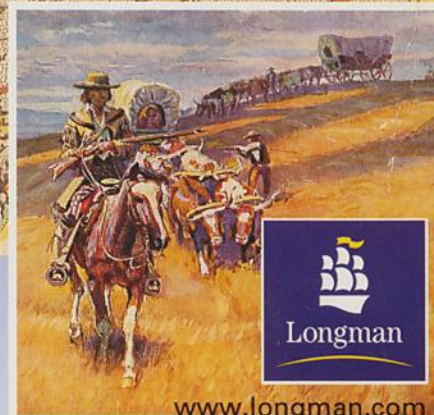
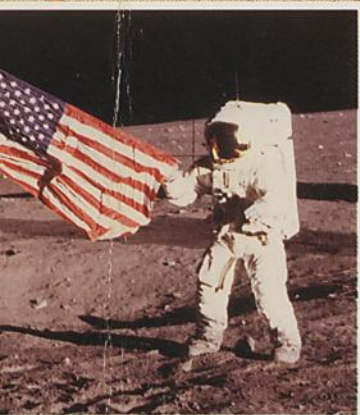
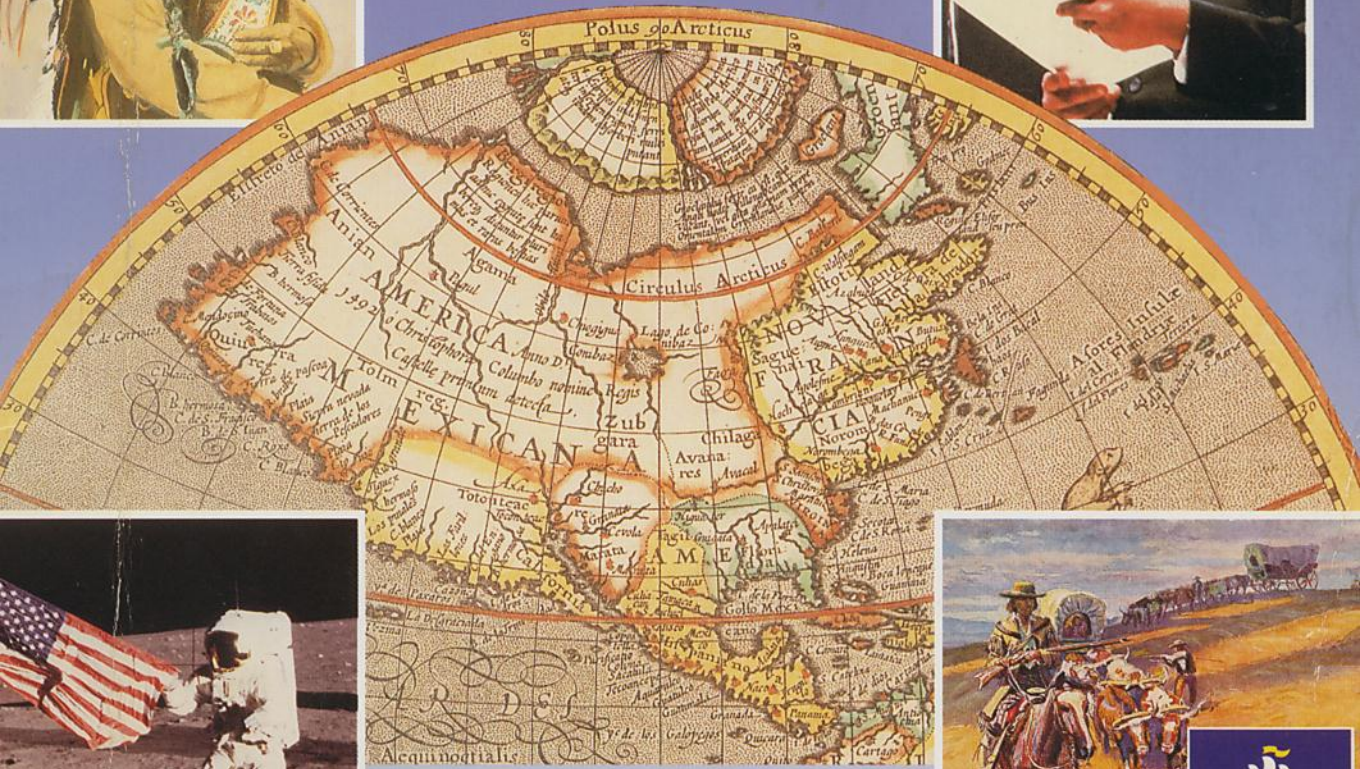
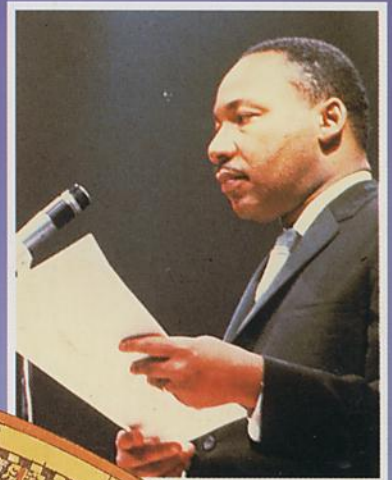


AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE USA



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REFORMERS AND PROGRESSIVES



An immigrant family in New York in the early 1900s.

By 1900 the United States was the richest and most productive industrial country in the world. It produced 31.9 percent of the world's coal, 34.1 percent of its iron and 36.7 percent of its steel. About twenty million of its seventy-four million people earned a living from jobs in industry.

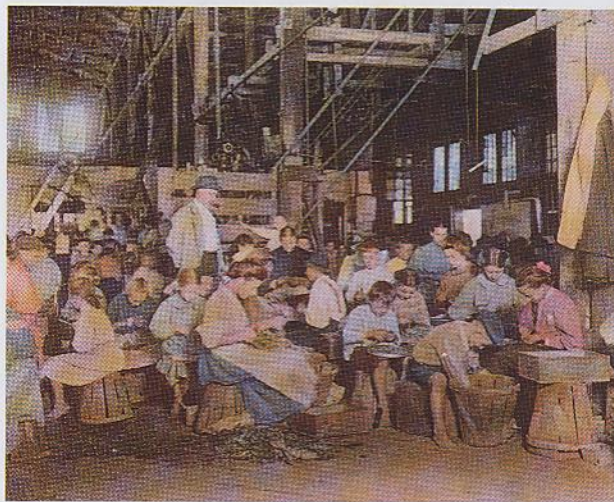
Men, women and children labored for long hours in factories, mines and workshops. Many lived in cities, for growing industrial centers like Pittsburgh and Chicago needed more and more workers. The workers' homes were dirty and overcrowded slums. Years later the son of immigrants from an Italian village remembered his mother's unhappiness. He described how she would sit for hours at the window of the family's room in a crowded New York tenement, or apartment building, "staring up at the little patch of sky above the tenements."

Wages were often low. In 1900 the average industrial worker was paid nine dollars for working fifty-nine hours a week. Many worked longer and earned less. In cotton spinning mills the usual working week was sixty-two hours for wages of ten cents an hour. Often the work was unhealthy or dangerous. In one plant belonging to the United States Steel Corporation forty-six men were killed in 1906—by

burns, explosions, electric shocks, suffocation, falling objects or by being crushed. If workers were killed or injured like this, neither they nor their families received compensation. When the owner of a coal mine was challenged about the dangers and hardships that his workers faced, his reply was short and cruel: "They don't suffer," he said. "Why, they can't even speak English."

Workers tried to form trade, or labor, unions to improve the conditions of their lives. These attempts often failed. One reason for this was the competition for jobs between American-born and immigrant workers. Another was the violent opposition unions faced from employers. Employers would dismiss union members and put their names on a "blacklist." If a worker's name appeared on one of these lists, other employers would refuse to give him a job.

