



Biographical Briefing on Alice Paul

Directions: The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you will play Alice Paul and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, take turns reading aloud the information on the handout and discuss the “Stop Here and Discuss” questions.

Alice Paul was born on January 11, 1885, in Moorestown, New Jersey. Paul was born a Quaker and was profoundly influenced by that tradition, which taught nonviolence, the importance of education and social justice, and the equality of all people. Paul’s family was relatively well-to-do, religious, and conservative. Growing up, Paul received an excellent education at a series of private schools. She attended Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, and received her bachelor’s degree in 1905. Paul then attended the New York School of Social Work as a graduate student, and left for England in 1906 to perform settlement work. As a social worker in a London settlement house, Paul provided assistance to community members in need. While in England, women’s rights activists Emmeline and Christobel Pankhurst asked Paul to join them in fighting for women’s suffrage, or right to vote. The Pankhursts’ motto was “Deeds, not words,” and Emmeline believed, “You have to make more noise than anybody else, you have to make yourself more obtrusive [noticeable] than anybody else, you have to fill all the papers more than anybody else. In fact you have to be there all the time and see that they do not snow you under, if you are really going to get your reform realized.” Paul was deeply influenced by these ideas and the Pankhursts’ militant (aggressive) tactics. She joined the Pankhursts and participated in numerous protests, was jailed three times, and went on a four-week-long hunger strike in which prison officials force-fed her through a tube in her nose.

Paul returned to the United States in 1909, and dedicated herself wholeheartedly to the cause of women’s suffrage. She continued her education—eventually receiving a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania—and joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). However, after being exposed to the Pankhursts’ forceful brand of activism, Paul found NAWSA’s approach too submissive and slow. NAWSA’s tactics were non-confrontational and primarily involved circulating statewide petitions to pressure lawmakers into supporting women’s suffrage. Most of NAWSA’s members believed that the best way to achieve suffrage was to enact laws on a state-by-state basis, rather than on a national level. Paul strongly disagreed, however, and felt that a constitutional amendment that applied to all women would be the quickest and best way to secure women’s right to vote. Furthermore, Paul believed that militant action was necessary to force lawmakers into giving women voting rights. Paul’s differing views eventually inspired her to leave NAWSA in 1913 and form her own suffrage organization, the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage.



- What ideas influenced Paul's early life?
- To what cause did Paul dedicate herself?
- In what ways did Paul's ideas differ from NAWSA's?

Paul led suffragists in a series of militant actions that raised politicians' and the public's awareness of women's rights. Despite being a rather conservative, reserved person in private, she was an intense and inspiring leader in public. In 1913 Paul organized a 5,000-woman parade in Washington, DC in support of women's suffrage. The parade almost ended in a riot, with one source noting, "Crowds of angry, jeering men slap[ped] the demonstrators, spit at them, and poke[d] them with lighted cigars...40 people [were] hospitalized, and it [took] a cavalry troop [soldiers on horseback]...to restore order." Paul met such violent opposition with increasingly militant, but nonviolent, actions. She and other suffragists picketed the White House regularly in an effort to pressure President Wilson into supporting women's suffrage. As in England, Paul and her supporters were arrested, imprisoned, and force-fed whenever they went on hunger strikes. Paul's tactics received widespread publicity and gained considerable public sympathy for the cause of women's rights. However, Paul's critics—most notably the NAWSA suffragists—criticized her militancy. They believed that her methods alienated (created hostility among) politicians and jeopardized the cause. One Paul supporter responded, "Ladies and gentleman who are so afraid lest we fatigue [tire] the President [with our actions] are urged to remember that we ourselves are very, very tired, and perhaps [they could have] some pity on the faithful women who have struggled three-quarters of a century for democracy in their own nation."

