

# Introduction

## The Advent of Progressivism

The progressive era—circa 1900 to 1920—was a time of ferment and change in New York (and the rest of the nation). *Progressives* and *progressive reformers*, as the terms are used in this book, mean people and groups that were dissatisfied with, and determined to improve, the status quo.

The term is meant to be broad, encompassing a wide range of people. Progressives came from all sectors of society. They included poor people, middle class, and the wealthy. Some inherited wealth and social status, but more were self-made people who excelled on their own. Some worked as individuals, but many united with other like-minded people in groups or organizations. The progressives in this book included, but went far beyond, the members or candidates of the short-lived political Progressive Party of 1912. Some were politicians, but the majority were social reformers, advocates, journalists, academics, novelists, ministers, inventors, champions of various causes, or ordinary citizens moved to take some action.

They are also much different from “progressives” today, who favor dramatic expansion of government programs and government intervention in the economy and society. The progressives in this book were less interventionist, more tentative and experimental in their approaches, more modest in their expectations. The progressive reform impulse was felt by individuals, groups, and both of New York’s mainline political parties.

The progressive era was a time for public reckoning with social and economic issues that had accumulated and intensified in the late nineteenth century. New York (and the nation) expanded in population, cities grew to overshadow rural areas, and complex industries rose to domi-

nate the economy. Americans felt buffeted by the social and economic disruptions caused by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. These developments produced a sense of “dislocation and bewilderment.” Many people were apprehensive, swept along by large, impersonal forces beyond their control. They were living in a “distended society.” They were searching for patterns, order, ways to make sense out of and assert some measure of control over the changes swirling around them.<sup>1</sup>

Progressives stepped forward to lead that “search for order.” They realized there was no turning back to simpler, less complex times. Progressives repudiated the self-centered, hyper-individualist, laissez-faire doctrine of the Gilded Age, a period of flashy materialism and corrupt politics in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

Instead, they insisted, people needed to move forward. The progressives experienced, and urged others to undertake, a sort of moral awakening and enlightenment that sharpened their motivation to work for the betterment of society. They exhorted their fellow citizens to support reform. Progressives liked American capitalism, representative government, and constitutional law. But they wanted to rein in the excesses of these institutions and make them more responsive to the public interest. They mostly rejected radical solutions, including socialism and anarchism. They sought more moderate political reform and government intervention in social and economic affairs on behalf of the powerless and underempowered, such as children, women, factory workers, and the poor and disadvantaged.

The progressives shifted public thinking away from old values such as “frugality, promptness, foresight, [and] efficiency” and espoused new values such as “continuity and regularity, functionality and rationality, administration and management” in order to manage twentieth-century problems. This, in turn, meant “the need for a government of continuous involvement” with an accent on executive power and administrative applications. “Throughout the pattern ran the central theme of modern reform: functional specialization, continuity, adjustment. And behind it rested the assumptions of a bureaucratic order: a society of ceaselessly interacting voluntary groups assisted in their course by a powerful, responsive government.”<sup>2</sup>

Progressives wanted change but were determined to work within the system rather than radically change or overthrow it. They were persistent but seldom confrontational. They were steady, pragmatic gradualists. Inclined to compromise when necessary, progressives sometimes

were content to try things out on a small scale or in prototype before pushing for expansion. “Progressives managed to fashion slow and steady reforms as an alternative to calls for revolution. Progressive reformers quickly learned that in order to succeed they would have to compromise—to find a way to put personal property rights, personal liberty, and economic growth on more equal footing with communitarian ideals and the protection of the weak and vulnerable, and to work within existing systems to bring change.”<sup>3</sup> They were clearly distinct from socialists, who favored more social programs, and fearful of anarchists, who wanted to overthrow the existing order and begin afresh.

They often appealed to New York and US history for incentives and justification. In their interpretation, that history demonstrated the constant need for change and adjustment in order to keep institutions fresh and relevant. Progressives saw themselves as being part of that tradition. In that sense, they sometimes explained, history was on their side.

