

# Progressivism Under Taft and Wilson

## READING FOCUS

- What political conflicts marked the presidency of William Howard Taft?
- Who were the contenders in the Election of 1912, and what was the outcome?
- What major policies did President Woodrow Wilson help put in place?
- In what ways were the achievements of progressivism limited?

## MAIN IDEA

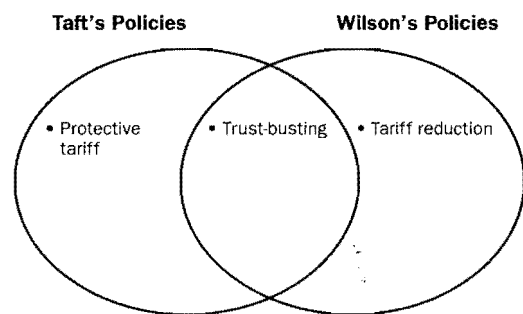
Despite his solid record of reforms, President Taft alienated many Progressives. They broke away and formed their own party with Roosevelt as their candidate. Democrat Woodrow Wilson beat both men in 1912 and continued progressive reforms.

## KEY TERMS

conservationist  
New Nationalism  
Bull Moose Party  
Clayton Antitrust Act  
Federal Trade  
Commission (FTC)  
Federal Reserve System

## TARGET READING SKILL

**Compare and Contrast** Copy the Venn diagram below. As you read, fill in the two circles with facts about the policies of Presidents Taft and Wilson. Where the circles overlap, fill in policies endorsed by both Presidents.



**VIEWING HISTORY** President Taft accomplished as much as or more than TR in some areas of progressive reform, yet he took several steps for which Progressives never forgave him. **Identifying Central Issues** *What factors made Taft's job so difficult?*



**Setting the Scene** The day after his election in 1904, Theodore Roosevelt announced he would not seek another term as President. One evening, as the 1908 campaign approached, Roosevelt was entertaining the Secretary of War, William Howard Taft, and his wife, Helen, at the White House. Suddenly the mischievous TR pretended to fall into a fortune teller's trance. "I see a man standing before me weighing about 350 pounds." (Taft was a portly man, more than 6 feet tall.)

"There is something hanging over his head. I cannot make out what it is; it is hanging by a slender thread. At one time it looks like the Presidency—then again it looks like the Chief Justiceship."

"Make it the Presidency!" exclaimed Mrs. Taft.

"Make it the Chief Justiceship!" cried Mr. Taft.

Helen Taft, a key political advisor to her husband, had her way. TR persuaded the reluctant Taft to run for the job, and made him his hand-picked nominee on the Republican ticket in 1908.

Perhaps Taft should have listened instead to his mother: "I do not want my son to be President. His is a judicial mind and he loves the law." Taft would, in time, become the nation's highest judge, a job he dearly loved. But not until he served a fairly miserable four years as President.

## Taft's Presidency

With TR's backing, Taft easily won the 1908 election over Democrat William Jennings Bryan, who tried for a third and last time to win the office. Taft pledged to carry on TR's progressive program. But from the beginning, Taft found his predecessor's shoes difficult to fill. He had neither Roosevelt's energy nor strength of personality to battle the powerful Republican congressmen who opposed progressive reforms. He created disappointment from the start by not appointing any Progressives to his Cabinet. Although in many ways he would fulfill his pledge to continue Roosevelt's reforms, in the

end he alienated Progressives and caused a crisis in the Republican Party.

**Conflict Over Tariffs** In 1908, Taft had run on a Republican platform of lower tariffs, a Progressive goal that Roosevelt had not addressed. Taft promptly called a special session of Congress in 1909 to pass tariff reductions. The effort backfired on him. The House passed some reductions, while more traditional Republicans in the Senate added some highly protective tariff increases. The compromise measure, which Taft signed enthusiastically, was the Payne-Aldrich Tariff. Although not as protective as the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890, Payne-Aldrich was a protective measure. Progressives were furious with Taft.

