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The progressive era 1900 to 1920 study guide

We should not accept social life as it has seeped down to us, the young journalist Walter Lippmann wrote shortly after the twentieth century began. We have to deal with it consciously, devise its social organization. . . . educate and control it. The ambition to harness and organize the energies of modern life, as Lippmann spoke cut through American economy, politics and society in many different, sometimes contradictory ways between 1900 and 1929, but that left virtually none of its major institutions unchanged. The modern business company, modern politics, the modern presidency, a modern vision of the international order, and modern consumer capitalism were all born in those years. More than in most eras, Americans in the early years of the twentieth century felt the newness of their place in history. Looking back at the late nineteenth century, they underscored its chaos: the boom-and-bust cycles of the economy, the violent and exploitative aspects of its economy and social life, the gap between its demonstrative new wealth and the lot of its urban poor and hard-pressed farmers, and the inefficiency of American politics in the world of great nations. A revolution in the organization of social life on more conscious and systematic lines were the architects of the modern business company. In the wake of the Great Depression of the 1890s, they undertook to replace the unstable partnership and credit systems of the past with the forms of the modern company: widely capitalised, more intensely managed and national in scale and market. The reorganization of Andrew Carnegie's iron and steel empire of JP Morgan's bank house in the mammoth US Steel Corporation in 1901 was a sign of future trends. In the 1920s, giants in manufacturing, communications, finance, life insurance and entertainment dominated the economy; the two hundred largest companies in 1929 owned almost half of the country's total corporate wealth. The new scale of economic enterprises required much more systematic organisation. On the workshop and office floor, the systemization of work routines was intense, from the extensive organization of office work at Metropolitan Life to the subdivision of car manufacturing at Ford in 1913 to tasks that workers could repeat over and over again as an assembly line pulled their work past them. In showcases of welfare capitalism, a new cadre of staff managers committed to smoothing out the radically unstable hiring and firing practices of the past, creating seniority systems and benefits for stable employees. In the 1920s, corporate elites heralded a new era of capitalism, liberated from the cyclical instability of the past. Its catchphrase was now efficiency, permanence, welfare and service. With similar ambition to escape the turbulence of late economy and society, progressive reformers committed to expanding governments' capacity to deal with the worst effects of barely regulated capitalism. Their projects met far more resistance than business leaders. But between 1900 and 1929 they succeeded in making most of the characteristics of the modern administrative state come into being. More professionalized corps of state factory inspectors tried to protect workers from dangerous working conditions, physically exhausting hours and industrial illnesses. Public utility commissions attempted to pull the pricing of rail shipping, tram fares, and city gas and water supplies out of the turmoil of politics and put them in the hands of expert-staffed commissions tasked with setting reasonable terms of service and fair return on capital. New zoning boards, urban planning commissions, and public health agencies jumped in to try to bring more conscious public order out of chaotic land markets, slum housing, poisoned food, contaminated water supply, and infectious diseases. Progressive politics The energy of the new progressive policy was most intense at the state and local level, where civic reform associations of all kinds sprang up to push the new economic and social issues into politics. Women's leagues, labor unions, businessmen good government lobbies, social associations, and investigative journalists led the way, borrowing on each other's techniques and successes. Despite the more sharply defined constitutional constraints on federal power during this period, visions of more active government filtered up into national politics as well. Theodore Roosevelt set the mold for a much more active, subject-driven presidency than any since the Civil War. In the national railway attack of 1894, President Cleveland had sent federal troops to break the attack. Now in the national coal strike in 1902, Roosevelt offered the White House as a venue for mediation. Pushed by its farm and labor constituencies, including the Democratic Party, moved toward more active and effective governance. The era's impetus for the creation of a more centralized banking system to stabilize the country's credit system had come first from elite bankers. Woodrow Wilson and the Democratic Congress incorporated their plan for a central bank into the Federal Reserve Act of 1913, sliding a publicly appointed board over bankers' plan for self-regulation. Congress took its first steps toward nationwide child labor restriction, even though the Supreme Court struck down the law on a narrow reading of the Constitution's trade clause. The relationship between these progressive reforms of democracy was complex. Breaking what they saw as the corrupt alliance business wealth and political party bosses, progressive reformers managed to shift the election of U.S. senators from state legislatures to the general electorate and in some states introduce new systems of popular referendums, initiative and recall. They were in favour of voting for women, bringing the last states fighting women's suffrage into line in the nineteenth amendment in 1920. But they also tightened up voter registration systems to slow immigrant voters, and they agreed to disenfranchisement measures to strike African Americans off ballots that had swept through southern states between 1890 and 1908. Immigration The immigrant-filled cities were a focal point of progressives' mixed feelings about mass democracy. Between 1900 and the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, more