President (and former New York governor) Theodore Roosevelt, in a 1906 speech, commended the progressive spirit. “In so far as this movement of agitation throughout the country takes the form of a fierce discontent with evil, of a firm determination to punish the authors of evil, whether in industry or politics, the feeling is to be heartily welcomed as a sign of healthy life.”<sup>4</sup>

### The Progressive Wave in New York

New York, the nation’s largest, most diverse, and most vibrant state, was at the forefront of the new progressive wave. According to census counts, its population rose from 7,268,012 in 1900 to 10,385,227 in 1920. Within the state, New York City rose from 3,437,202 to 5,620,048 two decades later. Much of the growth was due to immigration. Approximately 35 percent of the city’s population in 1920 was foreign-born. Other cities grew at a rapid pace in this twenty-year time period. Buffalo jumped from 353,387 to 573,076; Rochester from 162,608 to 290,720. At the same time, the ethnic composition of the cities shifted and diversified with the arrival of more immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and more Blacks migrating from the south. Steelmaking, railroads, and newer industries like photography and electric machinery kept the economy growing. Growth was powered by large commercial banks. The New York Stock Exchange, established in 1792, expanded and moved to a new building

with a huge trading floor in 1903. “Wall Street” became the most powerful banking conglomerate in the nation.

New York statesman Elihu Root described “the new conditions incident to the extraordinary industrial development” in a 1912 address.<sup>5</sup> Individuals were caught up in vast, complex enterprises, Root explained. “In place of the old individual independence of life, in which every intelligent and healthy citizen was competent to take care of himself and his family, we have come to a high degree of interdependence, in which the greater part of our people have to rely for all the necessities of life upon the systematized co-operation of a vast number of other men working through complicated industrial and commercial machinery.”

Conditions “are continuously and progressively demanding the readjustment of the relations between great bodies of men and the establishment of new legal rights and obligations not contemplated when existing laws were passed or existing limitations upon the powers of government were prescribed in our Constitution.”

People had been used to living on farms or working in small shops. But now they were employed by industrial companies—“great aggregations of capital in enormous industrial establishments working through vast agencies of commerce and employing great masses of men in movements of production and transportation and trade so great in the mass that each individual concerned in them is quite helpless by himself.”

This, in turn, necessitated the intervention of government with new powers to rebalance the rights of individuals with the power of the new organizations, Root concluded. “The relations between the employer and the employed, between owners of aggregated capital and the units of organized labor, between the small producer, the small trader, the consumer and the great transporting and manufacturing and distributing agencies, all present new questions for the solution of which the old reliance upon the free action of individual wills appears quite inadequate.”

New York’s rapid growth and diversity made it the state where many of the critical issues of the era first manifested themselves and, therefore, the first state to deal with them. Other states watched New York and followed its lead. That makes New York’s story all the more important, because New York was in a sense a prototype for what much of the nation would try out. New Yorkers also helped shape national policies. A New Yorker was nominated for president or vice president by one of the two major political parties in every election from 1900 to 1920. Two New Yorkers ran against each other for president in 1904. Former governor

Theodore Roosevelt applied some of the emerging progressive policies he had developed as governor to the national government during his presidency (1901–1909).

But New York's progressive story was inconsistent, discursive rather than linear, and sometimes contradictory. Even the concept of progressivism in New York was "a fuzzy term" that "eschewed commitment to a specific political line, in favor of situating its users on the cutting edge of history." New Yorkers who labeled themselves "progressive" "distanced themselves from dogmatism; there were no hard-and-fast theoretical or programmatic positions to defend or proclaim; the label conveyed open-mindedness and an up-to-dateness." They agreed, though, on some things. "The bulk of the reformers shared an antipathy for the competitive economy and its enabler ideology, laissez-faire government. They agreed that the free-for-all, socially heedless marketplace in goods and labor must be regulated, and the state brought in to mitigate the myriad social problems spawned by the chaotic economic order."<sup>6</sup>

Charles Evans Hughes, New York's great progressive Republican governor, in his 1907 inaugural address, endorsed forward-looking legislative action and "sympathy with every aspiration for the betterment of conditions and a sincere and patient effort to understand every need and to ascertain in the hard light of experience the means best adapted to meet it."<sup>7</sup>

Early in the progressive era, some reformers tried to apply intensified and expanded versions of strategies that they had used in the closing years of the old century. But these strategies often proved not up to the task of wrestling with the issues of the day. For instance, the New York Consumers' League, founded in 1891, focused mostly on publicity about the need for good working conditions, and they certified garment factories that provided these conditions. Such establishments were eligible for a special label that they could sew into their clothing. That helped, but the league soon turned to lobbying for government action. Leaders of the Charities Aid Association, which encouraged and coordinated voluntary contributions and assistance for the poor, began pushing for government programs. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union pushed for voluntary abstinence from alcohol but, when that effort flagged, switched to an emphasis on government prohibition. It was soon joined by powerful lobbying and politically influential organizations such as the Anti-Saloon League.

