James Hogg and the Populists

An Age of Reform

TERMS & NAMES
the Grange, James S. Hogg, trust, monopoly, antitrust, Farmers’ Alliance, Texas Railroad Commission, populism, People’s Party, graduated income tax

OBJECTIVES
1. Identify James S. Hogg.
2. Describe the point of view of the People’s Party.
3. Evaluate the effects of the populist reform movement.

MAIN IDEA
After enduring the unfair practices of railroads and other corporations, citizens rose up and demanded that the rights of the average Texas citizen be protected.

Why It Matters Now
Reform-minded citizens continue to try to regulate businesses to eliminate unfairness.

A REAL-LIFE STORY
In the 1880s a man named James Hogg stepped up to lead a reform movement. Hogg called upon Texans to reclaim control of their corrupt state government and demand that it protect and serve all citizens equally.

James S. Hogg, Speeches and State Papers of James Stephen Hogg

The Call for Reform
During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Texas economy was determined by industry and big business. The people who controlled successful companies often became very wealthy. Some discovered they could use their money and power to manipulate the laws. Unfortunately, this often occurred at the expense of farmers and other average citizens. To combat growing corruption and to return power to the general population, many Texans began calling for reform.

Railroad Abuses
Railroads had been a mixed blessing for Texans. They were a fast and effective mode of transportation that provided farmers and businesses with an efficient way to get goods to market.

This political cartoon suggests that Uncle Sam wanted to have little to do with the farmer. ⚫ In what way do the two men’s postures and clothing help express the cartoon’s meaning?
After the Civil War, Texas farmers formed the Patrons of Husbandry, known as the Grange. The organization gave farmers a social setting in which they could get to know each other and share information about crops and livestock. In the 1870s Grange farmers realized they could join together to purchase farm products in bulk for a cheaper price. The Grange opened 150 stores across Texas to sell these lower-cost goods to its members. Grange farmers also began pressuring leaders to end unfair railroad practices.

**THE GRANGE**

Trust is a group of companies in the same industry that set prices and reduce competition. Monopoly is one company’s complete control over a type of product or service in a market.

Vast amounts of land, shown in orange and yellow, were given by the state to the railroad companies to encourage them to build lines there. The railroads profited by selling the land at high prices. Why might farms and businesses be willing to pay high prices for this land?

However, railroad companies often followed unfair practices in dealing with passengers and businesses.

In many cases, railroad companies took lands given to them by the government and sold them to farmers and small businesses at extremely high prices. Railroad companies also took advantage of customers by charging higher freight rates for short hauls than for long hauls. They often allowed their political friends to ride for free. They even gave rebates to preferred customers while charging the average passenger full fare. In addition, some railroad companies banded together to control prices.

Reform-minded Texans thought these practices should be stopped. They reasoned that because the state government had given the railroad companies more than 30 million acres of land, it had every right to correct these abuses. They would find their champion in Texan James S. Hogg.

**Hogg’s Fight for Reform**

Born near Rusk, Texas, in 1851, James Stephen Hogg was a self-made man. After losing both his parents as a boy, Hogg went on to become a successful printer and then a lawyer. From 1880 to 1884, he served as a district attorney in Texas. In 1886 Hogg was elected state attorney general. Once in office, Hogg led the fight for reform of large corporations. He began by bringing lawsuits against insurance companies that were not following Texas laws. He forced dozens of these companies to stop operating in Texas, saving citizens more than $1 million.

After successfully cleaning up the insurance industry, Hogg turned his attention to the railroads. One of his first goals was to break up the Texas Traffic Association, a railroad trust. By controlling competition, the Texas Traffic Association was able to set high prices for its services. Hogg argued that this created an unfair monopoly in the railroad industry. Hogg led
the fight for a state antitrust law, which would make such monopolies illegal. The law was passed in 1889.

The Railroad Commission

Because of his efforts to reform the railroads, Hogg was strongly supported by groups like the Farmers’ Alliance. This group was a political organization formed by Grange members and other farmers. Hogg’s popularity with ordinary citizens helped him win the election for governor in 1890.

As governor, Hogg continued his reform of the railroad companies. One of his most important accomplishments was the forming of the Texas Railroad Commission by the Texas legislature in 1891. Headed by former U.S. senator John H. Reagan, the commission was formed to oversee all railroad operations in the state. Under Reagan’s leadership, the commission put an end to rate fixing, unreasonable shipping costs, and other unfair practices.

But railroads were not the only target of Hogg’s reforms. During his term he tried to make more land available to Texans by forcing corporations to sell some of their land. He also limited the amount of debt a city could have, lengthened the school year from four to six months, increased school and college funding, and changed the way decisions were made about pardons for prisoners. Many of these kinds of reforms became known as the Hogg Laws.

Hogg and the Populists

Governor Hogg was successful in his reforms because he was riding a new wave of political support known as populism. Populism was a nationwide movement of rural citizens who had not benefited from the modern lifestyle made possible by the growth in industry. Although urban businesses were thriving, many farmers were falling into economic ruin. Farmers and ranchers in West Texas felt that their interests were being ignored by the government. To correct the situation, farmers in Lampasas County formed the Farmers’ Alliance, which soon spread throughout the South. Together with other farmers, ranchers, and farm laborers, they formed their own party in 1892. Known as the People’s Party (or Populist Party), its members were called Populists.

The Populists relied on newspapers, religious groups, and speakers such as “Cyclone Davis” to promote their political views. They demanded government regulation of businesses; public ownership of the railroads, telephone, and telegraph lines; and elimination of the national banking system. Populists supported the creation of public warehouses where farmers could store their excess crops until prices increased. They also called for labor reform, a graduated income tax, and the direct election of U.S. senators. Previously, the state legislature had chosen U.S. Senators.
The Populists never did control the state government. However, some Populists were elected to office. In 1892 they won eight seats in the Texas House of Representatives, one seat in the Texas Senate, and many local offices. In 1894 they gained even more offices. But after 1896 the movement faded. This was most likely because the larger Democratic Party began to adopt many of the Populists’ ideas. The state economy also began to improve, creating a small increase in farm prices and easing some of the farmers’ economic worries. Populists shared a goal more than political policies. They wanted the government of the people to protect the interests of common workers.

**Populism After Hogg**

In 1895 a new Texas governor took over. Charles A. Culberson preserved the popular Hogg reform agenda and supported legislation to give the Railroad Commission more power. Culberson continued to enforce antitrust laws, supported reform of the courts, and improved educational opportunities for African Americans and Mexican Americans. However, by the end of his term, enthusiasm for populism was fading. By the time he left office, the Populist movement was over.