United States History Since 1877
CHAPTER 17

INDUSTRIALIZATION

BENCHMARK:

**Explain the social, political, and economic effects of industrialization.**

This benchmark focuses on the effects of industrialization in the United States after 1877. In the course of learning about industrialization, you will also encounter its causes. Understanding the causes of industrialization will help you remember the effects. For the purposes of the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), however, knowing the effects (results) of industrialization will help you be successful.

For this benchmark, effects of industrialization in the 19th century (1877–1900) include changes in work and the workplace, the impact of immigration and child labor, modernization of agriculture, urbanization, and the growth of the middle class and its effect on cultural life. Economic and political effects of industrialization in both the 19th and 20th centuries include the development of corporations, laissez-faire economic policies, monopolies, changes in the standard of living, and the growth of labor unions.

Reform movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were another response to industrialization, especially the Populists and the Progressives. The goals and achievements of these reform movements also are part of the story of industrialization in the U.S. They include urban reforms, the conservation movement, business regulation and antitrust legislation, the public school movement, and the regulation of child labor.

★ THE EFFECTS OF INDUSTRIALIZATION DURING THE 19TH CENTURY ★

In the 1870s, the United States experienced an unprecedented explosion of industrial growth. The Industrial Revolution, which was interrupted by the Civil War, reemerged with unparalleled vigor. A rapidly increasing workforce and the abundance of raw materials such as timber, iron, coal, and oil fueled the industrial boom. By 1900, the United States was the world’s leading producer of manufactured goods.

Other factors helped the American economy outpace the rest of the world. Immigrants from around the world streamed into the United States looking for work. In addition to providing labor, immigrants purchased many of the products manufactured in U.S. factories. The improvement of transportation and communication systems and better machines and labor-saving devices all increased productivity. Talented business leaders invested in new processes and
developed business organizations that resulted in the modern corporation. Industrial leaders enjoyed the support of a cooperative federal government that used tariffs to protect U.S. companies from foreign competition, while largely exempting the domestic companies from regulations and taxes on profits.

**Work and the Workplace**

Rapid industrialization changed the way Americans lived. Before the Industrial Revolution, factories in the United States were rather small operations, where owners and employees knew one another and worked side by side. That quickly changed as industry and manufacturing began to dominate the economy. Where people used to perform manufacturing tasks by hand, now they ran machines that did the work. Production and manufacturing processes also became much more complex, requiring more people to fill more jobs.
**Growth of Urban Population.** Between 1860 and 1900, due in large part to immigration from Europe, the U.S. population more than doubled. Until about 1915, the majority of people in the United States farmed or lived in small towns. By 1920, that balance had changed, with over 50 percent of the population living in urban areas.

| Rural and Urban U.S. Population, 1860, 1900, 1920 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                 | 1860      | 1900      | 1920      |
| Total U.S. Population | 31,443,321 | 76,212,168 | 106,021,537 |
| Percent Living in Rural Areas | 80.2 | 60.4 | 48.8 |
| Percent Living in Urban Areas | 19.8 | 39.6 | 51.2 |

Source: U.S. Census

**Living Conditions in Cities.** As more people moved from farms to cities to find jobs in factories, working and living conditions deteriorated. Before unions became influential, many workers often endured low pay, long hours, and unsafe conditions. The large labor force, which included immigrants, created fierce competition for jobs. The introduction of labor-saving machines in factories cost many workers their jobs. Depressions and “panics” periodically decreased consumer demand for goods, forcing businesses to cut production and lay off workers. In 1878, nearly a million people were unemployed as the result of a persistent depression. The economy improved for a while after that, but again in the mid-1880s, about 2 million workers were jobless. Most working
people feared unemployment because they would be unable to support themselves and their families. At the time, the present-day safety net, which provides unemployment payments and other benefits, did not exist.

**Women and Child Workers.** Industrialization also increased the number of women and children who experienced poor working conditions in factories and mines for low wages. In order to survive, many families put mothers and children to work. By 1900, there were over one million women in the workforce, and about one out of every five married women worked outside the home. The pay for women was about half of what men earned for the same work. At the end of the workday, women still had to care for their homes and families.

In the late 19th century, more children entered the workforce. In 1880, approximately one out of every six children under the age of 16 worked. Some children as young as six or seven worked in the coal mines, textile mills, or sweatshops found in large cities. Like women, most children worked long hours for low pay in unhealthy conditions. Few of them were able to attend school. In the early 1900s, most states passed laws that regulated child labor. While these laws had some effect, they were often ignored or circumvented. Many families depended upon the meager wages of their children to put food on the table.

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**ON THE FARM**

The technological improvements of the Industrial Revolution in big cities helped modernize agriculture as well. As more and more Americans and immigrants moved into cities to work in factories, improvements in transportation and agriculture made it possible to feed these new urban laborers and their families.

