

Period 7: 1890-1945

AP US History ■ Period 7

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What we will cover

- 1 Imperialism and the Spanish-American War
- 2 The Progressive Era
- 3 World War I and Its Aftermath
- 4 The 1920s: Mass Culture and Backlash
- 5 Depression and the New Deal
- 6 The Second World War



Imperialism and the Spanish-American War

Period 7 runs from 1890 to 1945 – the longest and densest period. Three storylines run through it: the growth of federal power in the economy, the rise of mass culture and the arguments it provoked, and the country's move to global power.

Victory in the **Spanish-American War** gave the United States overseas possessions and forced a genuine argument.

Why the United States looked outward

Territorial ambitions

New **territorial ambitions** grew from a search for markets, naval strategy, and beliefs about a national mission.

A war that settled it

Victory in the **Spanish-American War** left the United States with overseas possessions – and with an argument it could no longer avoid.

The argument

Was a republic founded against empire now running one? The debate split both parties.

Motive, opportunity, consequence: markets and navy explain the *want*; 1898 explains the *moment*.

The debate over empire

FOR EXPANSION

- markets and coaling stations for a trading power
- a naval strategy that needs bases
- a claimed civilising mission

AGAINST IT

- ruling people without their consent
- contradicts the republic's own founding
- the cost of holding territory
- racial objections to incorporating new populations

Both sides argue from **American principles** – which is why this is a debate about what the country is, and why it did not end in 1898



The Progressive Era

The United States continued its transition from a rural, agricultural economy to an **urban, industrial** one, and **Progressives** responded to the problems that came with it.

- Use **expertise and evidence** to diagnose social problems – the work of muckraking journalists and social surveys.
- Use **government** to fix them: regulation of food, drugs, working conditions, and monopolies.
- Reform **politics itself** through the direct primary, the initiative and referendum, and direct election of senators.

The Progressive Era, continued

Its limits are examinable too.

Progressive reform largely excluded African Americans, and some Progressives supported segregation and immigration restriction.

Progressivism was a method, not a programme

not a single programme a **broad reform impulse** whose adherents disagreed on almost every goal

but consistent methods expose the problem, gather evidence, and legislate

journalism muckrakers documented conditions in tenements, factories and meatpacking plants

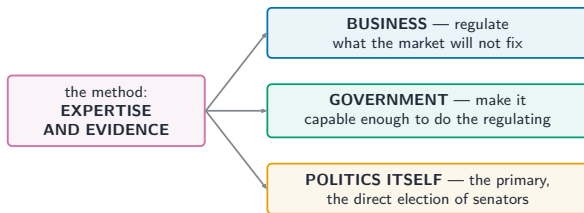
expertise trained professionals and commissions replacing patronage

government at every level city, state and finally federal – the laboratory-of-the-states pattern

who was left out most progressives accepted or extended segregation, and many supported immigration restriction

Ask “by what **method**?” rather than “for what goal?” That is what makes a set of contradictory reformers one movement.

A shared method, not a shared list of laws



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World War I and Its Aftermath

Entry into the **First World War** mobilised the economy and expanded federal power, but it also **intensified debates about the nation's role in the world** and about civil liberties at home, where dissent was prosecuted.

The war triggered the **Great Migration**, as African Americans moved north for wartime industrial jobs, reshaping northern cities and politics.

After the war: unilateral, not isolated

Rejecting the League

The Senate refused the League of Nations – the United States would not bind itself to collective security.

Still engaged

It stayed **economically engaged abroad**: loans, trade and reparations arrangements ran right through the 1920s.

The word to use

Unilateral foreign policy : acting alone and on its own terms – which is not the same as withdrawing.

“Isolationism” is the loose word; **unilateral** is the accurate one, and the distinction is worth a sentence in an essay.



The 1920s: Mass Culture and Backlash

Innovations in communication and technology – radio, film, mass-circulation magazines, and the automobile – contributed to the growth of **mass culture**, which increasingly set national tastes.

- **Immigration restriction** through national-origins quotas.
- Conflict over **religion and science**, and over **prohibition**.
- A revived **Ku Klux Klan** and organised nativism.
- The **Harlem Renaissance** and the "New Woman" as assertions of new cultural identities.

The 1920s: mass culture and backlash, continued

A NATIONAL MASS CULTURE

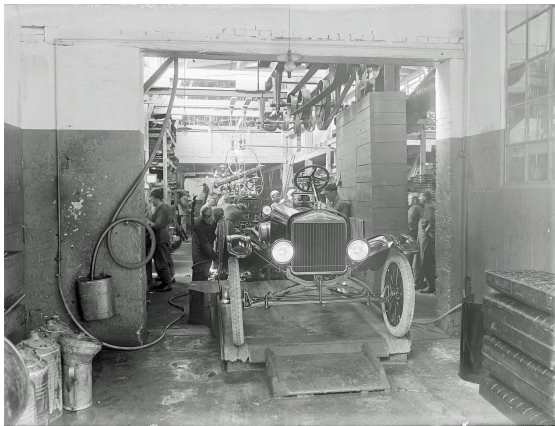
radio, film and the car
new roles and freedoms for women
the **Harlem Renaissance**

AND THE REACTION TO IT

immigration restriction
religion against science; **prohibition**
the revived **Ku Klux Klan**

One decade, not two halves. The **sharp divisions** are the answer to a 1920s prompt – naming only the jazz or only the Klan answers half of it

The Ford assembly line, 1923



The Ford assembly line, 1923 -
mass production is what made
a mass culture affordable



Relief, recovery, reform – three different purposes

An alphabet soup of agencies cannot be argued with. Sort them by **purpose** and the New Deal becomes an argument:

- **Relief** – *help people now*: the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, direct federal aid to the states.
- **Recovery** – *restart the economy*: the Agricultural Adjustment Act to raise farm prices, the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Tennessee Valley Authority.
- **Reform** – *stop it happening again*: Social Security, the Wagner Act's right to organise, the FDIC and the SEC.