**The Ballinger-Pinchot Affair** Progressives felt betrayed by Taft on another issue: the management of public lands. Taft's choice for Secretary of the Interior, Richard A. Ballinger, angered **conservationists**, people who favor the protection of natural resources. Ballinger opposed conservation policies on federal lands in the West, siding with business interests that sought unrestricted development.

Ballinger's views put him in conflict with Gifford Pinchot, head of the U.S. Forest Service. Pinchot favored scientific management of wilderness lands to allow both preservation and development. He had crafted many of TR's conservation policies. Pinchot's relationship with Taft, however, was strained.

In 1909, it became known that Ballinger had allowed a private group of businesspeople to obtain several million acres of Alaskan public lands containing rich coal deposits. Pinchot charged that Ballinger had improperly shown special preference to the purchasing group. When Pinchot protested to a congressional committee and aired suggestions of corruption on Ballinger's part, Taft fired Pinchot. Ballinger, although never found guilty of wrongdoing, eventually resigned. Pinchot remained a public hero, while Taft's popularity continued to slump.

## Turmoil in the Republican Party

Angry Republican Progressives in the House now teamed up with Democrats to attack opponents of reform in the Republican Party. This so-called "old guard" of traditional Republicans controlled the House Rules Committee, which decides whether and how bills will be referred for action by the House. Through the Rules Committee, the old guard had been able to block much reform legislation.

To break this stranglehold, the progressive faction sought to curtail the powers of the old guard member and House Speaker, Joseph G. Cannon. In 1910, the House passed a resolution allowing the full membership, instead of the Speaker, to appoint the Rules Committee. The Speaker was barred from serving on the committee. The Republican Party was now bitterly split.

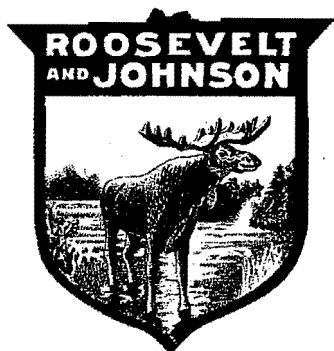
**The Midterm Elections of 1910** Following Taft's election in 1908, Roosevelt had set off on a long safari to East Africa. He returned to the United States to a wildly cheering crowd in New York and a storm of protest against Taft. At first, Roosevelt refrained from criticizing his old



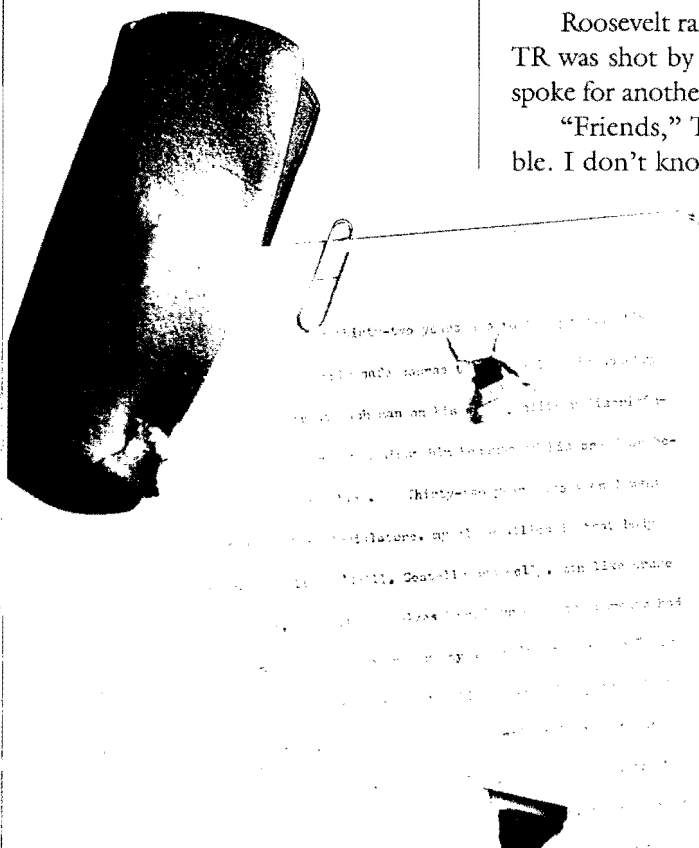
**INTERPRETING POLITICAL CARTOONS** Taft's presidency quickly became entangled in controversy and conflict. **Drawing Inferences** What details illustrate Taft's troubles? What does the cartoon suggest about TR's reaction to Taft's predicament?