New York became a leader in government labor reform, business regulation, and social welfare programs. It was the first state to establish

a comprehensive labor department (1901), health department (1901) and modern public health system that it coordinated, education department (1904), and public utilities' regulation office (1907). It enacted a model tenement house law (1901). New York was the first to outlaw night work by women in factories (1899; reenacted 1903), proscribe child labor (1903), enact workers' compensation (1910), pass a comprehensive workplace safety and fire code (1912–1914), and regulate carrying of concealed weapons (1911). New York enacted civil rights laws in 1895 and 1913. It began offering college scholarships to qualified students in 1913. This was the state where the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) were established, in 1909 and 1920 respectively.

On the other hand, along with these advancements, progressives sometimes had their own agendas, which sometimes seemed class-specific, narrow, indifferent to the needs of some groups, or even racist. Sometimes they brought and imposed middle-class values and perspectives on problems affecting less-well-off New Yorkers without fully understanding their needs and goals. There was de facto racial segregation in New York's large cities, and people of color generally were disadvantaged in seeking jobs and forging careers. Political power and, therefore, state and municipal services were inequitably distributed. New York had a civil rights law, as noted above, but it pertained only to public accommodations (such as hotels) and was lightly enforced. New York progressives by and large did not seem much concerned with these inequities, though they did take play leading roles in establishing the NAACP in New York City in 1909 and the Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (soon renamed the National Urban League) in 1910.

Attitudes toward working women could seem condescending, vacillating between pushing for hovering government protection and assertions that women workers should be left on their own. They passed laws to restrict women's working hours without consulting working women themselves. New York City was a haven for Jews fleeing persecution in Europe, but antisemitism lurked just beneath the surface in the state. It was manifested in discrimination against Jews in higher education, public accommodations, and jobs. A few progressives condoned or even supported the notion of white race supremacy, a particularly insidious theme in New York and US history in the early twentieth century. Some of the most enlightened progressive reformers came to favor limiting immigration, favoring northern and eastern Europe over other areas, and generally being exclusionary rather than welcoming and inclusive. Some progressives endorsed excessive

ensorship and anti-vice initiatives. Many progressives supported prohibition to curb excessive drinking, ignoring predictions, which proved accurate, that people would resent and resist this curtailment of their liberties.

New York progressives made slow headway against some of these inequities and inconsistencies, but they ignored or minimized others. They had flaws and shortcomings. Yet, viewed in they context of their times, they were well-meaning, generous, and mostly enlightened and forward-looking.

By the end of the period, circa 1920, the progressive movement was losing momentum in New York. That was partly because it had achieved many of its goals of reform, partly because of the weariness produced by World War I, and partly because the public had become fatigued by exhortations to improve and change. In the 1920 election, New York voters turned out progressive Democratic governor Alfred E. Smith (elected in 1918) and selected instead conservative Republican Nathan Miller. The politicians who took charge in Albany halted political reform, yearning for a return to what Republican Warren Harding, elected president in 1920, called “normalcy.” They turned on socialists, “radicals,” and others who rocked the boat. New York more or less settled into a pattern of calm, complacency, and drift. Progressivism had run its course, though conservative Republicans kept most of what had been achieved over the past couple of decades. Progressivism would reemerge in a renewed and different form in the 1930s in President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “New Deal.” FDR had been a young New York progressive, first elected to the New York state senate in 1910. A number of other New York progressives went on to serve with Roosevelt in Washington.

## Themes in New York Progressivism

Several themes played out in the story of New York’s progressive history.

### THE POLITICAL PARTIES CHANGED COURSE

New York had two dominant parties, Republicans and Democrats. There was a socialist party that garnered little support, a progressive party that lasted only one year (1912), and occasionally other minor third parties of temporary duration. Republicans and Democrats, emerging from a late nineteenth-century tradition of domination by top political leaders, sometimes resisted and sometimes embraced progressive reform. They were moved by progressives’ ideas and proposals, media pressure, politi-

cal scandal, opportunism (taking stands to score electoral victories), and new leadership.

