**Progressive Women and Issues**

In this folder are profiles of specific women active in Progressive reform. Read the profiles to learn about Progressive reform through these women.

Note that many of these women advocated reforms before they enjoyed the right to vote. The Nineteenth Amendment was not ratified until 1920 and at last gave women voting rights. Women in the West won the right to vote decades before women elsewhere in the country, beginning with the Wyoming Territory in 1869. Pacific Northwest women succeeded in gaining the franchise in 1896 in Idaho, 1910 in Washington, and 1912 in Oregon. Women’s political influence led to the passage of woman suffrage in each state, but they enjoyed political power before they could vote.

To understand the role of women in Progressive reform, you need to revise your definition of politics. Electoral politics includes the right to vote, to hold office, and to legislate, but cultural politics expands the political sphere to encompass the power to define a culture’s dominant beliefs and values. In the Progressive Era, women redefined the scope of government.

Victorian America entrusted to women the domestic sphere. Considered as protectors of the home, women were to care for their children and leave politics and economics to men. You remember how the Supreme Court referred to this definition of women's roles in the *Bradwell v. Illinois* (1873) case when Justice Bradley wrote: "The paramount destiny and mission of women are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother."

This image conflicted with reality for many women. By 1890, 19 percent of women over sixteen years old were in the labor force. With the influx of immigrants after the 1890s, young, single immigrant women flooded the factories, especially in the garment
industry. These women worked long hours for low pay in
dangerous conditions. On the frontier, women made important
economic contributions to the family.

For **middle-class women**, the confines of the home became
increasingly restrictive in late-nineteenth-century America.
Industrialization introduced the need for more white-collar jobs as
well as blue-collar ones. A separate stratum of middle-class
managers who worked in offices emerged. These new middle-
class families had fewer children and those children went to
school. The home became an empty place. At the same time,
women’s educational opportunities increased. More and more
middle class women went to high school and college. They
sought outlets for their intellectual energies. Many **women’s clubs**
began in the late nineteenth century as study clubs where
women read and gave presentations on topics.

**Women gradually redefined the home to be the community.**
Clubwomen worked tirelessly for community improvements such
as libraries, parks, playgrounds, and preservation of scenic areas.
They also sponsored **settlement houses**, homeless shelters,
safe homes for working women, and orphanages. By World War I,
women’s clubs around the country boasted of at least a million
members.

Increasingly clubwomen campaigned for governmental reform of
**social injustice**. They championed **protective labor legislation**
for women and children, **minimum wage and maximum hours
laws**, and **consumer protection legislation** such as pure food
and drug laws. In Portland, Oregon, women formed a Consumers’
League in 1903 as a branch of the **National Consumers’
League**. A Hull-House resident (see "Jane Addams" profile),
**Florence Kelley founded the National Consumers’ League**, the single most effective lobbying agency for protective labor
legislation for women and children. The Portland Consumers’
League united with women’s clubs and found sympathetic legislators who passed legislation in 1903 limiting work for women to ten-hour days and sixty-hour weeks.

The Oregon maximum-hours law for women was challenged in the famous Supreme Court case of Muller v. Oregon (1908) when Curt Muller, who owned a Portland laundry, claimed that the law was unconstitutional because the state lacked the authority to intervene in the workplace in this manner. The Supreme Court upheld the law based largely on the data presented in reports prepared by women of the National Consumers’ League. Florence Kelley summarized her reform strategy as "investigate, educate, legislate, and enforce." The Supreme Court decision vindicated Kelley’s strategy. Through the efforts of clubwomen, the Oregon law became a paradigm for using social and economic conditions to inspire reform legislation.

In Washington in the early 1900s, women’s clubs united with the Washington Federation of Labor and the Grange to establish a minimum wage for women, a child labor law, an initiative law, and an eight-hour day for employees on publicly funded projects. Women served on state commissions monitoring enforcement of the labor laws. Women’s clubs also conducted their own studies of effectiveness of the laws.

**Women’s clubs played an important national role in pioneering labor legislation.** By creatively redefining their role as protectors of the home to include the community, clubwomen across the country formed the core of the Progressive movement. Although Progressives engaged in many types of reforms, the centerpiece of each was the belief that the government must abandon its *laissez-faire* policies and assume a more activist posture. Women led the way in directing that activism toward social welfare. They began the redefinition of American politics to include government as protector of its citizens. Later, in
the **New Deal** of the 1930s, this view of the government triumphed.