## Focus on GEOGRAPHY

**Environmental Management** The nation's forests should be managed for "the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run." This summarizes the philosophy of conservationist Gifford Pinchot, head of the U.S. Forest Service from 1898 to 1909. After studying forestry in France, the young Pinchot returned home to find that "the nation was obsessed by a flurry of development." At that point he devoted his life to making forestry and conservation recognized professions and to promoting the scientific study and management of American forests.



The Republicans had their elephant mascot, the Democrats had their donkey, and the Progressives added a Bull Moose (above) to the zoo of political symbols. The "Bull Moose" himself, TR, escaped assassination, possibly thanks to the speech and eyeglass case (below) tucked inside his coat.



friend, but before long he plunged into the battle between Taft and the Progressives. Roosevelt campaigned for Progressive candidates for the 1910 midterm elections. He called for business regulation, welfare laws, workplace protection for women and children, income and inheritance taxes, and voting reform. TR called his plan the **New Nationalism**.

The congressional elections brought down the old guard. Democrats gained control the House and Senate, with Progressive Democrats and Republicans firmly in place in both houses.

## The Election of 1912

In early 1912, Roosevelt challenged Taft for the Republican presidential nomination. In the GOP primaries, voters preferred Roosevelt. But Taft, who controlled the Republican convention in Chicago, won the nomination handily.

Charging Taft's group with fraud, the Progressive Republicans marched out. Now Progressives vowed to form their own party. In August the Progressive Party held its convention. Spontaneous and intense, it had the feel of a religious revival. Gone were the party bosses. More women and young people attended. State delegations prayed together for their candidates: Roosevelt and his running mate, California Governor Hiram Johnson, a Progressive crusader.

When TR was asked about his physical readiness for a campaign, he said, "I feel fit as a bull moose!" The **Bull Moose Party** became the nickname of the Progressive Party—and the moose a symbol to challenge the Republican elephant and the Democratic donkey.

**The Bull Moose Party** The Bull Moose platform included tariff reduction, women's suffrage, more regulation of business, a child labor ban, an eight-hour workday, a federal workers' compensation system, and the direct election of senators. Many women joined the Progressive Party and campaigned for candidates. In states where women could vote, women ran for state and local offices.

Roosevelt ran a vigorous campaign. On October 14, at a speech in Milwaukee, TR was shot by a would-be assassin. With a bullet lodged in his lung, Roosevelt spoke for another hour and a half before seeking medical aid.

"Friends," TR addressed the crowd, "I shall ask you to be as quiet as possible. I don't know whether you fully understand that I have just been shot; but it takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose." He showed the crowd his bloodstained shirt, then continued his speech. It was classic TR.

**Taft's Record** Taft's frequent complaints about his job ("politics makes me sick") are so often quoted that they threaten to overshadow his presidential legacy. Yet Taft did achieve a notable record on progressive causes. He reserved more public lands and brought more antitrust suits in four years than TR had in seven. He supported the Children's Bureau, the Sixteenth and Seventeenth amendments, and the Mann-Elkins Act of 1910. This act gave the Interstate Commerce Commission the power to regulate telephone and telegraph rates. Yet Taft remained at odds with Republican Progressives.