Paul believed that equal political rights for women was an essential social reform. Some suffragists argued that women should be allowed to vote because their special female perspective would "purify politics." They asserted that women's traditional roles as mothers and guardians of morality made women more sensitive and therefore well suited to correcting society's problems. Paul agreed that women's votes had the power to change society for the better. However, she did not support the idea of a separate female sphere, and believed that women should have the right to vote simply because they deserved the same political rights as men. In the early 1920s, Paul also began to call for a constitutional amendment that would guarantee women's rights in every area of public life. Paul insisted that an Equal Rights Amendment, or ERA, was the only way to guarantee equal rights for women. She argued that only a constitutional amendment could wipe out all of the state laws that discriminated against women. Other feminists fiercely disagreed with Paul, particular women labor activists. They asserted that an ERA would wipe out the good laws as well as the bad, such as labor laws that provided special protections for women workers. Despite such protests, Paul continued to work toward an equal rights amendment to the constitution.



- What kinds of tactics did Paul use to achieve women's suffrage?
- Why did some suffragists condemn Paul's tactics?
- What other social reform did Paul support? Why?
- What did Paul believe to be the best way to improve American society?



Biographical Briefing on Robert La Follette

Directions: The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you will play Robert La Follette and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, take turns reading aloud the information on the handout and discuss the “Stop Here and Discuss” questions.

Robert Marion La Follette was born on June 14, 1855, in Primrose, Wisconsin. La Follette's family were among Wisconsin's first pioneers and they were hard-working but poor farmers. La Follette worked on the family farm until he could afford to attend the University of Wisconsin at Madison. In 1879 he graduated college and entered the law profession. He launched his political career the following year and was elected district attorney of Dane County. During his campaign for district attorney, the Republican La Follette defied the local political establishment after the Republican Party boss would not endorse him (support his campaign). Instead of withdrawing from the race, La Follette went out into the community and canvassed (met voters and solicited their votes) for himself. La Follette's commitment to going “straight to the people” was one of the cornerstones of his long political career. Another was his refusal to play “party politics” or submit to the will of corrupt Republican leaders. For example, in the early 1890s La Follette shocked the political world by accusing a powerful Republican senator of bribery. He announced that after the senator had hired him to defend some former state treasurers against embezzlement charges, the senator offered La Follette and the judge a bribe to ensure that the case was “decided right.” The senator denied any wrongdoing, but La Follette stood by his accusation. It was one of the many battles La Follette fought against political corruption.

La Follette—whose nickname was “Fighting Bob”—fought political corruption from within the American political system: he was a congressman in the House of Representatives for three terms, the governor of Wisconsin for five years, and a senator in Washington for over 20 years. During his time as governor, from 1901 to 1906, La Follette and his educated, feminist wife Belle fought for a group of Progressive reforms known as the “Wisconsin idea.” At the top of La Follette's list of reforms was establishing direct voter primaries. Prior to 1906, American citizens had no say in which party candidates were selected to run for political office. Instead, party bosses—typically wealthy businessmen with large amounts of political power—selected the political candidates, who were inevitably pro-business. La Follette believed this system was not only undemocratic, but fundamentally corrupt. He believed that “the American people...[must have] sovereign [supreme] control over their government.” Therefore, he enacted the nation's first “direct primary” law, which allowed

Wisconsin citizens to vote directly for the politician of their choice in the state primary. While La Follette's election reform made him popular with the public, it angered party bosses, who lost a large portion of their power base as a result of the reform.



- What were some of the cornerstones of La Follette's political career?
- What was the basis for the "Wisconsin idea"?
- In what ways did La Follette fight political corruption?
- In what ways was La Follette's direct-primary law more democratic?

The foundation of La Follette's reforms was his belief that the American people were entitled to full economic, political, and social equality. He asserted, "Democracy is a life and involves continual struggle." He lectured tirelessly throughout the country, speaking out against social injustices and drumming up support for his proposed reforms. He supported a wide variety of reforms, including public (versus private) management of natural resources such as oil and water and government regulation of the notoriously unethical railroad industry. He also advocated for the right of farmers and industrial workers to form labor unions to protect their interests, labor laws protecting child workers, and women's right to vote.