**Railroads.** One of the most important advances was the expansion of the railroad, which shipped goods from rural areas to urban centers. In 1869, the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific railroads met at Promontory Point, Utah, creating the nation’s first transcontinental railroad. By 1900, several transcontinental lines crisscrossed the United States. In 1880, about 93,000 miles of railroad track carried America’s trains. Twenty years later, that figure had more than doubled to 193,000 miles.

**Inventions.** Other inventions contributed to the efficiency and productivity of rail travel. By 1875, refrigerated railroad cars allowed meatpackers to deliver their product virtually anywhere in the nation. In 1878, Andrew Chase developed an improved refrigerated car for meatpacking magnate Gustavus Swift.
that increased the shipping range for his perishable product. In addition to meat, perishable goods such as vegetables and milk could now be transported hundreds of miles to different markets.

The widespread use of improved agricultural technology allowed farmers to plant more crops on increased acreage and produce more food. The McCormick reaper, the thresher, and the steel-tipped plow enabled homesteaders to cultivate the vast tracts of the American heartland. In the 1880s, farmers began using combines, machines that reap, thresh, and clean grain crops. The use of silos helped to solve the grain storage problem, and barbed wire allowed the fencing of rangeland. Fertilizer, which allowed farmers to increase their yield per acre, also came in to greater use throughout this period.

All of these inventions, advances, and improvements, and many others allowed farmers to produce more food with less labor in a shorter period of time and ship that food almost anywhere in the nation on the expanding railroad network.

Test Yourself
How did agricultural tools and machines invented in the 19th century make it possible for American cities to grow rapidly in the late 1800s?
THE GROWTH OF CITIES

After the Civil War, business leaders built their factories in cities that had good seaports or railroad lines. As a result, U.S. cities grew rapidly during the late 1800s. The population shift to big cities produced two benefits. It provided workers for the factories, and it also provided a market for many of the manufactured goods.

The Urban Poor

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the migration of Americans from small towns and rural areas to cities changed the face of the United States. In 1900, about 60 percent of Americans still lived in rural areas. By 1915, the balance leveled to about 50 percent rural and 50 percent urban. The 1920 Census revealed that for the first time in American history more people lived in urban areas than in rural areas. In addition to European immigrants, a significant number of people moving from the countryside to cities in the late 1880s and early 1900s were African Americans. By 1930, nearly one million African Americans had moved from the rural South to Western and Northern cities in search of jobs and to escape Jim Crow laws.

Urban Problems. The increase in urban population created several problems. Many cities were not prepared for fast-paced growth. Inadequate housing led to overcrowding. New city dwellers crowded into existing apartments and houses in poor, working-class neighborhoods, which turned into slums. In addition to substandard living conditions, urban slums were often plagued with violent crime.

The lack of adequate sanitation was another problem faced by urban residents in the late 1800s. Cities typically did not have sewage systems that could handle the increased population. Cities often dumped sewage into the same lakes or rivers that provided drinking water, which often resulted in outbreaks
of diseases such as typhoid fever and cholera. Many slum dwellers usually did not have the luxury of running water or bathtubs and had a difficult time keeping clean. This added to the problem of disease, as did air pollution from nearby factories.

Diseases such as cholera were a danger for people living in urban slums.

Test Yourself
What kind of problems did workers living in cities face?

The Middle Class

While the poor suffered and struggled in slums, life for many middle-class Americans also changed as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The growth of large corporations created the need for more managers and office workers, who are often referred to as white-collar workers. By contrast, factory workers and laborers became known as blue-collar workers. Industrialization also created the need for other types of employees such as engineers and sales representatives. Wages for middle-class workers also increased during the latter years of the 19th century, raising their standard of living.

The growing middle class had the luxury of income to spend on more than just the food, clothing, and shelter necessary for survival. While low-wage laborers worked long hours for six or seven days a week, increasing numbers of middle-class Americans enjoyed more free time. Many Americans pursued recreational activities during their free time. Baseball, football, boxing, and horse racing became more popular spectator sports that drew large crowds. Bicycle riding also became popular. Theaters in large cities drew patrons who enjoyed vaudeville shows featuring a variety of singing, dancing, comedy acts, plays, and operas. Traveling circuses were welcomed by large crowds in towns and cities across the nation. One- and two-cent newspapers, in addition to dime novels (inexpensive paperbacks), sold well. In 1880, Thomas Edison invented moving pictures, and eventually thousands of people were enjoying movies at local theaters.
Industrialization changed the lives of millions of people in many ways. The changes benefited some people but made conditions worse for others. Industrialization drew immigrant and U.S.-born workers to cities and helped spawn some of the worst slums imaginable, but it also turned the United States into the world’s leading manufacturing power and created whole new industries dedicated to leisure time activities. Industrialization, immigration, and urbanization were all part of a historical process that drastically changed how Americans lived and worked over a very short period of time.

Increased leisure time allowed more middle-class families to enjoy spectator sports such as baseball.

★ INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE RISE OF THE MODERN CORPORATION ★

The construction of transcontinental railroads after the Civil War made mass distribution of consumer goods possible. The railroads enabled people across the United States to buy all sorts of formerly unavailable products. As the number of consumers grew, production increased to meet the demand.

Corporations. Business leaders needed capital (money) to build new factories. They had to construct buildings, buy raw materials, pay workers, and ship their goods to the marketplace. Forming a corporation is one way to raise the necessary capital. Many corporations sell shares of their business, called stock, to the public. Investors who buy stock in a corporation are actually buying part ownership of the company. If a corporation makes a profit, it gives some of the profit back to shareholders in the form of dividends. If the company does well and the price of its stock increases, shareholders can sell their shares and earn a profit. Stocks are bought and sold at financial exchanges such as the New York Stock Exchange.
In the United States, railroads were the first industry to form large corporations. Many other businesses and industries eventually incorporated. In addition to raising the necessary capital, corporations organized the manufacturing processes and business practices so that companies could control all aspects of an industry, including obtaining raw materials, production, and sales. By the late 1800s, large corporations such as the Standard Oil Company dominated the U.S. economy. Immediately after the Civil War, there were only a few very large factories such as the McCormick Company in Chicago, which manufactured farm machinery. By the end of the century, however, there were over 1,000 large factories that employed at least 500 workers. In 1900, the General Electric Corporation employed 11,000 workers at a plant in Massachusetts and 15,000 in a New York factory.

The rise of the corporation separated the owners from the people who managed the factory and did the work. Owners were no longer involved in the day-to-day operations of the business. They were interested in earning stock dividends and in the price of stocks they owned rather than in managing the company. As the United States moved into the 20th century, more people worked for large corporations rather than for small businesses or themselves.

In the late 19th century, business leaders increasingly faced the problem of intense competition, which forced them to lower prices to attract consumers and resulted in lower profits. To address the problem, some business leaders sought ways to reduce competition. One way was to merge several competing companies into a larger corporation. Another approach involved developing trade associations, in which competing corporations promised to abide by a mutually agreed-upon set of rules. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, increasing numbers of businesses became less competitive as they merged or combined to form larger corporations, often referred to as monopolies, or “trusts.” A monopoly occurs when one company or person effectively controls an entire industry. The Standard Oil Company became one of the earliest monopolies.

A criticism of the powerful Standard Oil Company, one of the first monopolies
Other industries such as steel manufacturing also became monopolies. By the early 1900s, about 300 huge corporations effectively controlled nearly 40 percent of manufacturing investment. U.S. Steel was the largest such combination, cobbled together from 150 smaller companies, with over $1 billion in capitalization and employing over 165,000 people. It also controlled about 60 percent of steel manufacturing in the United States.

**Laissez-Faire Policies**

One reason the United States was able to industrialize at such a rapid rate after the Civil War was its economic system, which was based on the principle of free enterprise. In the late 1880s, most American business leaders favored *laissez-faire* economic policies. Laissez-faire is a French term which means, in context, to let people do as they choose. Laissez-faire advocates argued that government should not interfere with the free market. The only roles government should have are to maintain law and order, enforce contracts, and protect property rights. According to the theory, government regulation increased costs and hindered the operation of the free market, which hurt society in the long run. A laissez-faire economy depends upon supply and demand to set prices and wages, which results in greater efficiency and more wealth to spread around. It also favors low taxes so that more money is in the hands of private citizens rather than the government.

In the late 1800s, the economy of the United States followed a laissez-faire course. Wages and working conditions were unregulated. Men, women, and children worked excessively long hours for low pay in extremely dangerous conditions with no unemployment or health insurance. When government stayed out of economic affairs, the theory argued, competition motivated businesses to offer better goods and services at the lowest possible prices. Many 19th-century business leaders and industrialists advocated laissez-faire to legitimize their business practices, but at the same time they accepted government subsidies and benefited from high tariffs on imports, which made their goods more competitive in the United States. There were no environmental regulations to protect air quality, water purity, or wildlife. Railroads were

“King Monopoly” demands tribute from his captive subjects.
given huge tracts of land along proposed train routes that they could sell to settlers to help pay for building track. They believed that government regulations were bad, but government subsidies and protections were beneficial.

In the 1880s, laissez-faire policies enable the rise of monopolies, which destroyed the competition that laissez-faire supporters argued their system fostered. In response, Congress in 1890 approved the Sherman Antitrust Act, which made monopolies illegal and gave the federal government the authority to bring litigation and even criminal charges against companies that engaged in anticompetitive practices and illegally restrained interstate trade.

Test Yourself
Why did corporations favor laissez-faire policies?

