



# HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY 506

## A CHANGING NATION

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Alpha Omega Publications®

804 N. 2nd Ave. E., Rock Rapids, IA 51246-1759

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# A CHANGING NATION

America changed a great deal between 1890 and 1929. The changes began on the inside, where all good changes should begin. Americans were angry at the corruption and cheating that was taking place in their country. They began to make changes for the better, which are called reforms. These reforms from 1890 to 1917 were known as the Progressive Era.

As the reforms went forward, America began to show its strength to the world. America had been a farming nation without much power in the rest of the world before the Civil War. Now, with its great industrial

strength, America began to act with greater force in the world. The United States defeated the European nation of Spain in the short Spanish-American War of 1898. Then our nation joined with friends in Europe to fight Germany in World War I. American soldiers made the difference and Germany was defeated.

After the war, America went wild. People spent money freely, drank illegal alcohol, changed the way they dressed, and played. This time was called the Roaring Twenties and it lasted until 1929. This LIFEPAC® will cover all these American changes.

## OBJECTIVES

**Read these objectives.** The objectives tell you what you should be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAC.

When you have finished this LIFEPAC, you should be able to:

1. Describe the Progressive reforms and the people who led them.
2. Describe the events and importance of the Spanish-American War.
3. Describe the course of World War I and explain why America became involved.
4. Explain how America reacted after World War I and why the peace was a bad one.
5. Explain what life was like in America in the Roaring Twenties.
6. Explain how the Stock Market Crash of 1929 happened and how it started the Great Depression.

## VOCABULARY

**Study these new words.** Learning the meanings of these words is a good study habit and will improve your understanding of this LIFEPAC.

**armistice** (är' mə stis). A stop in warfare; temporary peace

**bid** (bid). An offer to pay a certain price

**cavalry** (kav' əl rē). Soldiers fighting on horseback

**communist** (kəm' yə nist). A type of government system in which most or all property is owned by the state and, supposedly, shared by all

**credit** (kred' it). A trust in a person's ability and intention to pay in the future

**decade** (dek' əd). Ten years

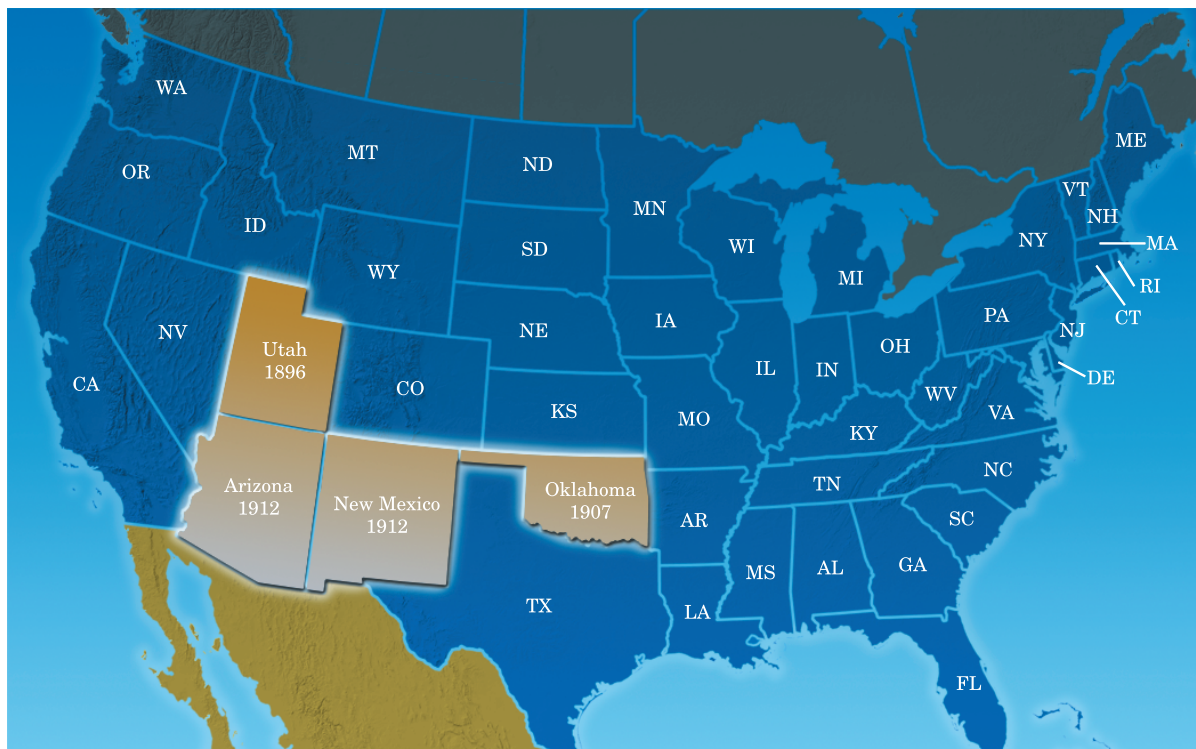
**dictator** (dik' tātər). A person who rules, using complete authority

**dues** (düz). The amount of money it costs to be a member of a club or organization

**front** (frunt). The place where fighting is going on during a war  
**heir** (er). A person who has the right to someone's property or title after the death of its owner  
**ideal** (îdē' əl). The goal or aim of a project or effort  
**intercept** (in' tər sept'). To take, seize or stop on the way from one place to another  
**invest** (in vest'). To use money to buy something which will produce a profit or an income or both  
**lottery** (lot' ərē). A way of choosing by chance  
**maim** (mām). To cut off or make useless a part of the body, such as an arm, leg, finger, toe, or eye; injure seriously; cripple  
**mine** (mîn). A small bomb placed in or under water, or buried just beneath the ground, to explode and destroy enemy shipping, troops or equipment  
**negotiate** (ni gō' shē āt). To talk over and arrange terms  
**press** (pres). Newspapers, magazines, radio and television and the people who report the news for them  
**rebate** (rē' bāt). The return of part of the money paid for something  
**register** (rej' ə stər). To have one's name written in a list or record  
**speculate** (spek' yə lāt). To buy or sell when there is a large risk  
**strike** (strîk). To stop work to get better pay, shorter hours or to force an employer to meet some other demand

**Note:** These words appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used in this LIFE PAC. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, review the definition.

