

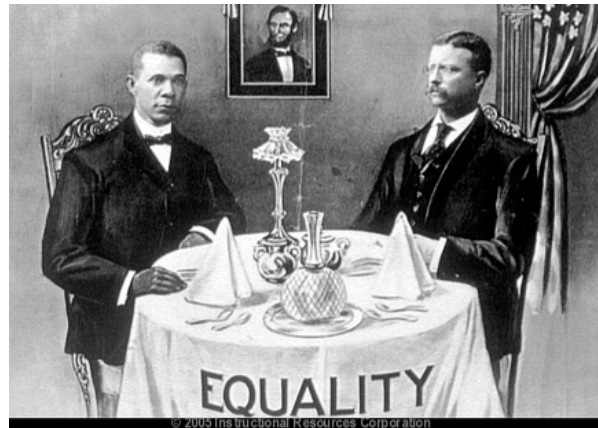
Many historians call the late 1800s and early 1900s the Progressive Era. Politicians from many parties who strove for social and political changes that would help common people identified themselves as Progressives. Their causes included fighting for the right of women to vote, protecting laborers, and addressing the vast inequality between rich and poor.

Two long-serving presidents led the United States through this era. Theodore Roosevelt, who served from 1901 to 1909, and Woodrow Wilson, who served from 1913 to 1921, identified themselves with the Progressive movement. As leaders, they changed the nature of the federal government and the rights and protections of many American citizens. The two men had much in common, but they arrived at the White House by different paths.

Roosevelt and Wilson lived during almost exactly the same years. However, they came from different parts of the country—which was very significant so soon after the Civil War. While they differed in personality and in their pursuits as young men, they came to hold a very similar political perspective.

Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919)

Roosevelt was very young during the Civil War, but he was also very aware. He was born and raised in New York, but his mother was from the South. She fretted about the well-being of those she had left behind, and her son knew that she sent care packages. His father, on the other hand, worked with Lincoln to ensure that Union troops had the best care and support available. The young Roosevelt sided with his father and identified with these Union soldiers.



This illustration shows Booker T. Washington and President Roosevelt at the White House.

Theodore Roosevelt received his college education at Harvard, specializing at first in natural history. When his father died in 1878, Roosevelt was devastated and in his confusion changed the focus of his schooling to history and government. He then went to law school, but he quickly dropped out to go straight into politics and civil service. He was elected to the New York legislature when he was just 23. He immediately focused on government corruption—politicians taking money from big business interests in return for favors. From a young age, Roosevelt earned a reputation as a curious and independent thinker.

Roosevelt's childhood influenced his adulthood in many ways. As a boy, Roosevelt loved to read, in part because he had many physical challenges and struggled with asthma. However, he was determined to overcome these obstacles. In fact, he became known as an avid outdoorsman. This love of the outdoors lasted his whole life, and in adulthood he had a ranch in the Dakota Territory. Perhaps because of his childhood love of the outdoors, Roosevelt felt it was important to be involved in world events. When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, he volunteered and led a group of soldiers known as the Rough Riders. When he was elected president in 1900, he was known as a war hero.

Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924)

Wilson was born below the Mason-Dixon Line in Virginia. His father was a Presbyterian minister. Wilson's family spent the Civil War years in Georgia and the years of the Reconstruction era in South Carolina, much of which had been devastated by the war.

Like Roosevelt, Wilson got an Ivy League education at Princeton University. Unlike Roosevelt, he completed law school at the University of Virginia. Instead of practicing law, however, he got a PhD in political science from Johns Hopkins University and became a professor and later president at what is now Princeton. It was from the position of university president that Wilson entered politics. He served as governor of New Jersey for just two years before becoming president of the United States at the age of 57. Like Roosevelt, Wilson was known as an independent thinker who agreed with many progressive ideas.



Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924)

Progressive Causes, Progressive Achievements

Theodore Roosevelt served as president from 1901–1909. Even before that, as governor of New York, Roosevelt had begun his campaign to rein in big business. As president, he got laws passed that kept major corporations from getting too powerful. He helped to resolve conflicts between corporations, such as coal mining companies and labor. He established an agency to ensure that the food and drugs people bought were safe. And he is particularly well known for his conservationism and environmentalism. He made sure that land was set aside for parks and that natural resources were extracted and used responsibly.

During Woodrow Wilson's administration (1913–1921), several amendments to the Constitution were passed. One established the federal income tax, which in part addressed socioeconomic inequality. Another amendment made senators directly elected rather than appointed by the state legislature, giving common people more democratic rights. The Eighteenth Amendment initiated Prohibition. At that time, it was thought that banning alcohol would help solve problems such as domestic abuse and poverty. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment affirmed women's right to vote. Also, while Wilson was president, Congress passed a law banning child labor.

The Roaring Twenties followed World War I and Wilson's presidency. During that period of rampant industrialization, more and more Americans benefited from the Progressive legislation passed during Roosevelt and Wilson's terms in office. The United States in the 1920s was expanding economically, sometimes recklessly so. By 1929, the country had fallen into the Great Depression.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

1. What helped make Roosevelt aware of the issues in the South?
 - A. He was raised in the South.
 - B. His mother was from the South.
 - C. He traveled to the South regularly.
 - D. He frequently read Southern newspapers.

2. Until he was elected president, Wilson worked in a
 - A. bank
 - B. factory
 - C. university
 - D. foreign embassy

3. Which of the following would you associate with Progressive politics?
 - A. labor laws
 - B. lowering taxes
 - C. Reconstruction
 - D. international aid

4. How did the experiences of the two presidents differ up until their years in office? How do you think these experiences led them both to become Progressive politicians? Support your answer with details and evidence from the passage.