La Follette particularly condemned the unequal distribution of wealth and economic power in American society. He called for a wide range of tax reforms that would require wealthy people and corporations to pay higher taxes, in accordance with their higher income. La Follette demanded that corporations pay the same amount of property tax as individual property owners and called for "large increases in the inheritance tax rates upon large estates to prevent the [unending] accumulation by inheritance of great fortunes in a few hands." He also fought corporate monopolies and trusts, in which corporations controlled an entire industry by eliminating competitors and forming exclusive partnerships with other companies. He declared, "The great issue before the American people...is the control of government and industry by private monopoly.... We demand that the power of the Federal Government be used to crush private monopoly, not to foster it." La Follette asserted, "Monopoly has crushed competition, stifled private initiative and independent enterprise [undertakings] and...now [makes huge] profits on every necessity of life consumed by the public." Along these lines, he pressed for antitrust laws and the end of laws that unjustly protected big business.



- What types of reforms did La Follette promote?
- What was La Follette's view on monopolies?
- What did La Follette believe to be the best way to improve American society?



Biographical Briefing on Mother Jones

Directions: The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you will play Mother Jones and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, take turns reading aloud the information on the handout and discuss the “Stop Here and Discuss” questions.

Mary Harris, known later in life as Mother Jones, was born on May 1, 1837, in the county of Cork in Ireland. Her father, a railway worker named Richard Harris, brought her to Ontario, Canada, when she was a child. In her early twenties, she attended teaching school and then worked as a teacher in Michigan in the United States. In 1861 she married George Jones and settled in Memphis, Tennessee. Like Harris’s father, Jones was a laborer. He worked in the iron industry and was an active member of his trade union. In 1867 Mary Harris Jones lost her husband and four children to yellow fever, a highly contagious disease that causes high fevers, vomiting, and sometimes death. Jones never forgot how the poor and working class suffered at the hands of the disease: “Its victims were mainly among the poor and the workers. The rich and well-to-do fled the city.” After the death of her family, Jones set up a dress-making business in Chicago, where she noted: “[I] worked for the aristocrats of Chicago.... My employers seemed neither to notice nor to care [about the poor’s suffering].” After the great Chicago fire destroyed her business in 1871, Jones sought help from the local labor organization, the Knights of Labor. From that time on, Jones was a fierce labor activist and defender of workers’ rights.

For most of her life, Jones had no permanent home, but traveled throughout the country speaking out at worker strikes, demonstrations, and union meetings. Her courage was legendary among workers—she went to jail several times for her labor activities, and was known for facing down armed soldiers at strikes and protests. She was also a fiery speaker who was not afraid to use earthy language to get her point across. Jones’ black bonnet and high-collared dresses made her look matronly (motherlike), and earned her the nickname “Mother Jones,” a role she embraced. Despite her own unconventional life, Jones felt that women should dedicate themselves to the traditional role of motherhood. She did not believe that women should have the right to vote, and stated, “I [do not] believe in ‘careers’ for women, especially a ‘career’ in factor[ies] and mill[s] where most working women have their ‘careers.’ A great responsibility rests upon woman—the training of the children.”



- What events in Jones’ life contributed to her interest in worker’s rights?
- Why did workers call Jones “Mother Jones”?
- According to Jones, what was women’s most important role?

Jones dedicated her life to speaking out against capitalism—an economic system based on privately owned businesses and individual profit. She fought against greedy industrialists—owners of factories and other manufacturing operations—and strived to improve workers' living and working conditions. She once noted, "There are no limits to which powers of privilege will not go to keep the workers in slavery." She believed in nonviolence, workers' rights, and socialism, a social system based on worker-owned businesses and shared political power. As a result, her industrialist enemies called her the "most dangerous woman in America." However, Jones' socialist ally, Eugene Debs, declared her "the 'Grand Old Woman' of the revolutionary movement."

