

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

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Thesis

Progressivism was fueled by the desire of many Americans to reform the problems they saw in America. On state and local levels, Americans worked to combat corporate wrongs, evident corruption, and to help the impoverished. These efforts included many state-level political and economic reforms, along with the efforts of citizens and organizations to help America on a more local level.

Progressivism on a Local Level

On a local level, progressivism worked to reform the many societal problems of the era. In 1889, Jane Addams and Ellen Gate Starr founded the Hull House in Chicago, which would serve as a model for settlement houses, being construct in other cities. These settlement houses, ran by educated volunteers, would help lower class families, especially immigrants, with the problems faced by the poor. Settlement Houses often offered programs which taught literacy, the arts, and other skills to those who normally couldn't afford such an education. In addition, lessons for adults included child care, health education, adult literacy, and various other useful skills

Progressivism on a Local Level

In addition to settlement houses, was the movement against alcohol. Some organizations such as the AntiSaloon League, felt that alcohol was responsible for the problems faced by the lower class. Another facet of the progressive movement were the "muckrakers". Muckrakers were investigative journalist who went about exposing political corruption and corporate wrongs (as these stories sold well). An example of an influential muckraker was Upton Sinclair whose book *The Jungle* exposed the horrible working condition and sanitation issues of Chicago's meat packing industry. Later laws would be passed to better regulate the food coming the meat packing industry (the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act). Other famous muckrakers were Ida Tarbell (The History of the Standard Oil Company), Lincoln Steffens (The Shame of Cities), and Jacob Riis (How the Other Half Lives)

Progressivism on a State Level

Progressivism also occurred on a state level, often focusing on the wrongs of corporation. Many labor reforms occurred thanks to progressivism. This included factory safety laws and compensation for victims of industrial accidents (Workers Compensation Law). Child labor reform also occurred which would raise the minimum age for employment and the maximum hours a shift could be (Factory and Workshop Act of 1901). In addition the maximum working hours for women was reformed and protective regulations were put in place. There were also early attempts at old age pensions and welfare support for mothers with dependent children. However these reforms had somewhat limited success due to a lack of enforcement.

Progressivism on a State Level

In addition to labor reform, electoral reforms occurred thanks to progressivist efforts. Many new electoral processes came to be in this time. Examples include initiative, referendum, and recall. The initiative process allowed a citizen to propose a new law, and if one gathered enough signatures, the law would appear on the next ballot. The referendum process allowed citizens to vote on a law that was being considered for adoption. The recall process allowed voters to remove an elected official from office before the end of said official's term was up. (Recall, Referendum, and Initiative were all introduced by Wisconsin governor Robert La Follette) In addition was the adoption of direct primary, which allowed party members to vote for candidates instead of them being picked by the party boss. Finally another large step was the 17th Amendment, which allowed voters, instead of the state legislature, to directly elect their senator.

Conclusion

Overall, America worked towards reform on both a state and local level. Though efforts on a state level sometimes faltered due to a lack of enforcement, progress was made none the less. On local level, citizens helped citizens, and helped the condition of the impoverished in cities and aided in exposing corruption in America.