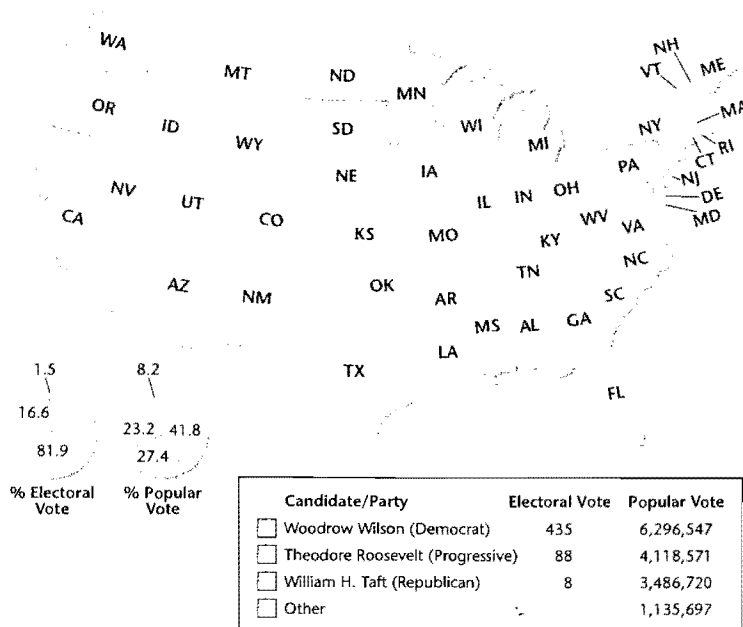
**Wilson's New Freedom** To head the Democratic ticket, the party chose New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson. Like Roosevelt, Wilson ran on a reform platform.

Unlike Roosevelt, he criticized both big business and big government. As part of his “New Freedom” policy, he promised to enforce antitrust laws without threatening economic competition. His position was pure progressivism:

“A trust is an arrangement to get rid of competition. . . . I am for big business, and I am against the trusts. Any man who can survive by his brains, any man who can put the others out of the business by making the thing cheaper to the consumer at the same time that he is increasing its intrinsic value and quality, I take off my hat to, and I say: ‘You are the man who can build up the United States. . . .’”

—Woodrow Wilson, campaign speech, 1912

## Presidential Election of 1912



**A Four-Way Election** Four main candidates sought the presidency in 1912. Taft, despite his distaste for the job, fought to keep it for the Republicans. Roosevelt, eager to get his job back, represented his Bull Moose Progressives. Wilson headed the Democratic ticket. Labor leader Eugene V. Debs made the third of his eventual five presidential runs for the Socialists.

With the Republican vote split between Taft and Roosevelt, Wilson emerged the victor. He gained only about 42 percent of the popular vote, but he won the electoral vote by a landslide: 435 votes to TR’s 88 and Taft’s mere 8. (See election map, above.) The Democrats also took control of both houses of Congress.

Taft left office with few regrets. “I’m glad to be going,” he told his successor. “This is the loneliest place in the world.”

## Wilson’s Policies as President

As president of Princeton University (1902–1910) and then as the governor of New Jersey (1911–1913), Wilson had acquired a reputation as a dedicated reformer. A former professor of political science, Wilson believed that one of his main duties as President was to offer major legislation to Congress, promote it publicly, and help guide it to passage. In that role he worked the Congress vigorously, keeping it in session for a full year and a half for the first time ever.

**Tariffs and Taxes** Wilson’s first major victory was tariff reduction, a long-unfulfilled goal of Progressives. The Underwood Tariff Act of 1913 reduced average tariff rates from 40 percent to 25 percent. To make up for that loss of government revenue, in October 1913 Wilson signed into law a federal income tax, made legal with ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment earlier in the year.

