Progressivism Essay, Research Paper

U.S. History Progressivism

The period of time between the Spanish-American War and World War I is known

as the Progressive Era. It was a period marked by idealism, reform, and significant

economic growth. Progressivism was a movement designed to correct the abuses which

reformers felt had crept into American society and government, as a result of

industrialization and urbanization.

Progressivism was the outcome of a number of forces in American life. The

reform spirit of the 1880’s and 1890’s was still strong, despite the collapse of the Populist

Party after the election of 1896. After the hard times of the 1890’s, many Americans were

anxious for a better life and supported reforms intended to achieve this. The middle class,

frightened by the economic unrest of the 1890’s and the actions of giant business

organizations, was more willing to accept progressive reforms than it had been earlier.

After the quick victory in the Spanish-American War, there was a new feeling of

confidence in the nation=s future. Progressivism had many aims.

The general aims of Progressivism were as follows: to extend political democracy

by shifting control of government from the political bosses and powerful industrialists to

the people; to curb the power of big businessmen, in order to give greater economic

opportunities to small business and labor; and to eliminate the social ills of society through

needed reforms. Although the aims of Progressivism were shared by all Progressivists,

support came from many different groups.

Progressives came from both major parties, as well as from minor or third parties.

Important political leaders in the movement included Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and

Woodrow Wilson, and Governors Robert La Follette, Charles Evans Hughes, and Hiram

Johnson. Support came from the farm, because the farmers wanted their problems to be

recognized. Support came from artists and writers, who wrote stories about social ills.

These sensationalists, known as Amuckrakers@, wrote about many different societal

problems. Lincoln Steffens wrote AA Shame of Cities.@ Ida Tarbell wrote, AHistory of

Standard Oil Co.@ Other writers, such as Upton Sinclair, wrote about bad working

conditions and unhygienic procedure in his book AThe Jungle.@ There was much support

from urban middle-class members. They were in fear of big business, and wanted to join a

movement which would strive to protect them. There were many achievements

accomplished by the Progressive Movement.

Progressivism accomplished many things. Political democracy was extended by

initiative, referendum, recall, and the short ballot. The Seventeenth Amendment was

passed and provided for the direct election of U.S. Senators. The Nineteenth Amendment

gave the franchise to women to permit the selection of party candidates by registered

voters. Many limitations and restrictions were placed on trusts. Monopolies were

prosecuted and the Clayton Act was passed. The Federal Trade Commission Act was

passed as well. Many laws which safeguarded labor and the public were enacted. More

adequate factory and building inspection codes were adopted, greater provisions were

made for sanitation and public health, and Congress enacted the Pure Food and Drug Act

and the Meat Inspection Act which further improved the quality of foods.

The Progressive Era did many great things for society. It improved the quality of

life, and of living. Through the support of many different types of people, Progressivism

was a major success.