Standard of Living

Industrialization in the late 1800s raised the standard of living for many people, especially entrepreneurs, the middle class, and managers. Although some workers experienced increased wages and improved living conditions, they paid the heaviest price when economic times were bad. Ten- to 12-hour workdays and six-day weeks were the rule. Workers had no protection and could be laid off or fired for any reason. When recessions hit, workers often lost their jobs.

The different lives of the rich and the poor during the late 1880s

★ THE RISE OF LABOR UNIONS ★

The growth of industrialization in the United States was matched by the rise of organized labor unions. In the late 1800s, laissez-faire policies resulted in a largely unregulated workplace. Unsafe, unsanitary, and dangerous conditions
were common. For many workers, wages were low and hours were long. In response, some workers attempted to organize labor unions in the hope of bargaining collectively with business owners for improved wages, hours, and working conditions. Owners resisted these attempts, sometimes with violence and often with government assistance.

Knights of Labor

One of the earliest unions to organize was the Knights of Labor, which began in 1869 as a secret society of tailors in Philadelphia. In the 1870s, a decade of recession and hard times, the Knights welcomed members from all industries. In 1877, railroad workers went out on strike across the nation to protest wage cuts. The strike turned violent, and President Rutherford B. Hayes ordered the use of federal troops to restore order. Over a hundred people were killed during the course of the strike, which increased worker militancy. The Knights of Labor benefited, and its membership rose sharply.

The Knights of Labor campaigned for an eight-hour workday, regulation of child labor, equal pay for women, a graduated income tax, and worker-owned factories. The Knights also pushed for restrictive legislation to protect American workers from competition by immigrants. It supported the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. At that time American unions were unfriendly to immigrants because they feared newcomers would take away jobs from their members.

When Terence V. Powderly took over leadership in 1879, the membership of the Knights of Labor boomed. By 1886, the Knights had about 700,000 members. Each chapter of the union accepted workers from an entire industry regardless of skill or job, and it welcomed African Americans and women. Powderly abolished the rules of secrecy and focused on obtaining rights and benefits for workers. At first, the Knights favored the use of arbitration and boycotts rather than strikes. By the 1880s, however, strikes had become part of the union’s list of tactics, and they enjoyed some success in reversing wage cuts in the railroad industry.

Haymarket Riot. The Knights’ demise came after the devastating Haymarket riot in Chicago, Illinois. In the mid-1880s, American labor leaders decided on an eight-hour work day as the primary goal for the movement. They organized a nationwide strike for May 1, 1886, to rally public support for the idea. Several strikes occurred in cities around the nation on that day, including Chicago. Two days later, a fight at the McCormick Harvester Plant led to a shooting, and the police killed one of the demonstrators. On May 4, union members met in Chicago’s Haymarket Square to protest the shooting. The police attempted to disperse the crowd, and someone threw a bomb that killed 12 people. Eight police officers, who were seriously wounded by the bomb, eventually died as well. Despite the lack of evidence, the authorities quickly blamed the crime on anarchists, some of whom had spoken at the meeting earlier in the day. No one ever identified the bomber, but the jury found eight rally organizers guilty. Seven of them were sentenced to death. The guilty verdicts caused a sensation in the international labor movement, and protests were organized in many parts of the world. One of the convicted men committed suicide in jail, and the
state of Illinois hanged four others. In 1893, three men were eventually par- 
doned by Governor John Altgeld, who reopened the case.

Several people who participated in the Haymarket riot were members of 
the Knights of Labor. They participated despite Powderly's objections. The 
Knights of Labor and unions across the nation suffered because of the violence 
associated with the Haymarket riot. Newspapers and politicians painted labor 
activists as extremists who engaged in violence against the government and 
desired anarchy. Government repression and adverse public opinion helped 
opponents of organized labor mount a successful campaign that set the labor 
movement back several years. The Knights of Labor, like most union organiza-
tions, took a severe hit. In only four years, the organization lost about 600,000 
members.

American Federation of Labor

In 1886, workers met in Columbus, Ohio, and founded a labor organization that 
became one of the most important and lasting in American history. They organ-
ized the American Federation of Labor (AF of L) as an association of trade 
unions.

The AF of L grew out of an earlier union called the Federation of Organized 
Trades and Labor Unions, which was founded in 1881. Samuel Gompers, the 
president of the AF of L until 1924, and its other founders believed that indus-
trial unions such as the Knights of Labor were too disorganized and undisci-
plined to withstand opposition from both management and the government. 
The AF of L was an association, or federation, of craft or trade unions, each of 
which accepted only members who were skilled workers in a particular trade. 
Gompers believed that unions should work within the system and concentrate 
on bargaining with management for the best deal they could negotiate. When
negotiations broke down, the AF of L resorted to strikes and boycotts. The union also opposed radical politics and supported candidates from the two major parties who worked on behalf of labor issues.

Gompers’ approach brought the AF of L into the mainstream. By 1904, its membership topped 1.5 million. In 1920, that number stood at 4 million members. The American Federation of Labor became the leading voice of unionism in the United States up to and beyond the New Deal years.