In 1900, Democrats ran New York City, but Republicans dominated most of the rest of New York State. In Albany, in part because of the way the state legislature was apportioned, Republicans predominated in state government. Both parties were conservative, wedded to the status quo, controlled by political “bosses,” and in league with business interests. Over the next couple of decades, both parties underwent transformations.

Republicans changed course in 1906. Press exposure and legislative investigations of mismanagement and exploitation by gas and insurance companies in 1905 had exposed their close ties to the Republicans. Reluctantly, they nominated reformer Charles Evans Hughes, who had served as counsel to the investigations, for governor in 1906. He won and pushed the legislature to enact a broad progressive agenda. The results were mixed: they expanded regulation of insurance companies and passed laws to regulate railroads and other public utilities but balked at enacting a meaningful direct primary law and other political reforms. In 1910, Hughes left to take a Supreme Court appointment, and a bribery scandal discredited top Republican legislative leaders. Democrats elected a governor and legislative majority that fall.

The Democrats, heeding the call of progressive reformers and reacting to the changing needs of their largely urban base, swung toward reform in 1911. Over the next few years, they enacted a broad progressive agenda, including the direct primary and labor regulations. But in 1913, the Democrats impeached and removed from office their own governor, William Sulzer, for misuse of campaign funds. Disillusioned voters elected a Republican governor and legislative majority in 1914. That party turned conservative and obstructionist. Progressive legislation halted. The Democrats made a partial comeback in 1918, electing Alfred E. Smith governor, but in turn he was defeated in 1920.

#### WOMEN OFTEN TOOK THE LEAD

Men were usually the public leaders, and got most of the credit, for progressive reforms. The governors, state legislators, and judges were all men. So also were the business leaders and most of the ministers and leaders of volunteer and civic organizations. Women could not even vote in New York until 1917.

But women led many of New York’s most important progressive reforms, sometimes out front, more often behind-the-scenes. The lead-



ers were mostly middle class and college-educated. When faced with the deplorable economic and social conditions of cities, they were galvanized into action. They were articulate and prolific speakers, writers, and organizers. They spent much of their time getting media attention to conditions they sought to remedy and converting men to the cause. They were persistent and adept at moving public opinion.

A cadre of leaders including Susan B. Anthony, Harriot Stanton Blatch, Carrie Chapman Catt, Margaret Fuller, and Rosalie Gardner Jones led the campaign for women's suffrage and women's rights generally. Black women's rights champions such as Hester Jeffrey of Rochester and Mary Burnett Talbert of Buffalo were vital to the movement.

Florence Kelley, a leader with exceptional energy and brilliance, began her career in Chicago as a labor reformer and settlement house supporter and moved to New York City in 1899. There she became the director of the Consumers' League, which pushed for shorter hours, better pay, and better working conditions for workers. She led the campaign to outlaw child labor in New York and nationally and pushed for protection of women factory workers. She was one of the founders of the NAACP and a long-time civil rights advocate. Kelley served as mentor to several other women leaders and built a network of activists and advocates for labor and other reform legislation.

Lillian Wald founded a pioneering settlement house in New York City and was an innovator in providing community health care. She was the founder of what is now the Visiting Nurse Service of New York State. Like many of her colleagues, she was also a supporter of other causes, including women's suffrage and banning child labor.

Crystal Eastman investigated working conditions, documented the impact of industrial accidents, raised public awareness about the needs of injured workers, and helped lead the development of New York's pioneering workers compensation law. She also campaigned for women's rights, served as a journalist and editor, campaigned against militarism, and joined the socialist cause.

#### PEOPLE IN NEW YORK CITY'S PROGRESSIVE COMMUNITY REINFORCED EACH OTHER

Most of New York's progressive activists were in New York City. They created an array of leagues, committees, and commissions to tackle particular issues. "Analysts researched them, discovered their causes, designed solutions, wrote reports. Then they mobilized public support, lobbying for

legislation, bringing court cases, and waging political battles to win the backing of municipal or state governments. Many were single-issue entities, focused on specific efforts—to curtail child labor, regulate women’s work, establish social insurance, alleviate poverty, reorganize public and private health care, or restructure the city’s school system.”<sup>8</sup> Their network was facilitated by physical proximity. They could easily meet each other in person and cooperated with each other. Some began as single-issue reformers but branched out into other areas through their association with people they met in the reform community. “They developed interlocking, overlapping memberships. They jointly held conferences, created journals, developed funding institutions. Collectively they created one of the nation’s most advanced social policy complexes.”<sup>9</sup> This “advanced social policy complex” directly or indirectly generated many of the ideas that found their way into reform initiatives and legislation. It also led to many national initiatives, most notably those reforms that took root in New York but later spread to other states and Washington.

