

**THE PROGRESSIVE ERA****Issues Connector: Social Problems and Reforms**

The Progressive Movement, which evolved from earlier movements including the Second Great Awakening and the abolitionist movement, was a response to many serious social and political issues that developed throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Urbanization and industrialization had created problems including crowded, unhealthy living conditions and safety issues in the workplace. Reformers focused on a number of issues including the abuses of big business, workplace safety, child labor, government corruption, better living conditions, and the use of alcohol. Journalists and novelists wrote articles and books that helped make people aware of some of the problems that American society faced. During the Progressive Era the lives of many people were improved. Even today, citizens and government officials continue to look at ways to improve healthcare, advance education, and help people living in poverty.

**Second Great Awakening (1790s–1820s)**

The Second Great Awakening marked a time of significant religious revival in the United States. One driving ideal of the movement was that individuals and society as a whole could be transformed by following a moral code based on providing for the common good. As a result, many citizens established volunteer organizations intended to improve American society. A quotation from Lorenzo Dow gives insight into one preacher's views on equality during the Second Great Awakening. Dow traveled and preached throughout the United States, as well as to Canada, the West Indies, and Europe, for more than 30 years. Dow became well known as an eccentric but committed missionary. Contemporary observers often remarked on his fiery speeches and dramatic performances.

**Abolitionism (1830–1850s)**

By 1804, all states north of Maryland had abolished slavery, but the slave system remained firmly rooted in the South. Abolitionists from across the country turned their attention to the remaining slave states and territories. Many abolitionists derived their moral objections to slavery from the religious ideals of the Second Great Awakening. Citizens, especially in northern states, began to organize antislavery groups. These efforts threatened the plantation agriculture on which southern states depended and increased tensions between the North and South. One northern abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, was a former slave who traveled around the nation and the world, sharing his experiences with and opinions of slavery. An excerpt from a speech given by Douglass in 1852 highlights the contradictions between the ideals celebrated on the Fourth of July and the realities of the slave system in existence at the time.

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**Issues Connector: Social Problems and Reforms****Progressivism (1890–1920)**

Urbanization and industrialization led to many new innovations and brought many people economic prosperity, but these two trends also resulted in and worsened a number of social problems, including corruption in government, economic disparity, child labor, urban slums, and poor working conditions. Progressives sought to correct these problems by pushing for reforms in industry, housing, government, and civil rights. Carrie Chapman Catt fought for women's suffrage for more than 30 years. In 1900, Catt was elected to lead the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and she refocused the organization's efforts toward fighting for a constitutional amendment to guarantee women's right to vote. In 1917, Catt addressed the United States Congress on the subject of women's suffrage. In an excerpt from that speech, she invokes the United States' historic commitment to democratic rule and citizens' rights to justify women's demands for the vote.

**Civil Rights (1950s–1960s)**

In 1877, Reconstruction in the South ended, and many of the economic and political gains made by African Americans began to be reversed. State and local governments began enacting laws that undermined and violated the rights guaranteed in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. In 1896, the United States Supreme Court sanctioned one such violation when it upheld segregation based on a doctrine of "separate but equal" in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Civil rights leaders worked for decades to overturn this decision. Their efforts culminated in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Issued on May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court's ruling stated that segregation in public schools violated the provision of equal protection guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. The *Brown* decision rejected the doctrine of "separate but equal" and led to the gradual desegregation of public schools. This victory also contributed to a surge of civil rights activity in the 1960s. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote the court's opinion on the case, explaining the inherent contradiction between segregation and constitutional freedoms.

**Healthcare Reform (1990s–2000s)**

When President Bill Clinton took office in 1993, he made the establishment of a national healthcare program providing health insurance coverage to all Americans one of his main objectives. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton helped spearhead this reform effort. The Clinton proposals encountered opposition from many groups, including insurance companies, small business owners, and Congressional opponents, and ultimately failed to win approval. Throughout the subsequent presidency of George W. Bush, Americans continued to debate the advantages and disadvantages of universal healthcare coverage. An excerpt from an article written by Hillary Rodham Clinton in 2004 and a statement made by President George W. Bush in 2006 provide contrasting opinions on how the healthcare system in the United States should work.

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"You may support your distinction and feed your pride, but in a religious point of view all men are on a level, and the good man feels it so. . . . The Lord hath declared his intention and purpose to exalt the humble whilst he will pull down high looks."  
 —Lorenzo Dow, "A Defense of Camp Meetings," 1814

"Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race. . . deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does. . . . Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. . . ."  
 —Chief Justice Earl Warren, opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954

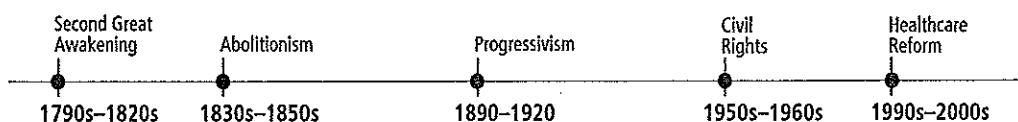
"The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine."  
 —Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," 1852

**Social Problems and Reforms**

"[W]e could decide to develop a new social contract for a new century premised on joint responsibility to prevent disease and provide those who need care access to it. [J]oint responsibility demands accountability from patients, employers, payers and society as a whole."  
 —Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Now Can We Talk About Health Care?", *New York Times Magazine*

"Behold our Uncle Sam. . . welcoming the boys of twenty-one and the newly made immigrant citizen to 'a voice in their own government' while he denies that fundamental right of democracy to thousands of women . . ."  
 —Carrie Chapman Catt, "An Address to the Congress of the United States," 1917

"I believe competition works. And I believe government ought to trust people to make the right decision for [themselves] and their families. . . . People are plenty smart when it comes to their own lives and making decisions about health care needs."  
 —President George W. Bush, during a panel discussion in April 2006



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*Directions: Read the excerpts regarding social problems and reforms, and complete the chart below. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Primary Source	Social Problem	Social Reform Wanted
Lorenzo Dow		
Frederick Douglass		
Carrie Chapman Catt		
Chief Justice Earl Warren		
Hillary Rodham Clinton		
George W. Bush		

1. How do Dow’s religious beliefs suggest the need for social reform?
2. How are the statements made by Douglass and Catt similar in the way that they criticize the social problems that they hope to correct?
3. How does Chief Justice Warren explain the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn segregation and reform public education?
4. Explain the different ways in which Clinton and Bush think that society should address the problem of healthcare.
5. **Link Past and Present** What social inequalities exist in the United States today, and how do you think they should be addressed?