Jones felt that industrialists constantly violated workers' rights, and she worked passionately for labor reforms. For example, one report noted that coal miners' pay had remained \$1.50 a day for over 25 years. In addition, many miners worked 14 hours a day or more underground, leading Jones to write, "Mining is cruel work. Men are down in utter darkness hours on end. They have no life in the sun." She fought for higher pay, shorter work days, and more humane working conditions for workers, particularly coal miners. While Jones was strongly pro-union, she also supported the socialist belief that owner exploitation (taking unjust advantage) of workers would end only when the workers themselves owned the factories, mines, and plants.

Jones was particularly appalled at industrialists' exploitation of child workers. Although some states had child labor laws forbidding children under a certain age—typically 12 years old—from working, Jones pointed out that few industrialists abided by those laws. In her investigation of child labor in southern U.S. factories, she observed at an Alabama cotton mill, "Tiny babies of six years old with faces of sixty [working] an eight-hour shift for ten cents a day." She also protested children's mutilation due to industrial machinery. Children working in Pennsylvania mills, she reported, "came into Union Headquarters, some with their hands off, some with the thumb missing, some with their fingers off at the knuckle." Jones organized a protest against such child labor abuses in 1903, marching thousands of striking child mill workers from Pennsylvania to President Theodore Roosevelt's home in New York. She also worked for child labor reforms, pressing the federal and state governments to enforce child labor laws, as well as to raise the age requirement for child workers to at least 14 years old.



- To what issues did Jones dedicate her life?
- According to Jones, what were the most pressing issues faced by American workers?
- What types of labor reforms did Jones support?
- What did Jones believe to be the best way to improve American society?



Biographical Briefing on William Du Bois

Directions: The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you will play William Du Bois and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, take turns reading aloud the information on the handout and discuss the “Stop Here and Discuss” questions.

William (W.E.B.) Du Bois was born on February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Born to parents of Dutch, French, and African heritage, Du Bois grew up in a small, close-knit black community. His father abandoned the family when Du Bois was young, and his mother, Mary, worked as a housekeeper to support him and his half-brother. At a young age, Du Bois was aware of the “vast veil” of prejudice that separated him from white people. Enormously talented and articulate (well-spoken), Du Bois wrote for the *New York Globe* newspaper at the early age of 15. His success impressed some of the town’s wealthy people, who arranged to pay for his education at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Fisk’s students were black, but its faculty was white. As a result, Du Bois experienced there both extreme racism and a growing awareness of his African-American identity. He recalled: “One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts...two warring ideals in one dark body.” While at Fisk, Du Bois taught at black schools, where he witnessed firsthand the devastating poverty and insufficient education of the local black community. Du Bois graduated Fisk in 1888, and went on to receive bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Harvard University. At the University of Berlin in Germany, he pursued a Ph.D. in social science “with a view to the ultimate application of its principles to the social and economic rise of the Negro people.” After he received his Ph.D., he became a sociology and history professor at Atlanta University in Georgia.

Du Bois spent his life speaking and writing about racial injustice in America. He fiercely criticized the conditions in American society that kept African Americans poor, uneducated, and oppressed. At the root of black misery, he argued, was the deep and continuing racism of white American society. He noted, “The history of the American Negro is the history of strife [bitter struggle],” and asserted, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” He believed racism was institutional in America, meaning racial prejudice was a fundamental part of the social system and ran through its every structure, institution, and policy. Du Bois criticized another famous African-American educator, Booker T. Washington, for placing African Americans’ economic independence before the issue of social equality. While Du Bois agreed that economic stability was an important part of improving black peoples’ lives, he felt that African Americans needed to fight first and foremost against racial prejudice and for their civil rights. Most of all, he condemned Washington’s belief that black society should accommodate itself to white society.



- What events in Du Bois's life contributed to his commitment to racial issues?
- According to Du Bois, what was the foundation of black oppression?
- In what ways did Du Bois' ideas differ from Washington's?