Employers were determined to allow neither their workers nor anyone else to interfere in the way they ran their businesses. Sometimes they persuaded politicians to send soldiers to break up strikes. At other times they hired their own private armies to control their workers. This happened when workers at Andrew Carnegie's Homestead Steel Mill in Pennsylvania went on strike in 1892. The mill's manager hired 300 "detectives" to stop the strike. In



Women and children working in a vegetable cannery.

Samuel Gompers and the A.F.L.

In the early 1900s the leading American labor organization was the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.). The A.F.L. was formed in 1886 by Samuel Gompers, a leader of the Cigarmakers' Union.

Cigarmaking was a skilled job. Gompers believed that unions of skilled workers were the only ones with a real chance of success. If unskilled workers went on strike they could easily be replaced. Skilled workers could not. This meant that employers would be more likely to listen to them.

The A.F.L. grew steadily as it brought more and more of these skilled workers together—carpenters, printers, iron molders, glassmakers. By 1904 it had 1.75 million members and was the United States' biggest labor organization.

At this time many workers in Europe were joining revolutionary labor movements. These European

movements called for the overthrow of capitalism—that is, the private ownership of factories, mines and other means of production—and its replacement by a new socialist economic system.

Most American workers rejected such revolutionary ideas. They were not interested in destroying the existing economic system; they simply wanted to make it work more effectively for their benefit. What they wanted was a bigger share of the wealth they helped to produce. Gompers called this “bread and butter unionism.” He believed that unions should concern themselves with the day-to-day welfare of their members, not with politics. Revolutions would not win a better life for working people, he said. But practical demands for higher wages, shorter working hours and safer working conditions would.

clashes between the detectives and the strikers, twenty people were killed.

Employers and the government were not the only enemies labor unions faced. The general public was usually against them. Americans had always seen their country as a land where individuals should be free to improve their lives by their own efforts. Many owned farms, shops or small manufacturing firms. Millions more dreamed of the day when they too would own a farm or a business of their own. Perhaps they might even become rich, as Carnegie had done! People such as these were unlikely to favor organizations which aimed to limit businessmen's freedom of action and opportunities.

But Americans were not complacent about conditions in their country. In the early years of the twentieth century a stream of books and magazine articles drew people's attention to a large number of national problems. Some dealt with conditions of life in the slums of the great cities, some with bribery and corruption in government, others with the dishonesty of wealthy businessmen. The books and articles often brought out startling and shocking facts. This caused some people to describe their authors with contempt as “muckrakers.”

One of the best-known muckrakers was Upton Sinclair. In 1906 he attacked the meat-packing industry in his novel *The Jungle*. This gave a horrifying description of life among immigrant workers in the slaughter houses of Chicago. *The Jungle* revealed to many middle-class Americans a side of their nation's life that they hardly knew existed. They were shocked to learn what went into their breakfast sausages. They were even more shocked when government investigators said that what Sinclair had written was correct. Here is part of the investigators' report on conditions in a Chicago meat-packing factory:

“We saw meat shoveled from filthy wooden floors, piled on tables rarely washed, pushed from room to room in rotten boxcars, in all of which processes it was . . . gathering dirt, splinters, floor filth and the expectoration [spit] of tuberculous and other diseased workers.”

Reports like this shocked and frightened the American people. Meat sales dropped by half. The meat companies begged the government to inspect their premises in order to convince people that their products were fit to eat. Congress quickly passed a new federal meat inspection law.



The Strike by Robert Koehler.

People began to demand that the nation's leaders should deal with other scandals exposed by the muckrakers. This pressure brought about an important change in American economic and political life. Before 1900 most Americans had believed in "laissez faire"—the idea that governments should interfere with business, and with people's lives in general, as little as possible. After 1900 many Americans became "Progressives." A Progressive was someone who believed that, where necessary, the government should take action to deal with the problems of society.

The Progressive movement found a leader in the Republican Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt became President in 1901. One of his main beliefs was that it was the duty of the President to use the power of the federal government to improve conditions of life for the people—to see that the ordinary man and woman got what he called "a square deal."