**Attacking the Trusts** Despite the Sherman Act and the trustbusting under Roosevelt and Taft, a congressional committee concluded that a relatively small group of powerful men still controlled much of the nation’s wealth, businesses, and credit. Wilson believed strongly that monopolies and trusts led

**MAP SKILLS** In the 1912 presidential election, progressive ideas influenced the party platforms of the three major contenders. **Predicting Consequences** What would have happened if Roosevelt had not run and Taft had received Roosevelt’s votes?



### Sounds of an Era

Listen to speeches from 1912 by Roosevelt and Wilson, and other sounds from the Progressive Era.

to economic instability and the restriction of free enterprise. He did not want to create more government to monitor the trusts. He sought to get rid of trusts altogether.

With Wilson's guidance, in 1914 Congress passed the **Clayton Antitrust Act** to strengthen the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. Instead of simply making trusts illegal, as the Sherman Act had done, the Clayton Act spelled out specific activities that big businesses could not do. Companies could not prevent their buyers from purchasing goods from competitors. Some types of holding companies used to create monopolies were banned. Price cutting in local markets to squeeze out competitors was forbidden, as were some rebates.

Prior to the Clayton Act, courts often treated labor unions as monopolies. Clayton stated that unions could not be regarded as "illegal combinations [monopolies] in restraint of trade under the antitrust laws" because "the labor of a human being is not a commodity or article of commerce." The act therefore legalized unions as well as their key weapons: strikes, peaceful picketing, and boycotts. Courts were prevented from issuing injunctions against unions unless their activities led to "irreparable injury to property."

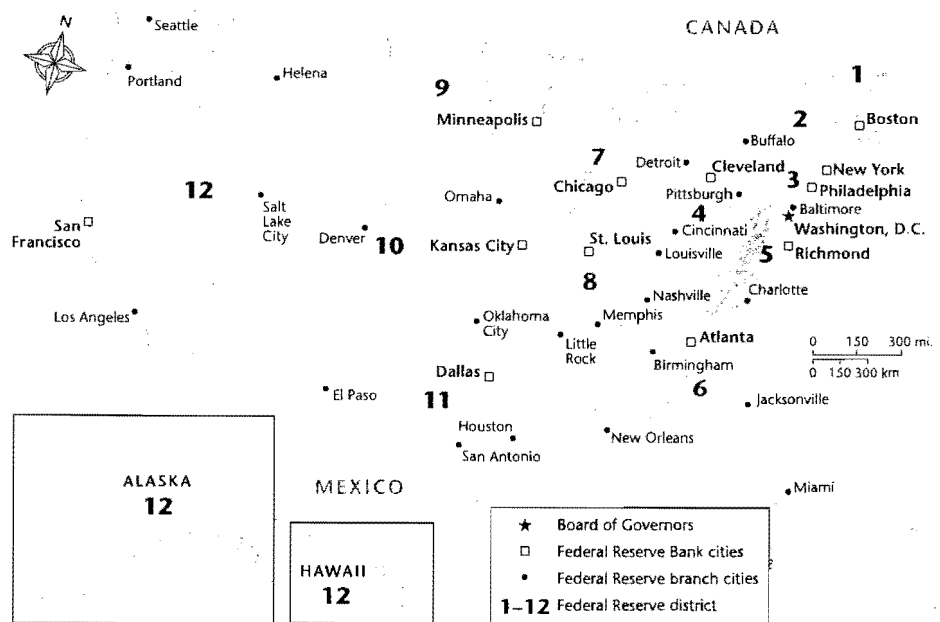
To enforce the Clayton Act and set up fair-trade laws, in 1914 Wilson and the Congress created the **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)**. The FTC was given the power to order firms to "cease and desist" the practice of business tactics found to be unfair. Still, later court rulings weakened the Clayton Act.

**The Federal Reserve System** Congress did not give the FTC authority over banks. Wilson sought a total overhaul of the American banking system to promote competition in the industry and to ease the frequent panics that destabilized the U.S. economy. Bankers, however, had their own ideas about how to reform the system, and many viewed Wilson's plans as radical.