Du Bois believed that African Americans should not accept the limits of white society, but rather protest long and vigorously for equal rights, opportunities, and treatment under the law. As he pointed out, "If there is anybody in this land who thoroughly believes that the meek shall inherit the earth, they have not often let their presence be known." Du Bois believed in both blacks' full and equal integration into American society, and the importance of their own unique culture and accomplishments. He encouraged African Americans to rely on their own community, culture, and intellect to promote black equality and highlight "black distinctiveness." Du Bois also promoted education as a key element of black advancement. He stated, "We demand for the Negroes as for all others a free and complete education." He further asserted that the "Talented Tenth"—the top 10 percent of African-American society in terms of education and talent—were best qualified to lead the black community in the fight for social equality.

During the Progressive Era, Du Bois focused primarily on racially based injustices, rather than the social injustices inflicted by capitalism, an economic system based on privately owned businesses and individual profit. He was basically supportive of labor unions and supported a form of black socialism—a social system based on worker-owned businesses and shared political power. However, Du Bois strongly criticized the labor movement for its history of racial discrimination and its corresponding unwillingness to fully defend the rights of black workers. He disagreed with white socialists who argued that black and white workers were united by their oppression as a class, and that the most important issue facing American society was the struggle between the poor and the wealthy economic classes. Du Bois, however, believed that African-American unity was more important than working-class unity. One historian put it this way: "Even though Du Bois agreed...that economic considerations were of major importance to the black masses, he no longer held, as he had earlier, that black and white class solidarity [unity] was a practical or meaningful strategy for Negroes to pursue." In his famous 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois noted, "To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships." Therefore, Du Bois promoted "the formation of a black economic cooperative enterprise [undertaking] based on socialist principles, [and] racial self-help."



- What actions did Du Bois encourage African Americans to take in the face of racial injustice?
- Whom did he believe were the best qualified to lead the black community?
- What were Du Bois' views on the labor movement and socialism?
- What did Du Bois believe to be the best way to improve American society?



Biographical Briefing on Eugene Debs

Directions: The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you will play Eugene Debs and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, take turns reading aloud the information on the handout and discuss the “Stop Here and Discuss” questions.

Eugene V. Debs was born on November 5, 1855, in Terre Haute, Indiana. His parents had immigrated to the United States in 1849 from Alsace, a German territory on the eastern border of France. Debs' parents owned their own grocery shop, and while they were far from wealthy, the Debs family lived in relative comfort. Debs attended both private and public schools, and was usually at the top of his class. Against his family's wishes, Debs left school at the age of 14 to work with Vandalia Railroad as a paint scraper. Paint scrapers only made 50¢ a day, but Debs hoped to advance to more skilled work, with more money and greater respectability. Within a year, the railroad promoted him to the position of fireman. Debs eventually left railroad work and worked as an accounting clerk during the 1870s. In 1875 he became the secretary for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, an organization that looked after the interests of local railway firemen. Joining the Brotherhood was a turning point in Debs' life. He recalled, “In the very hour of my initiation, I became an agitator [vocal supporter for labor].”

Over time, Debs became more deeply involved in labor issues. His activities included organizing unions, participating in railway strikes, speaking out against capitalism—an economic system based on privately owned businesses and individual profit—and fighting owner exploitation (taking unjust advantage) of workers. He remarked, “Through all [those] years I was nourished at the [Worker] Fountain. I drank deeply of its water and every particle of my tissue became saturated with the spirit of the working class.... How could I but feel the burden of their wrongs? How could the seed of agitation fail to take deep root in my heart?” In 1893 Debs founded the American Railway Union (ARU) to protect the interests of all railway workers. The following year, the ARU conducted a year-long strike for higher wages against the Pullman Company of Chicago, Illinois. During the strike, the federal government sent in troops to help Pullman squash the protest. Debs and other labor activists were disgusted with the government's role in protecting the interests of industrialists, or owners of factories and other manufacturing operations, and other capitalists. As a result of this and other antilabor actions, Debs eventually came to see socialism—a social system based on worker-owned businesses and shared political power—as the answer to worker exploitation.



- What events in Debs' life contributed to his interest in labor issues?
- What were some of the labor issues that Debs addressed?
- According to Debs, what was the answer to worker exploitation?

