

The Changing Role of Government

Read the following documents for homework. Be prepared to explain how the Progressives viewed the proper role of government and how Theodore Roosevelt viewed his responsibilities as President.

Document A

In this country the solution of the social problem demands the substitution of a conscious ideal for the earlier instinctive homogeneity of the American nation. That homogeneity has disappeared never to return. We should not want it to return, because it was dependent upon too many sacrifices of individual purpose and achievement. . . . The social problem must, as long as societies continue to endure, be solved afresh by almost every generation; and the one chance of progress depends both upon an invincible loyalty to a constructive social ideal and upon a correct understanding by the new generation of the actual experience of its predecessors.¹

Document B

There was once a time in history when the limitation of governmental power meant increasing liberty for the people. In the present day the limitation of governmental power, of governmental action, means the enslavement of the people by the great corporations who can only be held in check through the extension of governmental power.²

—Theodore Roosevelt

Document C

The executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.

—United States Constitution, Article I, Section 1

Document D

As President, Roosevelt was certainly no paragon of reform. He could be brutally militaristic, evasive about trusts, compromising on social legislation, purblind to the merits of reformers who did not equate reform with Theodore Roosevelt. Yet the bouncing Teddy, with his bold grasp of the possibilities of change, his instinct for workable political combinations, his teeth-gnashing phrases, was the most tremendous thing that could have happened to American progressivism. Before a dazzled country, Roosevelt preached the progressive doctrine of executive leadership. The leadership, however much it wobbled, moved in the general direction of the use of federal powers to promote clean, efficient government, to check exploitation by large-scale capital, and to strengthen the bargaining position of lower-income groups.

Lashing out at "malefactors of great wealth," Roosevelt revived the Sherman Antitrust Law and employed it in a way that made trust magnates more careful even if the general concentration of industry was not appreciably slowed. By persistent conservation propaganda, he secured from Congress sweeping powers to remove public lands from the

¹Herbert Croly, *Promise of American Life* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1965), 33–35.

²David M. Kennedy, ed., *Progressivism: The Critical Issues* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), 51.

possibility of plundering operations, and used the powers to withdraw a huge number of acres. With Presidential cooperation, often with Presidential goading, Congress forbade railroad rebates, strengthened the Interstate Commerce Commission, passed a meat-inspection act and a pure food and drug law, and brought the federal government into the workmen's compensation field for the first time. When intransigent owners produced a national coal strike, the country witnessed an unprecedented scene. Cracking down on the operators and forcing them to arbitrate, Roosevelt pulled the federal government far from its accustomed business-is-always-right attitude.

A whole new attitude permeated the White House.³

³Eric F. Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977), 126–127.