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**Racial Justice - Ida B. Wells-Barnett**

Ida B. Wells was born a slave in 1862. After the Civil War, her father was active in the Mississippi Republican Party during Reconstruction. Miss Wells became a school teacher in Tennessee. Her activism began when in 1884 she boarded a train to a teaching assignment and was asked to leave her seat and move to a segregated car. Wells refused and was physically ejected from the railway car. She sued the railroad, and though
she was awarded $500 by a lower court, the Tennessee Supreme Court reversed the decision in 1887. In the same year, she launched her career in journalism, writing of her experiences in an African-American weekly called The Living Way. In 1892, she became the co-owner of a small black newspaper in Memphis, the Free Speech.

That same year three young black businessmen were lynched in a Memphis suburb. Wells devoted the rest of her life to exposing the prevalence of the heinous crime of lynching, most of whose victims were African American. Wells rejected the arguments that lynchings followed the rape of white women by black men and instead presented evidence that economic competition between whites and blacks motivated the lynchings. Wells was driven out of Memphis by throngs of whites who then destroyed her newspaper office.

Wells eventually settled in Chicago where she married Frederick Barnett, a newspaperman. Wells-Barnett wrote studies of lynching, compiling statistics unavailable elsewhere, and campaigned until she died in 1931 for national anti-lynching legislation. Statistics on lynching, as you may imagine, were difficult indeed dangerous to compile. The largest number of lynchings occurred in 1892. Of the 230 persons lynched that year, 161 were blacks and 69 whites. Why was national anti-lynching legislation necessary? Think about what you know about the South after the Civil War. Would white southerners be likely to prosecute other whites for the murder of a black man? Think about the potent symbol of the noose today.

Ida Wells-Barnett was also a national leader in creating black women's clubs, in the woman suffrage movement, and in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She received many honors including a Black Heritage
postage stamp in 1990.

The Website for the PBS Series The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow offers a profile of Ida Wells-Barnett and a short video segment you can watch:

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_people_wells.html

Social Justice and Urban Life - Jane Addams
Like many women of the Progressive Era, Jane Addams supported woman suffrage and other reforms, but you know her from Chapter 17 and Hull-House, the settlement house she founded. Jane Addams was also a noted peace activist and in 1931 received the Nobel Peace Prize. As you read about Addams, think about whether issues she championed continue today.

Jane Addams crusading for two of her causes - woman suffrage and peace. Addams is on the right.
Born in 1860, Jane Addams dedicated her life to helping others. College educated but with few opportunities open to women, Addams and college friend Ellen Starr moved into an old mansion in an immigrant neighborhood in Chicago in 1889. Attracting other activists such as Florence Kelley, Hull-House became a community center that hosted 2,000 people every week in kindergarten classes in the morning, club meetings for older children in the afternoon, and for adults in the evening more clubs or courses in what became virtually a night school. Addams was what we would call today a "social worker."

Addams quickly learned that the needs of the neighborhood required reform of state and city laws. She and other Hull-House residents advocated legislation to abolish child labor, establish juvenile courts (instead of sending juveniles to adult courts and
prisons), limit the working hours of women, recognize labor unions, make school attendance compulsory, and ensure safe working conditions in factories. The 1912 Progressive Party adopted many of these reforms as part of its platform and Addams seconded the Party's nomination of Theodore Roosevelt for president.

Throughout her life, Addams argued that society should both respect the values and traditions of immigrants and help the newcomers adjust to American institutions. Addams believed that urban life and industrial capitalism demanded a new social ethic.

During World War I, Addams devoted herself to peace and opposed American entry into the war. Though vilified for that stance, Addams never wavered in her belief in peaceful negotiation and in 1931 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She died in 1935.

You can visit the Hull-House Museum's Website: http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/

Protecting Workers - Dr. Alice Hamilton
One of the occupations open to women in the late 19th century was medical doctor. Alice Hamilton, born in 1869, took advantage of that opportunity. She received her medical degree in 1893 and after internships in other cities journeyed to Chicago and moved into Jane Addams's Hull-House. There she established medical education classes and a well-baby clinic.

