Reform and Its Limits

Evaluate the gains and limits of Progressive Era reforms

9-12.US2.2 "Evaluate Progressivism's impact on circumstances and policies. These may include: • Exploitation of labor • Child labor • Spoils systems of government hiring • Machine politics • Corruption • Immigration tension • Women's suffrage •..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three reform gains and circle a limit on each gain. Give each gain and its related limit the same number so you can compare what changed with what remained unresolved.

What Did Reform Change?

1. In 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York City. Many workers were young immigrant women who sewed clothing for low pay. Some exit doors were locked, and escape routes were inadequate. The fire killed 146 people. The disaster drew public attention to dangerous workplaces, but publicity alone could not protect workers. New York investigators inspected factories, and state lawmakers passed new fire safety and labor laws. These rules required changes such as better exits and fire drills. Reformers could point to real gains, yet new laws still needed inspectors and employers willing to follow them.

2. Across the country, children also worked long hours in mills, mines, and fields, often missing school. Progressive activists argued that childhood should include education rather than exhausting labor. In 1916, Congress passed the Keating-Owen Act, which barred interstate shipment of goods made in factories or mines that employed children below certain ages or for excessive hours. The law targeted employers through trade, but the Supreme Court struck it down in 1918. State child labor laws remained uneven, and farm work was outside the federal law's factory and mine rules. Progress was visible, but it was neither secure nor equal.

3. Progressives disagreed about who deserved a voice in shaping reform. Suffragists organized marches, petitions, and campaigns; in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment prohibited denying the vote because of sex. That victory gave many women new political power, including a chance to press for labor protections. Yet the amendment did not remove poll taxes, literacy tests, or intimidation used to keep many Black women from voting in the South. Some white suffrage leaders even tolerated racist arguments to gain support. Looking across these reforms, Progressivism changed laws and widened opportunities, but its benefits depended on enforcement and on whose rights reformers defended.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did New York's response to the Triangle fire improve worker safety, and what could still limit its impact?

2. Was the Keating-Owen Act a lasting solution to child labor? Use two details from the passage to support your judgment.

3. How did the Nineteenth Amendment expand political power while leaving an unequal barrier in place?

4. Compare the limits of factory safety reform and women's suffrage. What do they show about the difference between changing a law and changing people's circumstances?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a reform committee in 1921. In four to five sentences, recommend one next step to make a Progressive gain more lasting or more equal, use evidence from two different reforms in the passage, and explain one possible limit of your plan.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.US2.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three reform gains and circle a limit on each gain. Give each gain and its related limit the same number so you can compare what changed with what remained unresolved. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did New York's response to the Triangle fire improve worker safety, and what could still limit its impact?	**New laws required measures such as better exits and fire drills. Their impact depended on inspections and employers following the rules.**
2	Was the Keating-Owen Act a lasting solution to child labor? Use two details from the passage to support your judgment.	**No. It restricted interstate shipment of some goods made with child labor, but the Supreme Court struck it down in 1918. Its factory and mine rules also did not cover farm work.**
3	How did the Nineteenth Amendment expand political power while leaving an unequal barrier in place?	**It prohibited denying the vote because of sex, but poll taxes, literacy tests, and intimidation still kept many Black women in the South from voting.**
4	Compare the limits of factory safety reform and women's suffrage. What do they show about the difference between changing a law and changing people's circumstances?	**Factory safety laws needed enforcement and employer compliance, while voting rights remained restricted by discriminatory barriers. A legal change alone did not ensure that everyone received its benefits.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would fund independent inspectors to check factory fire exits and report violations. New York passed safety laws after the Triangle fire, but those laws still depended on inspections and employer compliance. The Keating-Owen Act was struck down, showing that a reform also needs a lasting legal basis. Inspectors could make existing safety rules more effective, but they could not restore the federal child labor law that the Court invalidated.

Accept judgments supported by accurate passage details, even if students weigh a reform's gains and limits differently. For Part 3, look for one specific next step, evidence from two distinct reforms, and a plausible limit.