**From Progressivism to War**

The Period from 1910 to 1920 saw the Progressive Era fade and give way to World War I and its aftermath. Changes that had been slowly building over the decades accelerated, some even finally blossoming to fruition. The suffrage movement finally succeeded in securing the right for women to vote, the United States went from a debtor nation to the largest creditor in the world, and the middle class continued to grow. Unfortunately, the period was not all forward progress. Racism, anti-immigrant sentiments, and the first Red Scare also marked this period.

**Pre-War**Social

Since the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, the Suffrage and Women's movements had been fighting for equality and the right to vote. Most of American society at the time believed that women's place was in the home, not working outside the home or in politics. Women were seen as the moral guardians of the family and the teachers of virtue to their children. However, the early women's movements used these societal expectations to reach outside the home and press for social, economic, and political changes that took decades to take firm root. By the 1910s, women were one of the strongest forces for progressive change in the nation. They supported and ran programs for the poor, particularly the new wave of immigrants that populated the crowded inner city.

Beginning around 1910, a new wave of immigrants came into the United States. Traditionally the majority of immigration came from Western and Northern Europe, countries that were traditionally Protestant and often spoke English. This new wave of immigration tended to come from the Southern and Eastern countries of Europe. Often Catholic and generally not English speaking, these new immigrants often had a more difficult time assimilating into mainstream American culture. They faced some of the same struggles that Asian immigrants traditionally felt on the West Coast.

With few resources, these new immigrants tended to settle into ethnic neighborhoods where they found support through cultural ties to their departed homelands. Ghettos developed and poorly built tenement houses were erected in the oldest, poorest sections of cities like New York. As future President Theodore Roosevelt observed, the inner city was a dangerous, derelict place to live. Crime was high, social and municipal services were unreliable or nonexistent, and there were few building or safety codes to ensure that tenement houses and factories were safe places to work. In 1911 the Triangle Shirtwaist disaster brought attention to the need for reforms in industry and cities. The factory caught on fire and 146 women were killed because the fire escapes were locked. The tragedy brought attention to how badly reform was needed throughout the country. Laws were passed that improved safety in the workplace, strengthened safety measures in building codes, brought clean water into urban centers, and helped to improve or build new schools in impoverished areas.

Economic

The economic growth of the early twentieth century continued to build. White collar, middle class families steadily moved out of the urban city centers into the rapidly growing suburban areas. It was no longer typical for a family to live above their own small shop and to work as a family in that business with the aim of passing it down to the next generation. What became more common was for the family to live outside the crowded, dirty inner city and for the father of the household to commute into the city for work. School enrollment and high school graduation rates increased as children were no longer expected to be an integral part of the family work force. Although this was not true in the rural farming regions of the country, this new suburban trend shaped the American economy and society for most of the twentieth century.

In 1914 war broke out across Europe. In June of that year Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist. Austria declared war on Serbia and a chain of military alliances was set into motion that led to war across Europe; World War I had begun. For the United States, the war was an economic boon. The demand for war materiel and food skyrocketed and the United States was willing to supply either side of the conflict. As a result, manufacturing and farming exploded, hardly able to keep up with demand. This drew more people off of rural farming and into urban industrial areas, accelerating what had already been happening for decades. Farmers who remained on their land took out extensive loans to purchase more land to keep up with the booming economy.

Political/Diplomatic

Essential to the American economic boom of World War I was the "neutral" status of the United States. Officially the US was a neutral nation during the conflict which, according to international agreement meant that the United States enjoyed the right of free trade with both sides of the war. Primarily, most of the trade took place between the US and the allied powers of Britain and France, but America was not entirely against making a profit from Germany as well.

Eventually, however, the United States was drawn into the war, primarily by two events. First, the sinking of the Lusitania. The*Lusitania* was a passenger liner sailing the Atlantic and was sunk on May 7, 1915 by a German U-Boat, more than 100 Americans on board were killed. The German government insisted that the*Lusitania* was delivering arms to the British and could therefore be stopped and sunk by the German blockade. The United States denied these charges and public opinion shifted towards joining the war to defeat Germany. The second event was an intercepted telegram between the German government and the government of Mexico. Known as the "Zimmermann Telegram," this message was sent by Arthur Zimmermann, a German diplomat, to the German Minister in Mexico. The telegram promised to return lands "stolen" from Mexico in exchange for an invasion of the United States. These two events together helped sway public opinion. President Wilson asked for and received a Declaration of War from Congress, and the United States officially entered World War I.