The CED's own verdict: the New Deal **did not end the Depression**, but the **re-form** column outlived it – and with it the expectation that government answers for the economy.

Who pushed Roosevelt further

The New Deal

Franklin Roosevelt's **New Deal** attacked the Depression through **relief**, **recovery** and **reform**.

Pressure from outside

Radical, union, and populist movements – Huey Long's share-the-wealth plan, the Townsend pension movement, a newly militant labour movement – pushed him toward more extensive measures.

The result

That pressure is why the *second* New Deal (1935) went further: Social Security, the Wagner Act, the WPA.

The New Deal was not one plan handed down; it was revised under pressure – which is exactly the kind of causation an essay can argue.

Relief, recovery, reform – three different purposes, in detail

RELIEF

help people now

- Civilian Conservation Corps - jobs for young men
- Works Progress Administration - public works jobs
- Federal Emergency Relief - direct aid to states

RECOVERY

restart the economy

- Agricultural Adjustment Act - raise farm prices
- National Industrial Recovery Act - codes for industry
- Tennessee Valley Authority - power and development

REFORM

stop it happening again

- Social Security Act - pensions and unemployment
- Wagner Act - the right to organise a union
- FDIC and SEC - bank deposits and stock markets

The New Deal did NOT end the Depression - but it left a permanent legacy of reform
radical, union and populist pressure is what pushed Roosevelt toward the wider measures

The New Deal sorted by purpose: **relief** helps people now, **recovery** restarts the economy, **reform** stops it happening again.



The Second World War

Americans viewed the war as a fight for the **survival of freedom and democracy** against fascist aggression – a framing that shaped what the government could ask of its citizens, and what they asked back.

Mass mobilization is the hinge of the period: it ended the Great Depression, and it changed the society that fought the war.

What the war did that the New Deal could not

the New Deal, 1933–39

relief, recovery and reform. It cushioned the collapse and rewrote the rules, but unemployment stayed high through the decade

war production, 1941–45

government orders on a scale no peacetime programme had attempted – this **mass mobilization** is what **ended** the Depression

what outlived both

the **reform** column: Social Security, federal deposit insurance, the right to organise a union

the claim to argue

the New Deal's legacy is **institutional**, not economic – and saying so is the CED's own verdict, not a concession

Two federal responses to the same crisis, and only the second one ended it. An essay that compares them has a causal argument rather than a list of agencies.

The Second World War, continued

Victory came through **Allied cooperation** , industrial capacity, and technological advantage, ending with the use of atomic weapons against Japan.

Mass mobilization changed American society

how Americans saw it

a fight for the **survival of freedom and democracy** against fascist aggression

mass mobilization

helped **end the Great Depression** – war production did what the New Deal had not

women and minorities

mobilisation and military service opened opportunities to improve their status, though wartime gains were often reversed after 1945

migration

from **Mexico** and elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere increased to meet labour demand

Japanese Americans

forcibly **interned** – the period's clearest case of wartime rights denied

after the war

a **unilateral foreign policy** after WWI had rejected the League; after WWII the United States led the institutions instead

The war's domestic effects are as examinable as its diplomacy. Note both the opening of opportunity **and** its partial reversal.



Postwar Diplomacy

The war-ravaged condition of Asia and Europe, and the dominant U.S. role in the Allied victory and in the occupations that followed, left the United States as the strongest power in the world – and set up the confrontation with the Soviet Union that Period 8 begins with.



Comparison in Period 7

The period's reasoning skill is **comparison**.

The most useful pairing is **Progressive-era reform against the New Deal**: both expanded federal power, but the New Deal did so on a far larger scale and in response to collapse rather than to growth.

Worked example – beliefs about threats, 1917–1945

2024 long essay: “Evaluate the extent to which beliefs about threats to the United States shaped society from 1917 to 1945.”

- **Thesis:** “Beliefs about internal and external threats shaped American society to a great extent between 1917 and 1945, producing wartime restrictions on dissent, immigration quotas, and the internment of Japanese Americans.”
- The prompt is about **beliefs**, so the evidence must be what beliefs *caused* – policies and social change, not a narrative of the wars.

Read the noun in the prompt. *Beliefs* shaped society ⇒ your evidence is a list of **effects**, each tied back to a fear.

Depression and the New Deal



The Dust Bowl in the Texas Panhandle, 1936 - the environmental half of the Depression

Exam tips

- Give **both sides** of the imperialism debate; a one-sided answer misses the point of the question.
- Progressivism is a **method** – expertise, then government action, then political reform. Its exclusion of African Americans is examinable.
- Sort New Deal programmes by **relief, recovery, reform**. That structure converts a list into an argument.
- State the CED's verdict directly: the New Deal did **not** end the Depression but left a permanent legacy.
- Wartime opportunity for **women and minorities** was real *and* limited. Saying both is what earns complexity.
- For 1917-1945 prompts about fear or threat, use **civil liberties, immigration quotas, and internment** as your evidence.



Period 7 – key takeaways

1

Empire

give both sides of the imperialism debate

2

Progressivism

method: expertise → government
→ political reform

3

New Deal

sort relief, recovery, reform; it did
not end the Depression

4

War

opportunity for women and
minorities was real *and* limited

Check yourself

- 1 What is Progressivism as a method?
- 2 Did the New Deal end the Depression?
- 3 Name the three New Deal purposes.
- 4 Name wartime evidence of fear or threat.

Answers: expertise then government action ▪ no, but a permanent legacy ▪ relief, recovery, reform ▪ civil liberties / quotas / internment