

PROGRESSIVISM PAPER INSTRUCTIONS

Prompt: Which of the 5 interpretations of the Progressive Movement BEST explains the rise and success of reform 1900-1916? Some reforms that happened slightly beyond these dates can still be used for analysis.

The more you study ANY subject, the more you are going to realize that every discipline (subject of study: math, history, english) has multiple interpretations of what is the “right” answer. In our case, this is called Historiography. Currently there are 5 distinct historical explanations of exactly WHAT the “Progressive Movement” was. Your job, whether you choose to accept it or not, is to choose one of these interpretations, and write a 3-5 page paper explaining WHY and HOW that interpretation BEST explains the Progressive Movement. Of course no single interpretation ever fully explains such large sweeps of history, so make sure you also explain where the other 4 interpretations also add to historical explanation. PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CAN NOT SIMPLY TELL THE READER (me) **WHAT** HAPPENED. YOU MUST ALSO SHOW HOW YOUR CHOSEN INTERPRETATION EXPLAINS **HOW** THE PROGRESSIVES MANAGED TO ACTUALLY **SUCCEED** TO A LARGE (larger than ever before anyways) DEGREE IN THIS PLACE AND THIS TIME. As always you must have

- An introductory paragraph that gives sufficient background info, FULLY answers the question, and supplies structure by give at least two ways you going to PROVE your hypothesis.
- Every transition sentence must tie back to the prompt.
- Use FACTS and Analysis throughout the paper
- A concluding paragraph that does more than rehash the thesis sentence, without saying something stupid like “and that’s why America is the great democratic beacon for oppressed peoples around the world”.
- Works cited page using the Chicago citation method.

Below are the 5 accepted interpretations of Progressivism. This is just a short overview, please go online to research each “school of thought”.

1. The “Traditional” interpretation (1930’s): This interpretation hypothesizes that Progressivism was A case of Reformers vs. Big Bidness. People like Jane Addams, Riis, etc., believing in the Social Gospel championed reforms in order to ameliorate the growing problems of industrialization.
2. The “Jaded View” Interpretation (1950s): This interpretation hypothesizes that Progressivism was a case of “Status Anxiety” in the traditional old rich families allying themselves with the growing power of the moralistic Middle Class in an effort to reduce growing tensions between the very poor and the Nouveau Riche Robber Barons. Fearing a loss of prestige and power the Old Rich gave support to the Middle-class who were in turn seeking to stop a lower-class violent backlash against the Conspicuous Consumption of the new Super-rich. Thus the Old Rich (Lowells, Cabots, etc) were will to support the Middle-class Progressive Movement in order to regain their traditional place at the top of the social order.
3. The “New Left” interpretation (1960’s): This interpretation hypothesizes that Progressivism was a case of corporate self-interest. Big Business leaders co-opted the reform movement and channeled it to their own interests of reducing competition and increasing profits. For example, the Pure Food and Drug Act actually helped Armour and Swift by driving out smaller meatpackers and reclaiming lost sales in Europe.
4. The “Search For Order” Interpretation: (1980s): This interpretation hypothesizes that Progressivism was an inevitable phase of industrialism. As chaos grows it is in everyone’s best interest to emphasize rational planning. The emergence of middle managers and civil servants to run businesses and governmental agencies encouraged a more organized and efficient system
5. The “No Interpretation” Interpretation: (Now): This interpretation hypothesizes that Progressivism was NOT a single movement, but rather 100’s of small movements that had very little in common. After all the racist Woodrow Wilson is classified with W.E.B. Dubois as Progressives. Rather, historians merely clump them all together for the sake of simplicity.

As always, you will be graded on CONTENT and ANALYSIS. Make absolutely sure that you BOTH explain WHAT happened and HOW they were able to succeed, when so many other reform movements had failed so dismally. If you get your paper back with SBBJGU written on it, you can't get over a 60. SBBJGU is an acronym for "So big business just gave up". If, as we argued in the last unit, big business had an excess of power and control over the governments (local, state, national), then why did they allow a bunch of middle class reformers (mostly women) to change the rules?