**Pronunciation Key:** hat, âge, câre, fâr; let, êqual, têrm; it, îce; hot, ôpen, ôrder; oil; out; cup, pût, rûle; child; long; thin; /ʒh/ for then; /zh/ for measure; /ə/ represents /a/ in about, /e/ in taken, /i/ in pencil /o/ in lemon, and /u/ in circus.



**THE UNITED STATES IN 1929**

# I. THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

The *Progressive Movement* was the name of a large group of reforms around the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. These reforms happened because ordinary Americans were angry at all of the corruption after the Civil War. They began to vote for honest men who promised to change things and the changes came. In the

Progressive Era, dishonest politicians were put in jail, changes were made to prevent stealing from the government, the railroads were controlled, trusts were broken apart, and laws were passed to protect workers. America showed it could change its laws as it changed from a farming nation into an industrial nation.

**Review these objectives.** When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Describe the Progressive reforms and the people who led them.
2. Describe the events and importance of the Spanish-American War.

**Restudy these words.**

armistice  
dues  
press

bid  
mine  
rebate

cavalry  
negotiate  
strike

## Reform

**City Reforms.** Cities in the 1890s were a mess. Most cities were run by political bosses. These bosses sold contracts for things like supplying electricity, picking up trash, and cleaning the streets to whoever paid the biggest bribe. If the electricity stopped or the trash was not picked up, the boss did not care as long as he got his bribe. However, the people who had to live in the cities did care and they began to do something about it.

The first reforms came in the cities as honest men came forward to run for office. They were sick of the corruption and promised changes. Once they were elected, they forced businesses to make public **bids** for city contracts. Businesses that did not provide the services they promised lost their contracts, so they started doing a better job.

The reformers also built parks for the people of the city to enjoy, schools for their

children, and fired policemen who took bribes. They changed the way taxes were assessed so that rich people, who had not paid full taxes before, had to pay their fair share. They changed the way people were chosen to run for office so that rich bosses could not control who got elected. They made city governments more honest and more responsible all over the nation.

The reformers also made the cities safer. They passed building codes that made apartments safer by requiring fire exits and inspections of the electrical wiring. Police and fire protection were improved. Clean water was provided for the people to drink. Hospitals were improved. Thus, the reforms made the cities better places to live.

**State Reforms.** The success reformers had in the cities encouraged them to work for changes in state government, too. The best

example of Progressive reform in a state was in Wisconsin. Before reforms began, the Wisconsin state government was controlled by the large state railroad corporations. Progressive governor Robert LaFollette changed that after he was elected in 1900.

LaFollette set up open voting in the Republican and Democratic parties to choose candidates. That stopped the railroad bosses from just choosing whom they wanted. This was called a *primary election*, and it is still the way most candidates are chosen in America today.

The Wisconsin governor also forced the railroad to pay taxes on the full value of their property. He set up government boards to control the prices charged by the railroads and investigate wrongdoing. He set up civil service reform for state jobs, too. Other reforms included *recall elections*, where the voters could remove a politician they did not want in office any more, and *referendums*, where the people could force the government to make a certain law they wanted. These state reforms swept across the nation in the early 1900s.

**Other Reforms.** People in America began to want many changes once they realized that the government was going to listen to them. Writers called “Muckrakers” wrote stories about the many things that were wrong in America, and the public pushed for more changes. The writers found evidence of cheating by politicians and businessmen. The evidence was then used to arrest them or at least stop them from doing more. Laws were passed to stop children from working in factories and to shorten the number of hours worked by the men and women. Other laws forced businesses that handled food to keep it clean and fresh. People were forced to stop selling fake medicines, and many states began to forbid the sale of alcoholic drinks like whiskey.

**Unions.** Today in America workers are usually treated with a certain amount of respect by their employers. They can expect to be paid a fair wage. They get a certain number



#### **A BOY WORKING AT AN OYSTER FACTORY**

of days each year that they will be paid if they are sick or go on vacation. Many large employers have pension plans to provide for workers when they are too old to work and medical plans to pay for doctor bills. The standard working day is 8 hours long, and many workers get paid higher wages for any hours they have to work over that. None of these things were common during the Gilded Age. It was the work of the Progressive reformers and unions that made all these things possible for American workers.

Unions are groups formed by workers to get better pay and working conditions. The workers all agree to let the one person from the union **negotiate** with the factory owners to set the pay for everyone. If the owner does not give the workers what they want, then they all go on **strike**. An employer has no trouble if one worker refuses to work, but he has lots of trouble if all the workers refuse at the same time. This forces him to pay attention to what the workers want.

Unions had a hard time getting started in America. Rich industrialists did not want to pay workers very much. They realized that unions and strikes could force them to pay better wages, so the owners tried hard to stop