**Formation of the CIO.** As a confederation of trade unions, the AF of L did not address the problem of unskilled workers in mass-production industries who were not members of a trade union. In the 1930s, some AF of L members tried to expand their federation to include unskilled workers. Efforts at both the AF of L conventions in 1934 and 1935 failed to convince its membership that organizing unskilled workers was beneficial. Dissident AF of L members took action after the 1935 failure. David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, Sidney Hillman, the leader of the Amalgamated Clothing workers, John L. Lewis, the head of the United Mine Workers, as well as leaders of the Textile Workers and the Typographers unions founded the Committee for Industrial Organization within the AF of L to represent the unskilled workers of America. The committee gained strength within the AF of L and created a split among its leadership. In 1937, AF of L leaders, unable to reach consensus, expelled the committee from the union. The committee then became the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The two organizations remained separate until 1955, when they reunited to form the AFL-CIO, which for many years was the most powerful labor union in the United States.

![Labor Union Membership, 1867](image1)

- A.F. of L: 60%
- Independent Unions: 40%
- Total membership: 444,000

![Labor Union Membership, 1914](image2)

- A.F. of L: 76%
- Independent Unions: 24%
- Total membership: 2,647,000

Labor union membership in 1867 and 1914

**Test Yourself**

How did the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor differ?
Two reform movements grew out of the dramatic change that accompanied industrialization—Populism and Progressivism. The two movements were distinct and reacted to problems in different ways.

**Populism**

*Populism* was primarily an agrarian movement. Despite industrialization and advances in agricultural technology, farmers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries experienced periods of economic hardship. Technology changed American agriculture but also led to overproduction. In addition, as the Great Plains opened up for settlement, more acreage came under cultivation. Overproduction and the availability of more farmland increased yield and drove prices down. Farmers grew more crops but earned less for them.

Farmers also faced the unpredictability of the weather and soil exhaustion. As farmers moved west to the Great Plains, they relied on railroads to transport their crops to market. Protective tariffs forced many farmers to pay high prices for American-made equipment instead of imported equipment, which was less expensive. All of these factors put farmers ever more deeply in debt.

*Granger Movement*. The Granger movement was the first attempt to address the problems that many farmers encountered. U.S. Department of Agriculture employees organized the first Grange meetings in 1867, meetings primarily as social gatherings to alleviate the isolation experienced by many rural farm families. After the economic recession caused by the Panic of 1873, Granges grew rapidly, becoming more than social organizations. Granges developed stores, cooperatives, processing plants, and factories as a way of helping farmers become more competitive and profitable. Grangers also became politically active, and some agricultural states enacted “Granger laws” that attempted to regulate railroad shipping and storage fees.
Farmers’ Alliance. Despite its limited success, the Granger movement began to decline in the 1880s. Many farmers, however, continued to experience problems. The Farmers’ Alliance movement took up the cause. By 1890, Farmers’ Alliances could claim about 1.5 million members. The Alliances were more political than the Grangers had been, and they developed detailed agendas for action, calling for strict regulation—even nationalization—of the railroads, monetary policies that would cause inflation, which would make it easier for farmers to pay off debts, a government agency that would offer low-interest loans, and government-run storage facilities. Farmers needed storage for wheat and other crops awaiting shipment on trains to processors.

Populist Party. Several droughts in the Great Plains during the 1880s increased hardships faced by farmers. By 1890, many farmers were desperate, and Farmers’ Alliance leadership decided to increase its political efforts. Joining with Southern Democrats, some labor unions, and a few small reform parties, they organized a new political party called the Populist Party. The Populists quickly enjoyed success in the South and West, where they captured political control of several states and elected members to both the House and Senate.

At their national convention in 1892, Populist delegates examined strategies to make the government and political system work in their favor. Populists believed that Congress, indeed all branches of government, were controlled by industrial trusts, banking, and Eastern commercial interests. Referring to the vast gap between the rich and poor in America, the Populists’ party platform maintained that

> corruption dominates the ballot-box, the legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench [i.e., the courts]. . . . From the womb . . . of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes—tramps and millionaires.

The Populist platform also called for reforms in transportation, particularly railroads, land distribution and use, and in finance, especially the coinage of silver. Debt was a constant problem for many farmers, who borrowed in the spring to purchase seed and equipment with the hope of paying off their debts in the fall after a successful harvest. Declining farm prices in the 1870s and 1880s, as well as natural phenomena such as drought, made constant debt even more burdensome. The Populists viewed the coinage of silver as a way to increase inflation, which would allow farmers to pay their debts more easily.

In the 1892 elections, Populists again did well in Western and Southern states, and their candidate for president received over a million votes. The silver issue dominated the campaign. Populists in the West and South, with the support of organized labor, urged unlimited coinage of silver. They were convinced of the need for more money in circulation to inflate the currency. Inflation allowed borrowers to pay back their debt with cheaper money. By contrast, business leaders and bankers favored monetary stability, feared inflation, and wanted to stick with the gold standard.

