

EMMA J. LAPSANSKY-WERNER

Progressive Era: Exploring Its Impact Today

Author's Note from the Teacher's Edition

I find this era particularly fascinating because so much of the infrastructure that our students know today originated during the Progressive era: universal childhood education; the professions of social work, architecture, and city planning; dams, water management, and public control of utilities; and government concern for individuals' well-being, including protection for workers and families or concern for public health. Public policy that establishes protection for women and minorities is another legacy of these years, as is government intervention in environmental planning. These are great "handles" for getting students involved in the "what if" of history—what would be different if today's children did not attend school, but went instead to work in factories? Is it a good thing to have the government keep track of public health issues such as the safety of the food we eat? What do agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration do, and how does their work benefit our daily lives?

Today, we take identity- and interest-group politics—and political lobbying—for granted. We might ask students to name interest groups that reflect their own concerns or sense of identity. We could discuss with them areas that work in American society today. Students might also enjoy speculating about how Progressives such as Jane Addams, Margaret Sanger, Woodrow Wilson, or Ida Wells Barnett might address today's areas of concern.

“Students light up as they see connections between the world they inhabit today and events in their nation's history. They understand why history matters.”

*Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner,
Program Author*

About the Author

Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner is Professor of History and Curator of the Quaker Collection at Haverford College. After receiving her doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania, she taught at Temple University for almost two decades. Her recent publications include *Quaker Aesthetics*, coauthored with Ann Verplanck, and *Back to Africa: Benjamin Coates and the Colonization Movement in America, 1848–1880*, coedited with Margaret Hope Bacon.