Like many of his fellow socialists, Debs believed that the root of America's ills was its capitalist economy. Socialism was based on the theories of Karl Marx, a German philosopher who condemned the unchecked capitalism brought on by the Industrial Revolution. He argued that capitalist systems, in which private industries competed for profit with little or no government regulation, resulted in a class struggle between the rich and the working classes. In accordance with Marxist thinking, Debs believed that American workers should rise up as a class and defeat the wealthy capitalists. The working people of the country would then create a new system, socialism, in which everything society produced would be owned by everybody and used for the benefit of all, not just a wealthy few. In the *International Socialist Review* in 1900, Debs dismissed the idea that reform could cure America's problems. Instead, he called for a revolution: "The working class must get rid of the whole brood of masters and exploiters.... It is therefore a question not of 'reform,' the mask of fraud [deception], but of revolution. The capitalist system must be overthrown, class rule abolished [destroyed], and wage slavery supplanted [replaced] by cooperative industry."

Debs was enormously popular among workers and socialists alike. He ran as the Socialist candidate for president five times, receiving one million votes in one election even though he was in prison for his labor activities at the time. One admirer called Debs "a plain man of the people" whom "striking workers in trouble could always depend on." Known for his passionate, eloquent (well-spoken) speeches on the behalf of the working class, Debs was uncompromising in his view that nothing less than a worker's revolution could solve America's problems. He swore his loyalty to the American underclass: "While there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free."

In addition to being a tireless champion of socialism, Debs traveled around the country speaking out against the social ills caused by capitalism. He fought for higher pay and more humane working conditions for workers; he spoke out against racism, war, and violence of all kinds; he supported women's rights—including the right to vote; and strongly condemned the decline of America's cities. In 1902 he wrote, "[People] wonder 'what is the matter with...Chicago!' Look at some of her filthy streets in the heart of the city, chronically [constantly] torn up, the sunlight obscured [hidden], the air polluted, the water contaminated.... The deadly virus of capitalism is surging through the veins of this [city]." The only cure for these ills, Debs argued, was the complete abolishment of the capitalist system. He believed that private industry should be destroyed and workers given ownership of the means of production, such as the factories, mines, and plants. Ultimately, Debs envisioned a society based on cooperation rather than competition. Only then, he asserted, would justice, equality, and progress arise in American society.



- According to Debs, what was the source of American society's problems?
- What did Debs believe to be the best way to improve American society?
- What other social issues did Debs address?



Biographical Briefing on Theodore Roosevelt

Directions: The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you will play Theodore Roosevelt and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, take turns reading aloud the information on the handout and discuss the "Stop Here and Discuss" questions.

Theodore Roosevelt was born to a family of well-to-do merchants on October 27, 1858, in New York City. His ancestors had settled in the United States during the seventeenth century, and his family was well respected in the New York City area. At a young age, Roosevelt had a strong sense of morality and civic duty, or obligation to society. His beliefs came, in part, from his father, whom Roosevelt greatly admired. Roosevelt was frail and sickly as a child, and suffered from severe asthma and poor eyesight. Determined to improve his health and increase his strength, he taught himself to ride horses, hunt, and box. In addition, he developed a lifelong passion for the natural world, and took great enjoyment in hiking and other outdoor activities. Due to his ill health, Roosevelt was schooled at home until he entered college. He graduated with honors from Harvard University in 1880, and eventually entered politics. He served as governor of New York, vice president of the United States under William McKinley, and became the youngest president in U.S. history after McKinley was assassinated in 1900.

As president, Roosevelt was immensely popular with the American public due to his passion for Progressive reforms and his dedication to "the little guy." In a 1902 speech he proclaimed, "The government is us; we are the government, you and I." He further asserted, "The object of the government is the welfare [well-being] of the people. The material progress and prosperity of a nation are desirable chiefly so far as they lead to the moral and material welfare of all good citizens." During his presidency, Roosevelt was known for his boundless energy, keen intellect, and outspoken nature. He vowed to battle greed, corruption, and special interests on the behalf of all Americans, from business people to farmers to industrial workers. In this vein, he particularly focused on monitoring big-business practices and protecting the environment.