The Panic of 1893 exacerbated the situation. Unemployment increased, several banks failed, and crop prices dropped. As the 1896 election approached, Populists picked up support as they increased their call for silver coinage. The Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan, a silver supporter, for president, and the Populist Party endorsed him as well.
With Populist support, Bryan and the Democrats carried the South and much of the West. They could not, however, overcome Republican strength in the North and East. William McKinley, a former representative and governor of Ohio, won a narrow election victory. The Populist Party was unable to gain additional support. The economy began to improve, and the Spanish-American War diverted attention from economic issues. Many Populist issues and ideas, however, lived beyond the party and were later enacted into law. These included the federal income tax, the eight-hour workday, the direct election of U.S. senators, and the abandonment of the gold standard.

The Progressive Movement

The Progressive Movement was an urban, middle-class reaction to social and economic dislocations fostered by the growth of the United States as an industrial power.

Progressive Reformers. Progressivism was not an organized political movement. It was, instead, an idea or a way of looking at the United States and the problems it experienced as it underwent the transformation from a previously
rural nation to an industrialized world power. Progressives were reformers who did not challenge the basic principles of capitalism but who wanted to improve social conditions in the United States and strengthen its political system by fighting corruption and making it more inclusive. They tackled business abuses, corrupt city governments, and substandard living conditions for working people and immigrants in cities. Some Progressives became the first environmentalists, who were then called conservationists. Progressives also wanted to reform the political system by allowing women to vote and through other reforms such as the recall, referendum, initiative, and the direct election of U.S. senators. (At the time, senators were chosen by state legislatures.)

Progressives came from many walks of life but were overwhelmingly middle class and well-educated. They believed that they could apply the scientific method, education, and moral values to the problems faced by many Americans in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

**Muckrakers.** The Progressive Era saw the rise of a new kind of journalism. The muckrakers were journalists and writers who uncovered corruption and abuses in society; they “raked up the muck” to expose what went on below the surface of American business and politics. In 1904, Ida Tarbell wrote an exposé of the Standard Oil Company and its business practices. Lincoln Steffens published *The Shame of Cities* (1904), which uncovered political corruption in city governments. One of the most famous muckraking books was Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), a novel that revealed unsanitary conditions in the meat-packing industry and the mistreatment of workers.

**Theodore Roosevelt’s Square Deal.** In national politics, President Theodore Roosevelt and his wing of the Republican Party represented the Progressive spirit. After he became president following McKinley’s assassination in 1901, Roosevelt (often called “TR”) used the “bully pulpit,” the prestige of the presidency, to encourage change where he believed it was needed. When he ran for president in 1904, Roosevelt called his administration the Square Deal because he wanted fair and equal treatment for all people. Roosevelt embraced several Progressive reforms. He added two departments to the Cabinet: Labor and Commerce. He lobbied vigorously for passage of the Hepburn Act (1906), which strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). TR also prosecuted a railroad monopoly using the Sherman Antitrust Act. The resulting *Northern Securities* case ended with the Supreme Court ordering the monopoly dissolved. When a coal strike in 1902 nearly paralyzed the nation, Roosevelt ordered the mine owners and the union leaders to the White House where he threatened to use troops to keep the mines open. The owners reluctantly backed down and agreed to bargain with the union. This brought an end to the strike. Additionally, Roosevelt pushed the Pure Food and Drug Act, which required accurate labeling and established regulations to improve food safety.

Roosevelt was a great outdoorsman, who had spent a large part of his youth in the West. He was interested in conservation and the effort to save natural resources from unnecessary destruction by mining and timber interests. During his administration, millions of acres were added to the national forests, which were then protected from logging. He increased the power of the U.S. Forest Service, under the direction of Gifford Pinchot, who instituted pro-
grams to plant trees and harvest them. The Roosevelt administration also oversaw a program of dam and canal construction that helped establish an irrigation system for farmers and ranchers.

**Government Reforms.** The Progressive Era is also remembered for attempts to clean up state and city governments, which were often riddled with crime and corruption. Many cities were under the control of “machines.” These were political organizations run by bosses who controlled city or state legislatures and the awarding of lucrative government contracts. Progressives advocated the use of city commissions and city managers, professionals hired to run some small cities, to replace elected mayors and city councils. Tom Johnson, who served as mayor of Cleveland from 1901 to 1909, was a reform-minded Progressive. He battled corporate power and machine bosses. During his time as Cleveland’s mayor, Johnson built parks, lowered streetcar fares, and made the city more sanitary. During Johnson’s administration, Cleveland earned the reputation as the country’s best-governed city.