After a long, heated debate, Congress passed the Federal Reserve Act of 1913. The act created the **Federal Reserve System**. It divided the country into 12 districts, each with a Federal Reserve bank owned by its member

**MAP SKILLS** Initially, the 12 regional banks in the Federal Reserve System acted independently, sometimes in conflict. Changes to the system over the years have improved coordination among the regional banks while still allowing them to represent the interests of their member banks. Analyzing Visual Information Which regions' banks might represent a large proportion of (a) farm interests; (b) urban interests; (c) manufacturing interests?

### Federal Reserve Districts



banks. The system was supervised by a Federal Reserve Board appointed by the President.

The Federal Reserve banks were the central banks for their regions—the “bankers’ banks.” Every national bank was required to become a member of the Federal Reserve bank in its district and to deposit some of its capital and cash reserves in that bank. Member banks could borrow from the Federal Reserve to meet short-term demands. This helped to prevent bank failures that occurred when large numbers of depositors withdrew funds during an economic panic.

The system also created a new national currency known as Federal Reserve notes. The Federal Reserve could now expand or contract the amount of currency in circulation according to economic needs.

Another Wilson financial reform was the establishment of the Federal Farm Loan Board in 1916. This board and a system of Farm Loan Banks made loans available to farmers. Farmers could borrow money for five to forty years at rates lower than those offered by commercial banks.

**Brandeis to the Supreme Court** In 1916, with the presidential election approaching, Wilson took a number of steps aimed partly at attracting progressive voters. Early that year, Wilson nominated progressive lawyer Louis D. Brandeis to the Supreme Court. Brandeis was known for his brilliance and for fighting many public causes. He was known as “the people’s lawyer.”

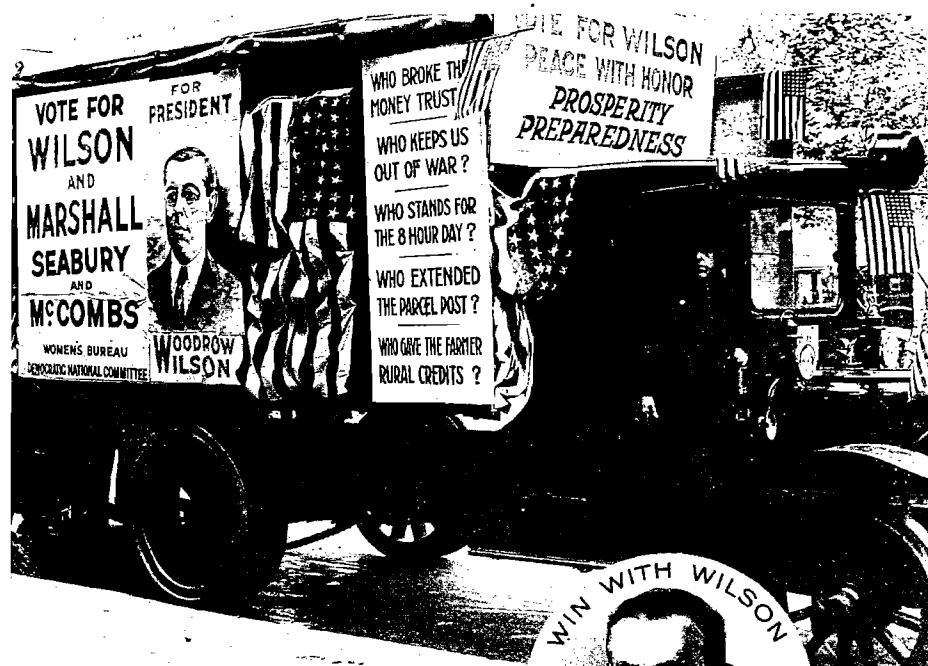
Wilson’s nomination of Brandeis to the Supreme Court drew a storm of protest. Opponents, including former President Taft, accused Brandeis of being too radical. Anti-Semitism also played a part in the opposition; Brandeis was the first Jewish Supreme Court nominee. Nevertheless, he was confirmed by the Senate and served on the Court with distinction until 1939. The appointment of Brandeis marked the peak of federal progressive reforms.