Roosevelt was particularly concerned about the power of the trusts. His idea was to give the United States the best of both worlds. He wanted to allow businessmen enough freedom of action to make their firms efficient and prosperous, but at the same time to prevent them from taking unfair advantage of

other people. A humorist of the time made fun of this two-sided attitude by describing it in these words:

"The trusts are hideous monsters built up by the enlightened enterprise of the men that have done so much to advance progress in our beloved country. On the one hand I would stamp them under foot, on the other hand, not so fast."

A good example of the "square deal" in action came in 1902. Anthracite coal miners went on strike to obtain better wages and working conditions. Their employers refused even to discuss the workers' demands. Then the President stepped in. He told the mine owners that they were being unreasonable. He said that unless they agreed to negotiate with their workers, the federal government would take control of the coal mines. The threat was enough. The owners changed their attitude and the strike was settled.

Another example of the "square deal" came a few years later. Roosevelt forced the big railroad companies to charge all their customers fair rates, instead of allowing large customers like the oil and meat-packing trusts to pay less than farmers and small businessmen. He also supported laws which

compelled manufacturers of foods and medicines to make sure that their products were pure and harmless before selling them.

Theodore Roosevelt retired as President in 1909. In 1912 he tried to regain the position, but he was defeated in the presidential election by Woodrow Wilson, the candidate of the Democratic Party.

Although Roosevelt and Wilson belonged to different political parties, some of their ideas were very similar. Wilson, too, supported the Progressive movement. He had promised that when he became President he would fight “not for the man who has made good [achieved success] but for the man who is going to make good—the man who is knocking and fighting at the closed door of opportunity.” As Governor of the state of New Jersey he had fought successfully to make sure that the state was run for the benefit of its people. He had reduced bribery and corruption there, and he had introduced reforms such as laws to give workers compensation for injuries at work.

In March 1913, Wilson stood before the Capitol building in Washington, the home of the United States Congress. There he took the oath as President. Then he made a brief speech about the state of the country: “We have built up a great system of government,” he told the crowd which had gathered to watch the ceremony. “But evil has come with the good . . . We have squandered [wasted] a great part of what we might have used. We have been proud of our industrial achievements, but we have not hitherto stopped thoughtfully enough to count the human cost . . .”

One of these “human costs,” Wilson believed, had been the near destruction for many ordinary Americans of a fair chance to get on in life. Workers, farmers, owners of small businesses—people such as these had seen their opportunities steadily shrinking in recent years owing to the continuing growth of the power of “big business” over the nation’s economic life. Despite Theodore Roosevelt’s attempts to bring the trusts under control, they were even more powerful in 1913 than they had been in 1900. Real equality of opportunity seemed in danger of disappearing in the United States. Wilson believed that only action by the federal government could halt this process. As President, he was determined to see that such action was taken.

Wilson called his policies “The New Freedom.” They were put into effect by a series of laws passed between 1913 and 1917. One of Wilson’s first steps was to reduce customs duties in order to encourage trade between the United States and other countries. Then he reformed the banking system and introduced a system of federal taxes on high incomes. Other laws reduced the powers of the trusts, gave more rights to labor unions and made it easier for farmers to borrow money from the federal government to develop their land. Many individual states also passed Progressive laws. They forbade factories to employ children, introduced secret voting, improved safety at work, and protected their natural resources.

But not all Wilson’s plans of reform were accepted. For example, the Senate refused to pass a law giving the federal authorities more control over the buying and selling of business shares. Another law, stopping child labor in factories everywhere, was declared to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

The Progressive movement changed and improved American life in many ways. But many people still distrusted too much government “interference” in the nation’s life.

Theodore Roosevelt and conservation

Perhaps Theodore Roosevelt’s most important service to his country was to persuade Congress to pass a number of conservation laws. These were laws to save the country’s natural resources from being used up carelessly and greedily.

The United States desperately needed such laws in the early 1900s. Roosevelt pointed out that unless action were taken to slow down the destruction of the country’s forests, mineral resources and soil fertility, Americans would soon discover that much of the natural wealth of the United States had been destroyed for ever.

Congress listened to Roosevelt’s advice. It passed conservation laws under which millions of acres of land were protected and their forest and mineral wealth preserved for the use of future generations.