than 13 million immigrants arrived in the United States, largely pouring into industrial cities from rural areas of Central and Southern Europe. The new economy, in which six out of ten industrial workers were born abroad in 1914, was built on their cheap labour. Out of this new urban working class jumped not only new forms of poverty and overcrowding, tenement living, but also powerful political machines, energetic labor unions, and a socialist party that on the eve of World War I rivaled anyone outside Germany. Middle-class progressives sometimes took the urban masses as political allies. But more often, progressives saw urban poor as a subject of social considerations: as populations to be assimilated, improved and protected from employers, landlords and political bosses who exploited them. Progressives lean less toward talk of class justice than toward faith in a unit's public good; they were less aware of protected rights than of mediation and effective management. They may have placed too much faith in experts, science and the idea of the common good, but they have created the capacity of the modern state to push to combat accidents with social destiny and the excesses of private capital. The international scene In all these state-building endeavors, early twentieth century Americans moved in line with their counterparts in other industrial nations. That meant increasing the nation's ability to project its interests more strongly abroad. In the Philippines, seized as a collateral in the war to liberate Cuba from Spanish rule in 1898, a commission led by William Howard Taft committed to establishing a U.S.-style model of imperial governance. In Latin America, where U.S. economic interests were overshadowing Britain's, American muscle flexing became routine. On a dozen separate occasions between 1906 and 1929, U.S. administrations sent troops to Mexico and the Caribbean to seize reorganise finances or try to verify the outcome of an internal internal The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 brought these state-building ambitions to the fore. When the Wilson administration's efforts to act neutrally with all the belligerents collapsed in 1917, the government went into war determined to turn the nation into an effective social machine for its promotion. Manpower was recruited through a wartime draft. Funds were raised through income tax taxes and a public crusade for war bond sales, orchestrated with the best techniques that advertisers and psychologists experts could have done. The nation's railways were temporarily nationalized to coordinate transportation; farmers were organized for war production; The War Industries Board undertook to coordinate industrial production; worker representation rights were granted to increase production and morale; social workers and psychologists committed themselves to resolving and facilitating the transition to war for the nearly three million new military recruits. It was only thirteen months between the arrival of U.S. troops in France in October 1917 and the truce, but the war gave the Americans a model for an effective mobilization of resources in a common cause that early New Dealers, especially would remember. The First World War gave Americans their first vision of a more effectively managed international order as well. The idea of reorganising the world into more efficient management of international disputes had many sources during this period. Wilsonianism, as it has come to be called, was not unequivocally Woodrow Wilson's idea, although he pushed harder for it than any of the other great power leaders who met at the Peace Conference in Versailles in 1919. When the Senate failed to exceed the two-thirds needed to ratify America's entry into the new League of Nations, the defeat came as a major blow to progressives. But the use of the label isolationist for the period hides the increased role that the United States actually played in the organization of international affairs in the 1920s. The nation cooperated with the other great powers in the era's arms limitation agreements. American banker Charles Dawes won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1925 for drawing up a more sustainable international plan for German war reparations, which was soon eased by the US government's orchestration of new loans to German borrowers. Although the United States did not participate in the new world court established under the peace agreement, an American jurist sat on its panel of eleven judges. Postwar America Domestic, the break between prewar and postwar seemed much sharper than on the international stage. The year 1919, when the war economic machine earth suddenly to a halt, was one of the most elusive years of the twentieth century. Demobilization untapped a wave of labor strikes unprecedented in their scope the nature of their requirements. Workers tried to extend their wartime gains against employers who were determined to drive back unions and regain management's power of control. For fear of revolution abroad and at home, the Justice Department rounded up and deported hundreds of foreigners whom it deemed, without trial, to be radical and disloyal. Violence erupted along racial lines as white mobs in more than twenty cities poured into African American neighborhoods to attack homes and individuals. A new Ku Klux Klan emerged in both the North and south with the goal of intimidating not only blacks, but also Catholics, immigrants and radicals. In the wake of 1919's turmoil, Warren G. Harding, a Republican presidential candidate committed to returning the nation to normality, swept the election in a landslide. Vice President Calvin Coolidge succeeded Harding after his death in 1923. Still, many of the managerial ambitions of previous years survived into the new era. Coolidge, who retained the presidency in 1924, was not a friend of energetic government, but his commerce secretary and successor, engineer Herbert Hoover, held far more ambitious ideas about the role of government in promoting business and public purposes than he is generally credited with. The massive Hoover Dam public works project was a product of coolidge and hoover administrations; The main Depression-era agency for financial restoration, reconstruction finance administration, began as a Hoover initiative. The efforts to ban the production and