- What ideas influenced Roosevelt's early life?
- To what was Roosevelt dedicated during his presidency?
- What were key issues for Roosevelt?

Roosevelt declared that big business should be as moral in its practices as Americans should be in their everyday lives. He was particularly critical of corporate trusts, in which corporations controlled an entire industry by eliminating competitors and forming exclusive partnerships with other companies. Once corporations formed a trust, they could charge

whatever they wanted for their goods and services. Roosevelt was not opposed to big business's capitalist interests—economic concerns in support of privately owned businesses and individual profit—but he was against price gouging (charging extremely high prices), unfair labor practices, and the pursuit of obscene profits. He felt such practices were both unethical and a betrayal of the public's trust, and were also bad for the economy. While one of Roosevelt's nicknames was "Trust-Buster," he did not seek to completely destroy trusts. Rather, he believed that some trusts should be dissolved and the rest subject to strict government regulation. Roosevelt felt that the federal government should regulate businesses to ensure they did not form illegal monopolies, fix or otherwise set outrageously high prices, or engage in any other unethical practices. He stated, "[Government] should enter upon a course of supervision, control, and regulation of those great corporations—a regulation which we should not fear, if necessary, to bring to the point of control of monopoly prices."

Roosevelt's love of sports and other outdoor activities made him a passionate supporter of environmental conservation. He declared, "To waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining [destroying] in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them." Roosevelt believed that America's forests, deserts, and other wilderness areas should be protected for their beauty and their valuable natural resources, such as timber and water. Similar to his approach to big business, Roosevelt felt that the government should regulate the preservation and development of U.S. lands. He called for laws that would bring more wilderness areas and forests under government control, restrict private and corporate interests' exploitation (taking unjust advantage) of natural resources, and empower the government to control if and how protected land should be developed.

Roosevelt promoted a wide variety of reforms to improve American society, including worker's rights, a national income tax, taxes on inherited money, labor laws protecting women and children, monetary compensation for injured workers, federal inspections in the meat and drug industries, government regulation of the railroads, and fair election practices to give voters a stronger voice in governmental affairs. He also supported women's right to vote. Roosevelt pursued reform so vigorously that his critics accused him of being a socialist—a supporter of a social system based on worker-owned businesses and shared political power. In fact, he was an enthusiastic supporter of capitalism. To Roosevelt, capitalism inspired economic growth and produced a vigorous economy. He believed his reforms would make capitalism work for all people by avoiding the "extremes of swollen fortunes and grinding poverty."



- What are corporate trusts? What were Roosevelt's beliefs about trusts?
- What types of reforms did Roosevelt promote?
- What type of economic system did Roosevelt support? Why?
- What did Roosevelt believe to be the best way to improve American society?



Biographical Briefing on Ida Tarbell

Directions: The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you will play Ida Tarbell and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, take turns reading aloud the information on the handout and discuss the “Stop Here and Discuss” questions.

Ida Minerva Tarbell was born on November 5, 1857, in Erie County, Pennsylvania. Her father was a carpenter who worked in the oil industry, making wooden storage tanks for the booming oil refineries. Tarbell’s mother, Esther, was a major influence in Tarbell’s life. Esther was a passionate feminist who deliberately named her daughter Ida, after a literary character who promoted women’s education, and Minerva, after the Roman goddess of wisdom. Esther, a highly educated woman, resented having to give up her six-year career as a teacher to get married. Tarbell stated, “[My mother] had grown up with the woman’s rights movement. Had she never married, I feel sure she would have sought to ‘vindicate the sex’ [prove the worth of women] by seeking a higher education, possibly a profession.” Her mother’s bitterness, combined with her parents’ unhappy marriage, likely contributed to Tarbell’s wish to never be “enslaved” by marriage. Instead, Tarbell dedicated herself to getting an education and pursuing a career. She graduated from Pennsylvania’s Allegheny College in 1880, the only woman in her class. Tarbell was a teacher for two years, and then began her writing career with the Methodist magazine, *The Chautauquan*. By the turn of the century, she was a famous and respected journalist with New York’s *McClure’s* magazine.