#### MANY REFORMS STARTED IN NEW YORK CITY AND SPREAD TO THE REST OF THE STATE (AND SOMETIMES TO THE REST OF THE NATION)

Members of New York City’s progressive community often were the initiators of reform initiatives and proposals. Their ideas took root there but soon spread to the rest of New York State, particularly the larger cities, which faced urban problems and issues like New York City’s, though on a much smaller and less intense scale. Several key proposals which had emanated from the New York City progressives were enacted into state law in Albany.

#### REFORMERS INNOVATED AND IMPROVISED

In part because New York was the first to enter the arena of change-driven reform, many progressive initiatives, precedents, and models from the federal government and other states were unavailable. The New Yorkers articulated new concepts of government’s responsibility and authority and invented new types of agencies to deliver public policy.

For instance, the federal government had a limited workers’ compensation law, but New York was the first state to pass one, in 1910, and

it was more comprehensive than the federal program. New York's law was invalidated by the courts in 1911, but by the time it was repassed in 1913 (after a state constitutional amendment to sanction it), several other states had used New York's 1910 law as a partial model for their own new compensation laws. New York's Public Service Commissions law (1907) bestowed much more extensive public utility regulatory authority than any other state or the federal government (even the Interstate Commerce Commission had more limited authority).

### NEWS MEDIA, "MUCKRAKERS" AND ANALYTICAL REPORTS PAVED THE WAY

Much of the change in New York was propelled by heightened public discussion of issues and demands for change. Some of this was due to exposés in the New York newspapers and periodicals (mostly published in New York City). These reform-minded journalists and writers were sometimes called "muckrakers," a pejorative term coined by President Theodore Roosevelt in the 1906 speech referenced above. T.R. emphasized the benefits of investigative reporting but thought some writers went too far, always looking downward toward "the muck" of scandal. The term stuck and came to refer to progressive-era exposés generally.

For instance, newspaper stories about unsanitary working conditions and contaminated baked goods in bakeries led to New York's first progressive regulation, an 1895 law governing bakers' working hours and conditions. The *New York Times*, *New York World*, *New York Journal-American*, and other papers pioneered in investigative journalism and competed to expose business wrongdoing and political corruption. The New York child labor committee sent the press its reports on exploitation of children in factories; the newspapers carried them in front-page stories. Newspaper reports on mismanagement and corruption in gas and insurance companies headquartered in New York City brought legislative investigations that resulted in breakthrough new regulations. News reports on bribery in the legislature in 1910 led to the defeat of the Republican ticket in the fall elections.

Popular magazines and journals such as *McClure's*, *The American Magazine*, *Colliers*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Everybody's*, *Leslie's*, and *Outlook*—almost all published in New York City—disclosed corrupt linkages among business, labor, and government and aroused a public demand for change.

Longer reports were another important catalyst for legislation. Several were compiled by the legislature, state agencies, or commissions appointed by the governor. The state printing budget was generous, and copies of long state reports went to individual legislators (where their findings and recommendations helped shape new legislation) and to newspapers (which distilled them into laypersons' terms).

For example, commissions set up by Governor Theodore Roosevelt (1899–1901) produced reports that led to regulation of tenement houses (1901), a new cross-state canal (1903), and a state education department (1904). Legislative investigations and reports on the gas and insurance industries in 1905 precipitated new regulatory measures in 1906. Governor Charles Evans Hughes persuaded the legislature to appoint a committee to investigate factory accidents in 1909, and the committee's report was the basis for New York's first workers' compensation law in 1910. Reports and recommendations of a legislative factory investigating commission produced sweeping new factory safety and sanitation regulations between 1912 and 1914. New York's forward-looking public health program emerged from the report of a 1913 gubernatorial commission.

