**Period 7**

**1890 – 1945**

**OVERVIEW**

Between 1890 and 1945, the United States became an international power, while at home issues surrounding industrialization, urbanization, and the demands of an increasingly diverse society came to the fore. As the U.S. economy became more dependent on large corporations and the production of consumer goods, people increasingly moved from rural areas to urban centers where jobs were available. Although these new jobs offered opportunities to many who had been underemployed, cycles of boom and bust created periodic instability. The Great Depression was the most dramatic of these economic downturns, leading to calls for more regulation of the national economy.

Progressive reformers began to call for government intervention in the economy to relieve the suffering of the urban working classes, who faced the greatest hardships. These reformers, often urban middle-class women, targeted reform of both social and political institutions. Other groups worked in the area of conservation of natural resources. National, state, and local leaders responded to this call for reform, particularly after the trauma of the Great Depression, and the result was the transformation of the government into a limited welfare state.

Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal built on many of the ideas of earlier Progressive reformers and created government programs to aid the poor and reshape the American economy. Roosevelt faced conservative opposition in Congress and from the Supreme Court, yet he was able to introduce reforms that made many feel more secure. His programs were identified with the Democratic Party and led a number of racial and ethnic groups to switch loyalties from the Republicans.

The years from 1890 to 1945 saw the introduction of many new forms of technology and communication. Although these advances helped many improve their standard of living, others felt their traditional ways of life were being threatened. These years were a time of traumatic change for many, with economic instability, world wars, and the stresses associated with migration. Conflicts emerged on a number of fronts: social, political, economic, and religious.

The xenophobia caused by World War I led the United Sates to enact a series of restrictive immigration laws in the 1920s. Fears of the spread of socialism and communism also inspired Congress to pass laws restricting citizens’ civil liberties, all in the name of national security. A rash of labor strikes fed the fear of a “Red Scare,” (called this because red was associated with the new Soviet Union), leading to even stricter overseas immigration controls. The nation opened borders within the Western Hemisphere, however, to allow in a steady supply of cheap labor. Although Mexicans were welcomed in the 1920s, they faced uncertain futures as migrant workers in the 1930s and 1940s.

African Americans also began to move out of the South in significant numbers to urban centers in the North, Midwest, and West Coast, seeking jobs and an escape from Jim Crow. This “Great Migration” had an impact throughout the country, particularly in New York City in the form of the Harlem Renaissance, a rich contribution to the national culture.

At the beginning of this time period, the United States took its first steps into the international arena. There was much disagreement within the United States as to whether such a move was in keeping with America’s traditional position as a defender of the colonized. The War of 1898, or the Spanish American War, left the country with island territories as well as military and economic interests to defend in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Debates over whether the United Sates should rightly be an imperialist power would continue for the rest of this century and beyond, although clearly the country was now an international presence.

World War I effectively ended the United State’s long-term position as a neutral and isolated power, though debates over the U.S. role in international affairs continued in the 1920s and 1930s. The American Expeditionary Force entered in the last years of the war, which allowed Woodrow Wilson to play a role at the postwar negotiations at Versailles. The resulting Treaty of Versailles and Wilson’s League of Nations proved unpopular in the United States, and the country spent the next two decades trying to follow a unilateral foreign policy and retreat back into isolationism, an ultimately unsuccessful effort.

The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 ended U.S. isolationism overnight and launched the country into World War II and a position of international political and military prominence that would not change with the end of the war. The mass mobilization required for the war effort effectively ended what was left of the Great Depression. Women and minorities benefitted from these jobs as well. American values came under scrutiny during the course of the war with the Japanese internment, the ongoing civil rights struggle and the moral and ethical questions surrounding the decision to use atomic weapons on Japan. The United States and the Allies defeated the Axis powers through their combined military, economic, and technological strength. The United States emerged from World War II as the most powerful nation on earth.

**KEY TERMS**

American exceptionalism Laissez-faire

Appeasement Liberalism

Belligerents Classical liberalism

Chauvinism Regulatory liberalism

Feminism Social welfare liberalism

Fundamentalism Muckrakers

Cronyism Pan-Africanism

Culture Wars Popular culture and high culture

Dollar diplomacy Populism

Economic collectivism Progressivism

Fascism Red Scare

General strike Self-determination

Imperial presidency Social settlements

Industrial unionism Victorian morality

Internal migration Welfare state

Internationalism Welfare capitalism

Isolationism Yellow journalism

Keynesian economics Xenophobia

**GUIDED QUESTIONS**

1. From the reading, list three areas targeted for reform by Progressives.
2. What demographic changes occurred in the United States as a result of American entry into each of the world wars? How did these demographic shifts affect the economic, political, and social fabric of the nation?
3. How did the United States justify limitations placed on individual liberty during World War I?
4. What contributions did African Americans, Native Americans, and women make to the war effort in World War I and World War II?
5. How did the emergence of mass culture affect the delivery of the news to Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?
6. What steps did Franklin Roosevelt’s administration take to improve the American economy and the lives of workers?
7. In what ways did the depression and the New Deal alter the structure and power of the federal government?
8. What groups joined the Roosevelt coalition, and why did they feel that their interests were served by the Roosevelt presidency?
9. In what ways did World War I set the stage for the outbreak of war only two decades later in 1939?
10. How did actions taken during World War II lay the groundwork for the Cold War?