**War Time**

The United States officially entered the war in May of 1917. At that point fighting had been dragging on since 1914. Millions of soldiers had been killed in brutal trench warfare. Similar to the American Civil War, military weapons had advanced while tactics and strategies lagged behind. Armies still attacked in full frontal assaults, but this concept was very ineffective. World War I saw the first major use of machine guns, tanks, airplanes, and chemical weapons like mustard gas. Charging forward in long draw-out lines led to the bloody slaughter of thousands of soldiers in a matter of minutes. To adjust, armies dug miles and miles of trenches to hide and maneuver in.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans volunteered and served in World War I, approximately 2 million more were drafted. The spirit of volunteerism was extremely high across the nation. Americans voluntarily rationed food and other supplies, creating "Meatless Mondays" and "Wheatless Wednesdays."

World War I ended in November of 1918. The war and its aftermath, however, helped create the conditions that brought about the Great Depression and World War II.

Social

Although they served in segregated units during the war, black soldiers found that Europeans treated them much differently than they did whites back home in the United States. As the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) and allied troops moved through France, liberating the country from German occupation, black and white troops alike were treated as welcomed heros. For white soldiers this feeling continued when they returned home; for black soldiers, however, Jim Crow was waiting with open arms for their return.

Racial tensions rose following the war. Wartime volunteerism and employment increased expectations that it was time for change. At the same time, black veterans returned from the war and contributed to this growing push for civil rights. White racism combined with an economic recession, high unemployment, and insufficient housing rose tensions to a breaking point. Race riots erupted, the worst of which was in Chicago in 1919. Dozens were killed in five days of rioting. Lynchings increased by more than 50% in the South - many victims were lynched in their military uniforms.

African Americans were not the only targets of white fear and prejudice. The Labor movement suffered political and physical attacks that worked to undo the progress that had been made prior to and during the war. Unions responded with massive strikes in 1919; more than 4 million workers struck that year.  
The Red Scare, an intense fear of communist infiltration into the United States helped to cripple the efforts of many unions. Strikes and unions were often portrayed in the press as the work of communist agitators. Strikes were often declared illegal and broken up by police and union meetings were attacked by local police and vigilantes. Steinbeck portrays this issue in his short story "The Raid" (published in [*The Long Valley*](http://sits.sjsu.edu/curriculum-resources/the-long-valley/index.html)) where a potential union meeting is stopped violently. "The Raid" attempts to show all sides of the issue: the "radical" communist influence found in many unions, the sincere desire of laborers to improve their conditions, and the violent and irrational backlash against unions and Communism.

Economy

Recession set in immediately following the war. As the nation and the world demobilized, the demand for American goods plummeted. Workers were laid off at a time when millions of veterans were returning home looking for work. Farmers suddenly found that they were sitting on enormous amounts of crops for which there was no demand. During the war, the War Industries Board released constraints on large corporations, helping to keep prices and production stable. After the war the WIB was closed down without a transition put into place. The result was high unemployment and inflation. Employers were able to roll back labor union gains as the demand for work outstripped the need for quality working conditions and rights.

For farmers, the trouble was just beginning. The recession left many farmers bankrupt, unable to repay loans made to expand their farms and wartime overproduction depleted the quality of the soil. The stage had been set for the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression.

Political

The Red Scare was fueled by a long held fear of socialism and communism in the United States. The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and their program to spread communist doctrine around the world (known as the Comintern, 1919) increased American fears. This fear was directed at virtually any "radical" demonstration (violent or otherwise) across the country and particularly at eastern European immigrants who were viewed as the most likely source of communist infiltration. Between 1919 and 1920 Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer authorized what became known as "Palmer Raids." These raids targeted unions, radical organizations, and even invaded meeting halls and private homes in an attempt to root out communists and prevent revolution. Palmer's fears proved overblown and by mid 1920 the Red Scare began to fade.

The post war period also saw the ratification of two Constitutional Amendments, both with long lasting impact. First, the 18th Amendment: Prohibition. Alcohol was seen as a moral vice that contributed to many social problems, particularly domestic violence. Although it was later repealed, Prohibition was a landmark of the Progressive Era and played a role in shaping the 1920s and early 1930s. The 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote, however, had an even longer lasting effect on the nation.

The suffrage movement had been slowly progressing for decades and finally succeeded in 1920 when the 19th Amendment was ratified. Under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) had been building up support across the nation by focusing on passing state level suffrage laws. This approach, however, was not moving quickly enough for many women, particularly Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party (NWP). Paul's approach was much more forceful, much more of a break from societal norms. While Catt was using the idea that women were moral guardians to steadily convince people that women should be allowed to vote, Paul led protests, picketed the White House, was arrested on several occasions, and even led hunger strikes - all demanding the right to vote. Between the efforts of NAWSA, NWP, Catt, and Paul, the 19th Amendment was finally passed in 1919 and ratified in 1920. One of the crowning jewels of progressive reform was finally in place.