#### STATE GOVERNMENT MOVED FROM THE MARGINS TO CENTER STAGE

Progressive reformers continued voluntary organizations and encouraged philanthropic programs to deal with social issues. But, as noted above, one of their new departures was to call on government (particularly state government) to step in to regulate businesses, impose limits on people's freedoms in the name of the common good, and intervene to help the disadvantaged. Government rules for social and economic affairs are common today, but in the 1900–1920 period they were something new and untried. New York vastly increased business regulation. It enacted detailed building and sanitary codes and safety requirements for factories. It banned child labor and regulated women's working hours. A 1911 law banned unlicensed carrying of concealed weapons. A 1917 act created New York's first state police. Other laws enabled local governments to license and regulate peddlers, barbers, and contractors.

Yet the story of progress was mixed. State government, a modest affair in 1900, had grown into a sprawling maze by 1920. The legislature created new departments and agencies that partially overlapped with

existing ones. A panel appointed by Governor Alfred E. Smith in 1919 found there were 189 departments and commissions. Some of the department heads were elected. Others were appointed by governors, but senate approval was required both to appoint and remove them. The appointees' terms did not correspond with governors' terms, leaving governors with commissioners whom they had not appointed and could not replace. There was no budget system. Agencies got their appropriations directly from the legislature and so lobbied key legislators and in turn were beholden to them. The agencies issued reports but to the legislature, not the governor (though of course he read them, and they were available to the public). Strong governors asserted a measure of consistency and control over this maze, but consolidation of scattered agencies into a manageable number of cabinet-level departments reporting to the governor and a unified state budget proposed by Governor Smith had to wait until the 1920s.

#### NEW YORK COURTS GENERALLY BACKED THE PROGRESSIVES

In some states, progressives were deterred or thwarted by their state's conservative courts, which struck down progressive regulations as unconstitutional. The US Supreme Court was also very conservative. These courts often ruled that the reference to the right of "due process of law" in the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution meant government regulations could not curtail individuals' or businesses' rights to do what they wished.

But New York's highest court, the Court of Appeals, took a much more liberal view. In those days, most constitutional law cases were settled in state rather than federal courts, and appeals to the Supreme Court were rare, so the state's highest court's rulings were definitive.

The Court of Appeals generally ruled that the courts should support the legislature unless an enactment was clearly in violation of the New York state or federal constitutions. In contrast to the Supreme Court, it held that the Fourteenth Amendment, passed in 1868, was intended to protect the rights of formerly enslaved Blacks in the south, not businesses.

For instance, in 1904 the court validated the 1895 bakeshop law, referenced above. "The courts are frequently confronted with the temptation to substitute their judgment for that of the legislature," but whether the legislation is wise "is not for us to consider," said the court. Judges "are bound to assume that the law making body acted with a desire to promote

the public good” and should be “inclined to so construe the statute as to validate it.”<sup>10</sup> The Supreme Court reversed that decision the next year, but the New York’s Court of Appeals kept to its principles in deciding cases.

In another 1904 decision, involving New York’s authority to require smallpox vaccinations in the schools, the court ruled that “when the sole object and general tendency of the legislation is to promote the public health, there is no invasion of the Constitution even if the enforcement of the law interferes to some extent with liberty or property.” The vaccination requirement was valid.<sup>11</sup> That, in turn, encouraged other public health initiatives.

In 1907, the court struck down a law forbidding night work by women in factories. But the legislature soon passed a different version of the law, basing it on protection of women’s health. When that law was appealed in the courts in 1915, women’s rights advocates presented extensive evidence that night work was harmful to women. This time, the court validated the law. The legislature had concluded that night work was injurious and therefore “the interest of public health and welfare” justified the law said the decision.<sup>12</sup>

### Reckoning with New York’s Progressive Era

A century and more after the close of the progressive era, how should we assess the degree of success and impact of the changes and reforms brought about by New York’s progressive community?

We need to understand and evaluate the people and ideas from that era mostly by the standards of their time and avoid imposing our own values a century after their work. The people in this book were essentially late nineteenth-century people evolving and trying to invent new ways for the new twentieth century. The documents in the book reveal an earnest questioning of the old and a quest for new ways of looking at and doing things. The New York progressives believed they were in the vanguard of changes that would improve the common good. They made government the central engine of change in an unprecedented way that evolved later into the New Deal and some of the comprehensive programs of modern-day government. They brought a new mindset to issues. They endorsed the notion of trying new things; if they worked, they would try to keep and even expand them, but if not, they would modify or

abandon them. The progressives in this book were incrementalists, but persistent ones.

