state levels, especially through the women’s suffrage movement. Backlash to the suffrage movement was fierce, as many Americans believed that enfranchising women would destroy Americans’ home and family life.
- **Big Idea 2: Despite the robust efforts of activists and the government to reform American society, the progressive movement failed to adequately address the needs of many Americans, especially African Americans.**
 - The Supreme Court’s decision in Plessy v. Ferguson and the rise of Jim Crow laws led to increased segregation, violence, and disenfranchisement, especially in the American South.
 - African Americans leaders, especially W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Ida B. Wells, participated in the progressive movement and fought for change in their communities to end the racism, segregation, and violence that terrorized African Americans.
 - Despite the efforts of civil rights activists, a new and more national KKK rose to prominence in American society, gaining national reach into the 1920s by appealing to patriotic American values and emphasizing the threat of nonwhite Americans to this American way of life.
- **Big Idea 3: Beginning with the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, the federal government embraced some aspects of the progressive movement by formalizing many progressive reforms at the national level while neglecting to address many others.**
 - Theodore Roosevelt, William Taft, and Woodrow Wilson, who are collectively known as the progressive presidents, passed a series of reforms and significant legislation that attempted to address the progressive movement, especially in response to big business and conservation. These presidents failed to address many other issues, especially in regard to labor and civil rights.

- The 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th amendments reflected the ideals and goals of progressivism and a continued attempt to adapt the founding ideals to a modernizing society.

Key Terms

The following people, places, and events are foundational to understanding the Big Ideas of this unit. As these words are introduced in each lesson, add them to your word wall and hold scholars accountable for using them in discussion and writing throughout the unit.

- Progressive/progressivism
- Muckraker
- Ida Tarbell
- Jacob Riis
- Lincoln Steffens
- Upton Sinclair/The Jungle
- Frances Willard
- Jane Addams
- Women's suffrage
- Lynching
- Plessy v. Ferguson
- Jim Crow
- Segregation
- W. E. B. Du Bois
- Booker T. Washington
- Ida B. Wells
- NAACP
- Ku Klux Klan (KKK)
- Progressive presidents
- Trust busting

Geography

Beginning in Year 2, Unit 6, scholars will review the geography content they have learned since the beginning of their study of U.S. history. Continue to reference maps in class to build scholars' fluency with geography and to develop their geographic reasoning skills.

- **Regions of the United States:** Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, and West
- **Physical features of the United States' regions:**
 - **Northeast:** Appalachian Mountains, Erie Canal, and Atlantic Ocean
 - **Southeast:** Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico
 - **Midwest:** Great Lakes, Ohio River, and Great Plains
 - **Southwest:** Grand Canyon and Colorado River
 - **West:** Rocky Mountains and Pacific Ocean

Intellectual Preparation

Class Materials Once you have internalized the Big Ideas of the unit, to be successful you must study all scholar documents and materials before you teach the first lesson:

- All documents in the [Unit 6 Sourcebook](#)
- All scholar and teacher materials in the [Unit 6 Workbook](#)

Additional Resources The resources below provide additional historical background for the content covered in Unit 6:

- Because of the Jim Crow materials in the unit, read “Ten Tips for Facilitating Classroom Discussions on Sensitive Topics” on the PBS website.
- Review the “Progressive Era Timeline” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Read the essays “Jim Crow and the Great Migration,” “The Politics of Reform,” and “Women and the Progressive Movement” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Browse the Progressive Era webpage on the University of Houston’s Digital History website.
- Watch the following [Crash Course History](#) videos on YouTube: “The Progressive Era,” “Women’s Suffrage,” and “Progressive Presidents.”

*To access these readings and more free American History content and resources, create an account on the Gilder Lehrman Institute website.

Unit 6 Lesson Sequence

Essential Question: How “progressive” was the Progressive Era?

The first two lessons introduce scholars to the key individuals and movements of the Progressive Era that fought to change American society. In Lesson 1, scholars explore the leadership and activism of Jacob Riis (tenements), Jane Addams (immigrants and urban immorality), Frances Willard (prohibition), Upton Sinclair (meatpacking factory conditions), Lincoln Steffens (political corruption), and Ida Tarbell (monopolies). Through their study of these individuals, scholars will understand the various methods that Americans used to challenge the societal ills that had emerged during the Gilded Age. Lesson 2 reintroduces scholars to the suffrage movement, which they last studied in Year 1. In this lesson, scholars consider the evolution and key principles of the suffrage movement by the late 19th century, and they understand the key reasons that backlash erupted against the movement. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand how Americans fought for a better society and societal reform during the Progressive Era and will be prepared to consider the shortcomings of the era, especially for black Americans.

Lesson 1: Individuals and the Progressive Era (Jigsaw)

- **Central Question:** How did individuals challenge societal ills during the Progressive Era?

Lesson 2: Suffrage and Antisuffrage (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did Americans disagree on women’s suffrage?

Despite the many reform efforts of the era, discrimination and white supremacy continued to grow in American society, often with little attention or concern from most progressive reformers. In Lesson 3, scholars are introduced to the Jim Crow South, exploring the widespread impact of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and Jim Crow laws on the lives of African Americans in establishing a culture of white supremacy propped up by segregation, disenfranchisement, and violence. Lessons 4 and 5 introduce scholars to three leading African Americans who challenged this discrimination; scholars will assume the role of a civil rights activist, inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, or Ida B. Wells, and stand up against segregation and discrimination for themselves. In Lesson 6, scholars will study the rise of the second KKK and consider how, despite the best efforts of many black reformers, Americans increasingly joined the KKK and supported the continuing rise of white supremacy beyond the South and across the United States. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand how the Progressive Era failed to truly address the hardships of African Americans and will be prepared to consider the extent to which government legislation supported the era's many reform movements.

Lesson 3: The Jim Crow South (Gallery Walk)

- **Central Question:** How did Plessy v. Ferguson and Jim Crow laws promote a culture of white supremacy in the United States?

Lessons 4–5: Standing Up to Discrimination (Narrative Writing Seminar)

- **Central Question:** How did African Americans challenge Jim Crow and segregation?

Lesson 6: The Revival of the KKK (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why did the KKK regain prominence at the end of the Progressive Era?

In the final three lessons of Unit 6, scholars will conduct research to explain the extent to which the government adequately responded to the societal ills of the era. Through the examination of one of the reform movements of the era, ranging from suffrage to civil rights, scholars will determine whether the progressive presidents, the Supreme Court, or the constitutional amendments supported their chosen reform movement. By the end of these lessons, scholars will understand the role the government played in supporting the progressive movement and will be able to assess the extent to which the Progressive Era did indeed promote and make progressive change.

Lessons 7–9: A Progressive Government? (PBL)

- **Central Question:** To what extent did the U.S. government adequately respond to the societal ills of the Progressive Era?