

1900 – 1910

Major Themes:

Imperialism
Progressives

Presidencies:

William McKinley (R) – 1900 – 01
Teddy Roosevelt (R) – 1901 – 1909
William Howard Taft (R) – 1909 – 1913

Overview:

You want to think about this decade as one where America is coming on the scene as a legitimate world power. We have recently acquired colonies (Guam, Philippines, Puerto Rico) from the Spanish. We have begun construction on the Panama Canal Zone, have the world's most powerful navy (Great White Fleet), and have even entered the world diplomatic scene (T. Roosevelt and the Russo-Japanese War/Nobel Peace Prize). We also fought a little known three year war against Filipino rebels led by Emiliano Aguinaldo. Douglas MacArthur would get his first taste of war there.

With this new empire came continued growth in economic power. Pick up where the Gilded Age left off as the rich are still super rich, and most of America is poor. We still have large numbers of immigrants coming to the US, so called "New Immigrants" from southern and Eastern Europe, mostly from Italy, Poland and Russia. We also have the first large wave of Jews immigrating to the US to work in the textile industries and the Garment District of New York. In the next two decades, we'll see a growing amount of racism against these late arrivals.

Teddy Roosevelt is our first Progressive President. Mostly in terms of working conditions, he reacted to the wildly popular book *The Jungle* by getting Congress to pass the Meat Inspection Act, thus creating the USDA and allocating \$3 million to pay for independent inspectors. He soon followed up with Pure Food and Drug Act, creating the FDA to regulate prescription drugs and food processing plants. Lastly, he passed the Square Deal, outlawing child labor, establishing the 40 hour work week, and the minimum wage. He was also a conservationist, using his pal John Muir to help create a system of National Forests and National Parks.

He wasn't that big on trustbusting though. Early in his term, there was the Anthracite Coal Strike (1903). Rather than slam the coal monopoly or support the unions, Teddy

Roosevelt forced both sides to compromise. The trust lived on, but for the first time, big business didn't call all the shots.

Other progressives were busy as well. The WCTU and the Anti-Saloon League were still working towards prohibition, and many counties and states, especially in the South, had already outlawed alcohol. Some states in the west had also given women the right to vote. Wyoming was the first. The 17, 18 and 19 amendment were soon in coming, in the next decade, as a result of these efforts.

Last, but not least, a significant court case, *Muller v. Oregon* upheld an Oregon law limiting women's working hours to 20 per week. It was an example of how women were otherwise gaining rights that men in the government and the court system were still determined to withhold.

Taft succeeded Teddy Roosevelt as President in 1909, who guaranteed he would be elected simply by endorsing Taft. He later came to regret his choice.

Yes, this was the stuck-in-a-bathtub president. ☺