Tarbell made her mark as an investigative reporter with a series of articles entitled “The History of Standard Oil.” Published in *McClure’s* from 1902 to 1904, Tarbell’s articles exposed the ruthless and illegal business tactics of Standard Oil, an oil-refining corporation owned by John D. Rockefeller. Tarbell declared that the purpose of her exposé was to “give readers...a clear...notion of the processes by which a particular industry passes from the control of the many to that of the few.” Tarbell spent two years researching her subject, digging through mountains of documents and interviewing many people in the oil industry, including Standard Oil employees. She recalled warning Standard Oil’s representatives, “I wanted facts, and that I reserved the right to use them according to my own judgment of their meaning, that my object was to learn more perfectly what was actually done—not to learn what my informants thought of what had been done.” Her articles ultimately revealed Standard Oil’s domination of every aspect of the oil industry, from oil refineries to oil pipelines to equipment manufacturers. In addition, Tarbell exposed Rockefeller’s trusts—secret agreements—with railway companies in which the railroads promised to refuse to transport the oil of Standard Oil’s competitors. She criticized Standard Oil’s monopoly—complete control—over the oil industry, but also praised Rockefeller’s attempts to stabilize

the chaotic industry. Tarbell's report caused a sensation and drew the public's attention to the abuses of big business and capitalism—the economic system based on privately owned businesses and individual profit.



- What ideas influenced Tarbell's early life?
- What did Tarbell reveal in her articles, "The History of Standard Oil"?
- How did Tarbell view Standard Oil's business practices?

Tarbell did not consider herself a social reformer, per se. She asserted, "I am merely an observer of life, not an actor in it." However, as a result of her exposé on Standard Oil's unethical business practices, Tarbell became associated with a group of journalists known as "muckrakers." The term *muckrakers* was first used by President Theodore Roosevelt to refer to investigative reporters who uncovered corruption in American society, usually in a sensational manner. He compared the reporters to a Christian character in an English book who could not see heaven because he was always concentrating on the filth, or muck, of earthly concerns. Probably the most famous muckraker was Upton Sinclair, who wrote a book called *The Jungle* about the sensationally bad conditions in the meatpacking industry. Sinclair advocated greater government regulation to protect consumers from spoiled meat. Tarbell, however, did not consider herself a muckraker. She rejected the idea that sensational reporting on societal problems was enough to inspire reform. Rather, Tarbell believed that thoroughly researched, objective reporting would lead to the most meaningful and long-lasting change. Tarbell recalled, "I was convinced that in the long run the public [the muckrakers] were trying to stir would weary of vituperation [harsh criticism], that if you were to secure permanent results the mind must be convinced." She further insisted that her piece on Standard Oil was not a call to abolish, or destroy, capitalism, but rather to reform it.

A social reform that Tarbell did not support was women's suffrage, or right to vote. Despite her nontraditional life as a single, professional woman, Tarbell believed that a woman's place was in the home. She argued, "The women who count [in society]...are [in] the great business of founding and filling those natural social centers which we call homes." Indeed, Tarbell was unconvinced that women's suffrage would result in social reform. Like other anti-feminists of her time, she felt that women were too emotional and easily swayed to make intelligent decisions at the ballot box. Tarbell's stance on women's rights baffled suffragists such as Jane Addams, who commented, "There is some limitation to Ida Tarbell's mind." Nevertheless, Tarbell defended her position, stating, "It is really worth being [considered old-fashioned] to be so proud and so sure of anything as I am of the place and the value of women in the world—without the ballot."



- Why was Tarbell referred to as a muckraker?
- What was Tarbell's approach to social reform?
- What was Tarbell's opinion on women's suffrage? Why?
- What did Tarbell believe to be the best way to improve American society?