

# REFORM MOVEMENTS IN 1900'S TEXAS

**FOCUS QUESTION:** How did this reform movement impact Texas in the early 1900's?

## Farmers and Reform

Many Texas farmers faced serious hardships in the late 1800s as the supply of crops outpaced the demand. Farmers also faced foreign competition, high interest rates, and droughts. In the late 1860s farmers established the Patrons of Husbandry—commonly called the Grange. The Grange formed cooperative stores. These were businesses owned by and operated for Grange members. The Grange also tried to lower railroad rates farmers had to pay. In 1877 former Grange members and other farmers formed the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, or Southern Farmers' Alliance. Alliance members wanted to prevent railroad companies from pooling—the combining of efforts to prevent competition between companies. In 1889 Texan Charles W. Macune, the president of the Alliance, proposed that farmers store their crops in U.S. government warehouses until prices increased. The government would give low-interest loans based on the value of those crops. Farmers could repay the loans after selling their crops at higher prices. This subtreasury plan, which would be financed by newly printed currency, had much support within the Alliance.



Southern farmers had traditionally voted for Democratic Party candidates. However, the Democrats' failure to back the subtreasury plan prompted Alliance members to form the People's Party—commonly called the Populist Party—in 1891. Its members were known as Populists. The Populist platform, or statement of political goals, was taken from the Southern Farmers' Alliance. In 1896 both the Populists and the Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan for president. Bryan ran as a Democrat, but lost despite winning Texas and many other states. The Populist Party faded as members argued about policy issues. Democrats also weakened the party by adopting some Populist programs.

## GOVERNMENT IN THE REFORM AGE



By the late 1800s, some businesses in Texas had formed trusts. These were legal arrangements in which one board of trustees controlled a number of companies. A monopoly—sole economic control of a field of business—could be more easily created by using a trust. A monopoly eliminates competition, allowing one corporation to control prices. Some people wanted government policies that would regulate these corporations. James Stephen Hogg, who was elected attorney general of Texas in 1886, believed in reform. In 1887 the federal government created the Interstate Commerce Commission. This agency regulated railroads. Hogg helped write antitrust legislation that further regulated railroads. The Antitrust Act of 1889 regulated monopolies and trusts. Hogg was elected governor in 1890. His administration pushed for a number of laws regulating business, which

became known as Hogg Laws. At Hogg's urging the Texas Railroad Commission was created. Governor Charles Culberson also pursued reform. Thomas M. Campbell helped enact reform laws during his terms as governor from 1907 to 1911. These laws included railroad regulation, antitrust laws, and pure food and drug laws. James E. Ferguson gained the support of poor citizens, particularly tenant farmers, by working for

reform. Because of his support of Texas farmers, Ferguson was nicknamed Farmer Jim. Important reforms were passed during Ferguson's first term. As governor, Ferguson developed enemies who accused him of misusing state funds. He was impeached in 1917. Lieutenant Governor William P. Hobby became the new governor.

## THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

In the early 1900s reformers known as progressives worked to improve society. Progressive means "forward-looking" or "relating to progress." The passage of the Seventeenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1913 allowed American voters—rather than the state legislatures—to vote directly for U.S. senators. To rebuild Galveston after a hurricane in 1900, a new form of local government called the commission plan was established. The commission plan became a major reform of the progressive movement, and it was soon adopted by other cities. Progressives fought to help Texas workers. Progressives also fought for drug and food laws. These laws increased costs for businesses that had to meet the higher standards. However, most Texans agreed that the benefits outweighed the costs because the laws helped improve the lives of many people.



Many progressives, particularly women, also tried to improve Texas schools. In the late 1800s and early 1900s the state established schools to train teachers. The legislature also passed laws to improve public schools. These reforms changed the lives of many Texans. More women gained access to education in the late 1800s than ever before. But African American and Mexican American students generally did not benefit from Progressive Era changes in education. The fight to make public schools serve all Texans was just beginning.

## WOMEN AND THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

The temperance movement was a social reform effort that encouraged people to drink less alcohol. Support for prohibition—the banning of the manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcohol—increased during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The Eighteenth Amendment won the support of enough state legislatures to be ratified in 1919. As a result, the manufacture and sale of alcohol became illegal throughout the nation in 1920. In 1918 Annie Webb Blanton became the first woman to win election to a Texas state office. She served as the state's superintendent of public instruction. Eleanor Brackenridge and Jane McCallum were other important suffrage leaders in Texas. In 1919, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, granting women suffrage. In 1920 women across the nation were able to vote.



African American and Mexican American women also fought for reforms. Christia Adair, an African American, worked for women's suffrage and equal rights. In South Texas, Jovita Idar organized people to support women's rights as well as rights for Mexican Americans. In 1902, Texas began to require a poll tax, a tax on voting. As a result, poor Texans, many of whom were African American and Mexican American, could not afford to vote. African Americans in Texas were denied the benefits of reform in other areas as well. Many years would go by before laws were passed to protect the rights of African Americans in Texas.