In the typhoid fever epidemic in Chicago in 1902, she recognized the connection between improper sewage disposal and the role of flies in transmitting the disease and her findings led to reorganization of the Chicago Health Department. She then noted
that the health problems of many of the immigrant poor were due to unsafe conditions and noxious chemicals, especially lead dust, to which they were being exposed in the course of their employment. At the time there were no laws regulating safety at work and employers routinely fired sick workers and replaced them with new ones looking for jobs.

Dr. Hamilton became director of the Occupational Disease Commission when it was created by the governor of Illinois in 1910. It was the first such commission in the world. As a result of its findings, several worker's compensation laws were passed in Illinois. They introduced a new notion that workers were entitled to compensation for health impairment and injuries sustained on the job. Later for the US Commissioner of Labor, Dr. Hamilton looked at the hazards posed by exposure to lead, arsenic, mercury, organic solvents, as well as radium, which was used in manufacture of watch dials.

Her effort to protect industrial workers prompted one industrialist to write:

I don't know what your Company is feeling as of today about the work of Dr. Alice Hamilton on benzol [benzene] poisoning. I know that back in the old days some of your boys used to think that she was a plain nuisance and just picking on you for luck. But I have a hunch that as you have learned more about the subject, men like your good self have grown to realize the debt that society owes her for her crusade. I am pretty sure that she has saved the lives of a great many girls in can-making plants and I would hate to think that you didn't agree with me.

Harvard University Press, 1984.)

Dr. Hamilton became the first woman professor at Harvard Medical School in 1919 when she was hired as assistant professor of industrial medicine and was the first woman to receive the Lasker Award in public health.

Think about the conditions workers faced in the late 19th and early 20th century? Are conditions better today? Have you worked in a factory or shop where you had to wear special clothing or a mask? Do you assume that you will not be exposed to unsafe conditions in the workplace? If you want to read about workers and their families exposed to dangerous asbestos, research the W.R. Grace vermiculite mine and processing plant in Libby, Montana, and the plague of mesothelioma that has claimed hundreds in this small town.

**Workers' Rights - Rose Schneiderman and the Triangle Fire**

A Polish Jew born in 1882, Schneiderman came with her family to New York City's Lower East Side in 1890, the center of New York's garment industry. Her father's death two years later threw the family into desperate poverty and Rose and her siblings into child labor. By her early twenties, Schneiderman was a labor organizer among garment workers and an active participant in several strikes including the massive garment workers' strike in New York called the "Uprising of 20,000" in 1909.
Rose Schneiderman at work.

Schneiderman campaigned for worker safety measures particularly after the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. That fire in which 146 workers were killed was one of the worst industrial tragedies in American history. In this sweatshop that employed primarily women workers, employers routinely locked doors to keep employees from taking breaks and the building lacked fire escapes. Many jumped from the upper stories to escape the fire
but fell to their deaths.

The acquittal of factory owners in the workers' deaths enraged the public and resulted in a state commission to investigate and re-invigorated the efforts of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and members like Rose Schneiderman to secure basic rights for workers, especially women workers.

Schneiderman campaigned for the 8-hour day, safe working conditions, and women's right to vote as a basic economic not just political right.

Ever an advocate for working women, Schneiderman wrote in 1912:

What the woman who labors wants is to live, not simply exist--the right to life as the rich woman has it, the right to life, and the sun, and music, and art. You have nothing that the humblest worker has not a right to have also. The worker must have bread, but she must have roses too. (Rose Schneiderman in the WTUL magazine Life and Labor, August 1912)

"Bread and Roses" became a rallying slogan for workers. Rose Schneiderman continued her labor activism and served in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. During the New Deal of the 1930s, federal legislation for the first time guaranteed workers' right to organize and bargain collectively (unions), limited child labor, and set national minimum wage and maximum hour standards for workers in interstate commerce.

**Triangle Shirtwaist Fire**

Go to this Website, if you wish to learn more about the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire:
March 25, 2011 marked the centennial of the Triangle Fire. View the 6-minute video below to learn more about the fire and the reform effort that followed.

To view the video, please click here.

This video of just over 2 minutes and covers the 2011 commemoration of the fire that includes interviews with descendants of the women who were in the fire. It is from the Associated Press.

To view the video, please click here.

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