Progressives fought for reforms on the state level as well. Robert La Follette of Wisconsin was elected governor and then U.S. senator and earned the support of farmers and unions for his attacks on railroads and corporations. La Follette and many Progressives favored electoral reforms. He championed direct primaries, which prevented political machines from controlling nominations for office. Progressives supported the **initiative**, which allowed voters to “initiate” laws by way of petitions, and the **referendum**, which enabled voters to accept or reject laws passed by the state legislature. The Progressive agenda also included the **recall**, which gave voters the power to remove from office officials who were deemed ineffective or corrupt.

Progressive reformers such as Jane Addams addressed the problems faced by immigrants through settlement houses in city slums. They helped immi-
grants learn English and adjust to life in the United States. The Progressives promoted health codes, health facilities, and improved sanitation systems for cities. They also pushed for child labor laws and temperance legislation to deal with the problem of alcoholism. Many Progressives favored the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, which prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages.

**Education.** Many Progressives believed that education was the key to improving the system. In fact, public schooling became an important focus of Progressive reform efforts. John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Henry Barnard led the Progressive push to expand and improve public school education.

Child labor legislation occupied an important part of the Progressive agenda. As the United States moved to a predominately urban, manufacturing economy, more children were employed in factories and mines. They could be paid a lower wage than adult workers, and many children worked long hours for very little pay in unsafe conditions. Many never had an opportunity to attend school. In 1900, between 1.5 and 2 million children worked outside the home in factories or mines. In 1906, the muckraking journalist John Spargo raised public awareness when he published *The Bitter Cry of the Children*, which detailed the terrible conditions faced by thousands of children across the nation.

In the 1890s, Governor Altgeld of Illinois was one of the first public officials to address the problem of child labor. He persuaded the state legislature to pass laws controlling the employment of children, restricting them to an eight-hour day. He also appointed inspectors to help enforce the law. Business interests, however, were able to get the law repealed.

In 1904, Progressives founded the National Child Labor Committee to lobby Congress to pass laws that regulated child labor. Jane Addams was one of the committee’s leaders. In 1908, Addams engaged a photographer, Lewis Hine, to visually document the plight of children in the workplace. Hine’s photos are a graphic documentation of the harsh conditions in which many children worked.

**Child Labor Legislation.** Progressive reformers lobbied for the creation of a federal agency to address the problems of child labor. In 1912, President William Howard Taft established the Children’s Bureau to “investigate and report upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people.” In 1916, Congress passed the Keating-Owen Act, which attempted to regulate child labor by forbidding the interstate transportation of products made in factories or businesses that employed children under 14 years of age or mines that employed children under 16 years of age. It also outlawed interstate transportation of products manufactured by any business that employed children under 16 who worked at night or who worked more than eight hours a day. In 1918, the Supreme Court declared the Keating-Owen Act unconstitutional.

In response to the Supreme Court’s ruling, Congress enacted another child labor law, which levied a 10 percent tax on the profits of factories employing children under the age of 14 and on mines that employed children under the age of 16. In 1922, the Supreme Court struck down the law.

Progressives lobbied for the passage of a constitutional amendment giving Congress the power to regulate child labor. The amendment passed in Congress, but backers failed to obtain the necessary number of states to ratify
In 1938, Congress approved the Fair Labor Standards Act, which outlawed child labor in industries that produced goods that were transported across state lines. The law established a minimum age of 14 for working outside of school hours in nonmanufacturing jobs, 16 for working during school hours, and 18 for hazardous work. The Supreme Court upheld the law.

The trust-busting championed by Roosevelt forced industrialists to change some business practices and pay attention to public opinion. Consumers gained some protection with the passage of food and drug legislation. The Federal Reserve System and the income tax helped to redistribute wealth so that people who needed it received help. Progressives were able to address some problems created by industrialization, but they did it in a way that did not fundamentally challenge the system that created such wealth and wealth disparities in the first place.

**POINTS TO REMEMBER**

- In the 1870s and 1880s, the United States experienced an unprecedented explosion of industrial growth.
- Industrialization was made possible by the rise of modern corporations.
- Beginning in the period between 1910 and 1920, more people lived in urban areas than in rural areas for the first time in U.S. history.
- One effect of industrialization was to bring more women and children in the workforce.
- In the late 1800s and early 1900s, farmers could grow more food because of improved agricultural technology.
- Urbanization accompanied industrialization. Living conditions for working people and immigrants in many American cities were substandard.
- The Industrial Revolution helped establish a new middle class in the United States.
- Laissez-faire economic policies helped lead to the development of large corporations and trusts.
- While many people suffered and the gap between the rich and poor was wide, the overall standard of living rose in the United States between 1880 and 1920.
- Labor unions, Populism, and Progressivism were all responses to the effects of industrialization.
CHECKING WHAT YOU HAVE READ

1. Laissez-faire theory argued that
   A. poverty was natural and unavoidable
   B. the market was self-regulating
   C. government intervention was necessary
   D. corporations required regulation.

