

## **19<sup>th</sup> century America: Growth and Transformation**

The United States came of age in the decades following the Civil War. The frontier gradually vanished; a rural republic became an urban nation. Great factories, steel mills, and transcontinental railroads<sup>1</sup> were built. Cities grew quickly. And millions of people arrived from other countries to begin new lives in a land of opportunity.

During the nineteenth century Americans developed thousands of products to make life easier, safer or more enjoyable for people. Alexander Graham Bell developed the telephone. Thomas Edison produced the light bulb and George Eastman, the moving picture.

Even with the great gains in industry, farming remained America's basic occupation. Yet it, too, witnessed enormous changes. Farmland doubled and scientists developed improved seeds. Machines including mechanical planters, reapers, and threshers took over much of the work that had previously been done by hand. American farmers produced enough grain, cotton, beef, pork, and wool to supply the growing domestic market and still have large surpluses to export.

The western region of the United States continued to attract settlers. Miners staked claims in the ore rich mountains, cattle ranchers on the vast grasslands, sheep farmers in the river valleys, and farmers on the Great Plains. Cowboys on horses took care of the animals and guided them to distant railroads for shipment east.

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<sup>1</sup>In 1862 the Congress granted land and money to the Union Pacific Railroad Company to build a railroad west from the Mississippi towards the Pacific. At the same time it gave a similar grant to the Central Pacific Railroad Company to build eastwards from California. On May 10, 1869, the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific lines met at Promontory Point in Utah. A golden spike fixed the last rail into position and the first railroad across the North American continent was completed. By 1884 four more major lines had crossed the continent.

For many years, government policy had been to move Native Americans beyond the reach of the white frontier to lands reserved for their use. Time and again, however, the government ignored its agreements and opened these areas to white settlement. In the late 1800s, **Sioux** tribes in the northern plains and **Apaches** in the southwest fought back hard to preserve their way of life. They were skilled fighters but were eventually overwhelmed by government forces. In 1934, Congress passed a measure that attempted to protect tribal customs and communal life on the reservations.

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century America: Discontent and Reform**

### **(1900-1920)**

By 1900 the United States was the richest and most productive industrial country in the world. It produced 31.9 percent of the world's coal, 34.1 percent of its iron and 36.7 percent of its steel. About twenty million of its seventy-four million people earned a living from jobs in industry. Men, women and children labored for long hours in factories, mines and workshops. Wages were often low, in 1900 the average industrial workers was paid nine dollars for working fifty-nine hours a week. Many worked longer and earned less.

Workers tried to form trade, or labor, unions to improve the conditions of their lives. These attempts often failed because employers would dismiss union members and put their names on a 'blacklist' and other employers would refuse to give him a job. Employers were determined to allow neither their workers nor anyone else to interfere in the way they ran their business mainly because of the belief in the "laissez-faire"- the idea that governments should interfere with business , and with people' lives in general, as little as possible.

After 1900 many Americans became "Progressives." A Progressive was someone who believed that where necessary, the government should take action to deal with the problems of society. In response, a reform movement called "**Progressivism**" arose. Its goals included greater democracy and social justice, honest government, and more effective regulation of business.

President Theodore Roosevelt embodied the spirit of Progressivism and believed that reforms needed to be addressed nationally. He worked with Congress to regulate monopolies and take legal

action against companies that violated the law. He also was tireless in his efforts to conserve the United States' natural resources, manage public lands, and protect areas for recreational use.

Reforms continued during the presidency of **Woodrow Wilson** who called his policies “the new freedom”. They were put into effect by a series of laws passed between 1913 and 1917. One of Wilson's first steps was to reduce customs duties in order to encourage trade between the United States and other countries. Then he reformed the banking system and introduced a system of federal taxes on high incomes.

Other laws reduced the powers of the trusts, gave more rights to labor unions and made it easier for farmers to borrow money from the Federal government to develop their land. Many individual states also passed Progressive laws. They forbade factories to employ children, introduced secret voting, improved safety at work, and protected their natural resources.

Reserve banking system was established to set interest rates and control the money supply.

The Progressive era was also the era when great numbers of people from all over the world came to the United States. Almost 19 million people arrived between 1890 and 1921. Earlier immigrants had been chiefly northern and western Europeans and some Chinese. The new arrivals came from Italy, Russia, Poland, Greece, the Balkans, Canada, Mexico, and Japan.

The United States has always been a “**melting pot**” of nationalities, and for 300 years few restrictions were placed on immigration. Starting in the 1920s, however, quotas were established in response to Americans' fears that their jobs and culture were being threatened by the newcomers. While large surges of immigration have historically created social strains, most Americans whose own ancestors arrived as immigrants believe that the **Statue of Liberty** in New York harbor represents the spirit of a welcoming land to those “**yearning to breathe free.**” This belief has preserved the United States as a nation of nations.