sale of alcohol for consumption in 1919 and the shuttering of the borders of new European immigration in 1921 were driven in part by moral conservatives' reserving of the urban immigrant town. But there were progressives who saw in both measures the promise of a better organized society, deliberately managing its population movements and curbing the wasteful effects of intoxication on labor efficiency and on abused wives and children. The changes marking the period 1900-1929 were very unevenly distributed among the regions and peoples of the country. Southern leaders were not immune to progressive political ambitions. Southern farmers lobbied hard for federal credit systems to supplement private lenders in the cash-strapped South. They turned the system of federally supported agriculture expansion agents into a sprawling network of scientific consulting, crop marketing assistance, and lobbying help in Congress. But southern progressive reform had its limitations. Efforts to give women the right to vote or effectively ban the employment of 12- and 13-year-old children in textile factories or to pass national legislation against lynching, which was met with strong opposition. Although there were islands exception, the south was visibly poorer than the rest of the country, much less urbanized, far far from new consumer societies are being built elsewhere, and inextricably committed to cotton, low-paid labor, and managing its own racial issues. The most striking change in the South was the massive wartime exodus to the north of African Americans, breaking the ties that had tied most former slaves to agricultural poverty and leases since the end of the Civil War. Animosity toward African Americans didn't change in the North during this period when racial pseudo-science flourished in both elite and popular forms - but labor shortages in World War I shattered northern employers' bans on African-American workers, and the strenuous efforts by Southern landlords to keep black labor from fleeing north were not enough to blunt the effects. Nearly half a million African Americans fled between 1914 and 1920. Most were rural people, for whom the sharply defined housing ghettos and racially segregated labor markets of the urban North still seemed a big step up from the sharecropping and codes of Southern racial subordination. They were joined by aspiring poets, entrepreneurs, jazz musicians and rights advocates who helped turn Chicago's South Side and New York City's Harlem magnets into a newly self-conscious, urban, and assertive variety of politics and culture. New racially segregated work patterns also changed the southwestern United States, as growing jobs in farms, mines and railroads drew hundreds of thousands of workers across the border into Mexico. Women experienced the changes of the era in more complex ways than men. Northern middle-class women had played a crucial role in promoting many of today's progressive social reforms. Even before they were granted the right to vote, they had established themselves as important political actors. Working from women-dominated social spaces in settlement houses, women's clubs and colleges, social churches and social work, they undertook to demonstrate women's higher moral feelings and their greater sense of responsibility for the larger civilian household. The campaign for political equality for women changed and undermined these premises. In the 1920s, the settlement house worker was a much less visible presence in culture than bobbed-haired, flapper-clad new woman -more independent, more athletic, more eager to compete with men, and more attracted to men's company. Consumer culture These new women were both objects and subjects in the last major areas of society to be reorganized during this period, industries of entertainment and consumption. Both grew dramatically between 1900 and 1929. It was one of the most important discoveries of that age that even joy could be manipulated. Filmmakers like DW Griffith learned not only to film a gripping story, but through new techniques of scene cutting, to pace and manipulate feelings of their audience. Psychology moved into advertising as goods and pleasures were made to sell themselves by their brands and slogans. Music halls, chain-controlled vaudeville, amusement parks, dance clubs, the glittering movie palaces of the 1910s and 1920s, and finally radio transformed entertainment during this period, especially for urban Americans. In the 1920s, they lived in a culture that was far more cosmopolitan - with its African-American jazz and dance music, Yiddish comedy and screen idols showing their alienation - more sexualized, more commercial and more deliberately organized than any before. Along with the new forms of joy, a new flow of goods flowed out of the economy in the early twentieth century as production turned to mass market goods and household consumers. Preserves, refrigerators and other electrical appliances, factory-made shirtwaists, celluloid collars, and chemically manufactured

rayon, cigarettes and soft drinks, snap-shot cameras and phonograph records, along with hundreds of other consumables brought the reorganization of capital, production and advertising into daily life. The most revolutionary of the era's new goods was the car, no longer a toy of the elite, but a democratic commodity, thanks in part to Henry Ford's willingness to make cars so efficient and pay its workers enough that even factory workers could own one. In 1929, there was one car for every five people in the United States. Already the car's effects on the patterns of the suburbs living, recreation, status, rural isolation, and even sex were acutely sensed. By the end of the era, being outside the new world of mass-marketed goods-like millions of poor and rural Americans continued to be-was for the first time to be an outsider in one's own nation. Almost no one in the fall of 1929 thought the bounty could be at its end. Daniel Rodgers, Henry Charles Lea professor of history at Princeton University, is the author of *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (1978), winner of the Frederick Jackson Turner Prize; *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* (1987); *Atlantic crossings: Social policy in a progressive age* (1998); *age of fracture* (2011). (2011).

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