2. Generally, farmers of the late 19th century blamed their economic problems on
   A. railroads and banks
   B. poor farming practices
   C. rising costs created by mechanization
   D. outdated agricultural technology.

3. The Populist Party program
   A. was so impractical that none of it was ever enacted
   B. wanted to prohibit government intervention in the economy
   C. favored laissez-faire policies to help corporations
   D. favored regulation of railroads and coinage of silver.

4. The Progressive movement is best defined as
   A. an organized political party with a clear-cut set of goals
   B. an idea that favored government reform of social abuses
   C. probusiness and antiunion
   D. made up mostly of minorities and labor union members.

5. Populists wanted the free coinage of silver because it would
   A. lead to inflation
   B. lower equipment prices
   C. help the jewelry industry
   D. help railroads build more track.

6. Which of the following lasted well into the 20th century?
   A. Knights of Labor
   B. American Federation of Labor
   C. Granger movement
   D. Populist Party

7. Which of the following groups favored a civil service system?
   A. immigrants
   B. Progressives
   C. political machine bosses
   D. railroad owners

8. Between the late 1800s and early 1900s, the average standard of living in the United States
   A. stayed the same
   B. decreased
   C. increased
   D. could not be calculated.

9. Progressives generally believed that
   A. women were too emotional to vote
   B. women should have the right to vote
   C. corporations should not be regulated
   D. public education should be available only to those who can afford it.

10. At the state level, Progressive reformers
    A. opposed direct primary elections
    B. fought against direct election of senators
    C. favored the initiative and referendum
    D. opposed public schools.
1. On a separate piece of paper, complete a Venn diagram like the one below, comparing the Populists and Progressives.

2. On a separate piece of paper, complete a concept map like the one below with as many effects of industrialization as you can identify.

Assume the role of a factory worker or a farmer in the 1880s. Write a letter to the editor in which you describe a serious problem facing either factory workers or farmers, why it is a problem, and suggest a way to solve the problem.
Interpreting a Primary Source

Read each of the following primary source documents about life in the later 1800s and early 1900s. Then answer the questions that follow.

“Honest Graft”

Everybody is talkin’ these days about Tammany men growin’ rich on graft, but nobody thinks of drawin’ the distinction between honest graft and dishonest graft. There’s all the difference in the world between the two. Yes, many of our men have grown rich in politics. I have myself. I’ve made a big fortune out of the game, and I’m gettin’ richer every day, but I’ve not gone in for dishonest graft—blackmailin’ gamblers, saloon-keepers, disorderly people, etc.—and neither has any of the men who have made big fortunes in politics.

There’s an honest graft, and I’m an example of how it works. I might sum up the whole thing by sayin’: “I seen my opportunities and I took ‘em.”

Just let me explain by examples. My party’s in power in the city, and it’s goin’ to undertake a lot of public improvements. Well, I’m tipped off, say, that they’re going to lay out a new park at a certain place.

I see my opportunity and I take it. I go to that place and I buy up all the land I can in the neighborhood. Then the board of this or that makes its plan public, and there is a rush to get my land, which nobody cared particular for before.

Ain’t it perfectly honest to charge a good price and make a profit on my investment and foresight? Of course it is. Well, that’s honest graft.

Or, supposin’ it’s a new bridge they’re goin’ to build. I get tipped off and I buy as much property as I can that has to be taken for approaches. I sell at my own price later on and drop some more money in the bank.

Wouldn’t you? It’s just like lookin’ ahead in Wall Street or in the coffee or cotton market. It’s honest graft, and I’m lookin’ for it every day in the year. I will tell you frankly that I’ve got a good lot of it, too.

George Washington Plunkitt

Life in a Tenement

I counted the other day the little ones, up to ten years or so, in a Bayard Street tenement that for a yard has a triangular space in the center with sides fourteen or fifteen feet long, just room enough for a row of ill-smelling closet at the base of the triangle and a hydrant at the apex. There was about as much light in this “yard” as in the average cellar. I gave up my self-imposed task in despair when I had counted one hundred and twenty-eight in forty families. Thirteen I had missed, or not found in. Applying the average for the forty to the whole fifty-three, the house contained one hundred and seventy children. It is not the only time I have had to give up such census work. I have in mind an alley—an inlet rather to a row of rear tenements—that is either two or four feet wide.
according as the wall of the crazy old building that gives on it bulges out or in. I tried to count the children that swarmed there, but could not. Sometimes I have doubted that anybody knows just how many there are about. Bodies of drowned children turn up in the rivers . . . whom no one seems to know anything about. When last spring some workmen, while moving a pile of lumber on a North River pier, found under the last plank the body of a little lad crushed to death, no one had missed a boy, though his parents afterward turned up.

Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives

1. Who wrote each document?
2. What is the approximate date of the documents?
3. For whom was each written (the audience)?
4. What is the point of view of each document?
5. Summarize each document.
6. How do the two documents differ?
7. What does each document tell you about life in the United States at that time?