Also in the months preceding the 1916 election, Wilson oversaw federal legislation limiting the use of child labor in industry. Most states already had such laws. Yet the federal provision was struck down by the Supreme Court two years later. A federal ban on child labor would take another two decades.

**Wilson Wins a Second Term** By 1916, the historic progressive drive was winding down. TR did not want to run again. Instead, Roosevelt and the Bull Moose Party endorsed Wilson’s Republican opponent, Charles Evans Hughes, a former governor of New York and Supreme Court justice. Wilson ran on the slogan that he had kept the country out of World War I, which had erupted in Europe two years before. He barely defeated Hughes, with 277 electoral votes to 254.

## The Limits of Progressivism

By the mid-1910s, Progressives had made broad changes in society, government, and business. They had redefined and enlarged the role of government. Yet their influence was limited to certain sectors of society. Focused mainly on municipal problems, Progressives did little to aid tenant and migrant farmers



**VIEWING HISTORY** In 1916, Wilson had the election momentum of an incumbent, suggested in the campaign button above. The campaign truck at top publicized Wilson’s record during his first term as President. **Analyzing Information** Which of the slogans shown on this truck probably contributed most to Wilson’s reelection?

## READING CHECK

List some progressive reforms achieved by Wilson.



The journal of the NAACP is shown at right. Above is a photo of the offices of the NAACP, with W.E.B. Du Bois standing to the right at the back.

## THE CRISIS

A RECORD OF THE DARKER RACES

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Edited by W. E. B. DUBOIS, with the assistance of Charles Johnson, Lillian J. Hill, Walter D. White, Charles Edward Smith, Kelly Miller, A. B. Henderson and M. D. Barber

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Published monthly by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1212 Avenue C, N. Y. N. Y.

and nonunionized workers. Many Progressives supported immigration limits and literacy tests.

### Social Justice and Progressivism

The progressive Presidents took little action to pursue social justice reforms. Wilson allowed his Cabinet officers to extend the Jim Crow practice of separating the races in federal offices. Wilson also initially opposed a constitutional amendment on women's suffrage because his party platform had not endorsed it.

Many African Americans felt ignored by Progressives. Only a tiny group of Progressives, those who helped found the National Association for the Advancement

of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, concerned themselves with the worsening race relations and continued lynchings of the era. Although Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to the White House in 1901, he did little else to support African American rights. At the 1912 Progressive Party convention, Roosevelt declined to seat black delegates from the South for fear of alienating white southern supporters. In addition, some white southern Progressives who favored the women's vote did so because they realized that women's suffrage could double the white vote, putting African Americans further behind.

**The End of Progressivism** As more and more nations became involved in World War I, Americans worried about how long they could remain uninvolved. Soon, calls to prepare for war drowned out calls for reform in America. By the end of 1916, the reform spirit had nearly sputtered out. But one reform movement grew bolder: the drive for women's suffrage.

## Section

# 3

## Assessment

### READING COMPREHENSION

- (a) What progressive reforms did Taft achieve? (b) How did he offend **conservationists**, and what was the result?
- What effect did the Bull Moose Party have on the election of 1912?
- What reforms did Wilson seek?
- What reforms resulted from the establishment of (a) the **Clayton Antitrust Act**; (b) the **Federal Trade Commission**; (c) the **Federal Reserve System**?

### CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

- Making Comparisons** Compare and contrast the Payne-Aldrich Tariff and the Underwood Tariff Act. Describe the political battles and the outcomes of each.
- Writing an Introduction** Write a one-paragraph introduction to an essay on how reforms under President Wilson changed the size, scope, and role of the federal government.

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