They had their limitations and flaws, like leaders of change everywhere. They seemingly made little headway against such historic dilemmas as race and income inequality. But more than a century later, New York (and the nation) have still not resolved them.

But the progressives did accomplish a great deal, as the documents in this book make clear. Moreover, they provided new ways of framing issues and crystallized options in ways that are still helpful today. The theoretical approaches and hands-on solutions they proposed were useful policy frameworks. The New York progressives developed insights and strategies that continue to influence and civic-minded people today. The documents in the book provide an opportunity for them to speak to us in their own words.

### Plan of the Book

The book presents a profile of progressive New York in ten chapters. The topics are distinct, but they also overlap.

Chapter 1, *Gauging the Tenor of the Times*, conveys some of the vibrance, excitement, and sense of change in the period.

Chapter 2, *Building Grand Enterprises*, shows New Yorkers at their most dynamic, building grand things on a large scale.

Chapter 3, *Reforming Politics and Government*, documents the campaign to make politicians and government more responsive to the public interest.

Chapter 4, *Improving People's Lives*, provides examples of the progressive era's mission to make things better for people.

Chapter 5, *Strengthening Women's Status*, presents documents on women's struggle for equality.

Chapter 6, *Welcoming Newcomers*, goes into the issues of immigration and cultural pluralism.

Chapter 7, *Reckoning with Race*, includes documents of the experience of Black people in New York.

Chapter 8, *Regulating Business*, shows efforts to expand state oversight of its industries.

Chapter 9, *Helping Workers*, describes efforts to improve working conditions and safety.

Chapter 10, *Appealing to History*, includes example of how progressives' interpretations of history enhanced their reform message.

There is a vast amount of documentation from New York's progressive era. This book is, necessarily, very selective. The documents in the book are all contemporary—that is, they were written at the time and so constitute a first-hand account of what was happening. They were selected by considering a number of criteria:

- The document was prepared by a person or group that was clearly in touch with the intellectual, social, and political currents of the time. It is representative or indicative of what many people seemed to be thinking or saying at the time.
- It was recognized at the time for its clarity, coherence, informational value, insights, and persuasiveness. It has an analysis of events and also suggestions for how critical issues were being or might be addressed.
- People read and heeded it as evidenced by references to it in the news media and other documents and by the actions people took based on the document.
- It provides evidence of New York's complexity, diversity, and historical distinctiveness.
- It describes an issue of importance in New York that later affected the rest of the country, making New York a pioneer in addressing it.

For each chapter, I have begun with a short introduction to the topic. For each of the documents, I have included a short introduction in *italics*.

I have tried to include the most meaningful parts of each document. I have indicated omissions by using ellipses (. . .). In a few cases, I have broken long paragraphs into shorter ones for easier reading, or consolidated short ones into longer ones.



At the end of each chapter, there is a list of sources, including a full citation and URL where the full document I used can be found. This is helpful for anyone wanting to read more from the document. Most of the references are to HathiTrust (<https://www.hathitrust.org>). But I suggest beginning any search with the Online Books Page (<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/lists.html>), which often has links not only to HathiTrust but also to other online versions of the documents. You can also use it to search for any author, title, or subject.

The readings in the bibliography provide additional sources.

The documents are quoted directly from the originals and reflect the vocabulary and societal and cultural sentiments and expressions of the time period. Some of the terms may seem outdated, insensitive, or even insulting today. The writers sometimes include terms such as *Negro* and *colored*, which were commonly used in those days to refer to Black Americans. Their references to minorities can sometimes seem condescending or uncaring. Discussions of racial issues may seem to us a century later to be, unintentionally, racist themselves. Some of the writings on the Jewish immigration experience in New York in the era sound almost anti-Semitic today. The ways the writers used terms and the ways they expressed themselves can indicate both the extent of their beneficial ambitions and the limits of their vision and interests.

But a book of documents like this one is designed to meet the writers where they were, in their own time, and let them express viewpoints and sentiments in their own words. This approach, hopefully, imparts a sense of directness, connection, and authenticity. It is designed to convey people's insights without being overly judgmental.

## Notes

1. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), 11–43.
2. Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 164–95.
3. Robert D. Putnam, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 336.
4. Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 176.
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