



Essay #4

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Compare the work of the Progressives at the local and state levels.

Progressive reformers were mainly college-educated, middle-class citizens across the United States. Their main objectives were to use state power to curb the trusts and to stem the socialist threat by improving life and labor conditions for the common person. Progressivism was popular within all political parties, men and women, all regions, and at any level of government.

LOCAL

Frustrated by the inefficiency and corruption of an oil-run city government, many cities argued in favor of appointing expert-staffed commissions to manage their urban affairs. Other communities went for the city-manager system, which was designed to take politics out of municipal administration. Some of these reforms favored efficiency over democracy, as their control of city affairs was being taken away from the citizens.

LOCAL

One large objective at the local level of progressivism was to suppress red light districts, which was a part of an urban area concentrated with prostitution and brothels.

For education, Progressives were in favor of expanding high schools within the city as well as constructing playgrounds for primary schools.

People such as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Lillian Wald, Frederick C. Howe, and Samuel Jones were prominent figures in communities, trying to improve health, education, welfare in immigrant neighborhoods, child labor and work conditions, and reforming urban politics.

STATE

At the state level, Progressives were interested in making politics more open and accessible by pushing procedural reforms and removing some decisions on the electoral process altogether. The authority to protect the public's health, safety, and morals, was reserved for the states as well.

Progressive legislators interpreted this power broadly and passed a variety of economic and social measures at the state level.

In many cases, the Court overturned these laws, notably *Lochner vs. New York*. When the states were deemed incapable of effectively dealing with economic and social issues, the people turned to Washington for help and Congress passed new legislation that was upheld by the Supreme Court.

STATE

Progressive reformers like Robert La Follette, Hiram Johnson, and Al Smith wanted to limit the power of railroads and other corporate businesses, improve the civil service, direct democracy, and apply academic scholarship to human needs. Their main goal was to take control from the corrupted corporations and return it to the people.

Some main initiatives of the Progressives were to enact minimum wage laws for women workers, institute industrial accident insurance, restrict child labor, and improve factory working conditions for all employees. They urged adoption of the secret ballot, direct primaries, the initiative, the referendum, and direct election of senators. Additionally, Progressives struck at the excessive power of corporate wealth by regulating railroads and utilities, restricting lobbying, limiting monopoly, and raising corporate taxes.