



## UNIT 2

### Industrialization and Immigration

#### #3: Theme: Change can be beneficial or detrimental.

- Task #1: Highlight important/meaningful facts/points.
- Task #2: Write 7 notes, questions and/or comments from your highlights.

The time after Reconstruction was marked by intense growth and rapid change. Mostly prompted by the Industrial Revolution, Americans were overwhelmed with an array of such new inventions and conveniences as electricity, telephones, phonographs, and moving pictures. Items were mass produced and people who lived in isolated rural areas could purchase the same factory-produced items as urban dwellers. At the same time, big business grew rapidly, mostly due to lax government regulations and thousands of new immigrants arriving to urban centers daily. Immigrants helped the rich accumulate massive amounts of wealth and provided political machines with a source of power. Immigrants not only provided a cheap source of labor, but also posed serious questions regarding American identity. What were the qualifications for being “American”? Who were the true Americans? This question also extended to African-Americans, who were struggling with the cycle of poverty and discrimination created by sharecropping, segregation and lynching.

Life in America had drastically changed by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before America was mostly homogenous— white, Protestant, middle class (with, of course, a large African-American population.) By 1900, there was a growing population of immigrants, mostly Catholic, who spoke languages incomprehensible to English speakers. Before, Americans made their living off of the land and strove to achieve the life of the yeoman farmer. By 1900, Americans were striving to succeed in big business and building large houses in the wealthy districts of the city. Before, Americans had to find their own entertainment locally. By 1900, recordings were standardized and anybody from Los Angeles to New York could hear the same sounds on their phonograph. Throughout the unit, track the ways that life changed, but also focus on the consistencies as well. Even while life was changing, how did attitudes stay the same?

At the turn of the century there were very few limitations that the government put on private groups and individuals. Businesses were not regulated, labor conditions were not either. Tenements and apartments did not have to follow codes of sanitation or structural safety. After all the problems that built up in the cities, and the glaring gap between rich and poor, thousands of Americans felt that the ideals of their country had been betrayed and that the government had a responsibility to improve life for its citizens. The turn of the century was to be a new start, a chance to fix America’s problems. These young, middle-class, white idealists began applying political pressures to their elected officials, knowing that their voting power would be enough to convince the politicians to enact favorable legislation. The government, with the support of the Progressives, passed laws regulating trusts, conserving natural resources, and (you will be happy to know) monitoring the meat packing industry so all food sold would be clean, safe, and fresh.

Many Americans could not vote, though. African-Americans remained disenfranchised in the South. And a full half of the population – women – still could not vote. During this era thousands of women, led by Susan B Anthony and Cary Chapman Catt, took to the streets to demonstrate for suffrage. They paraded and circulated petitions to build up enough public support so that politicians would still feel public pressure to endorse women’s suffrage – even while the women themselves could not vote.

The Progressive movement gives us a model of reform to study. What were the social issues that led to the rise of Progressivism? Who was for reform and who opposed it? Who were the targets of reform? How did the reform occur? But these basic questions take on greater significance with the realization that the Progressives are not only a model to us, but were a model to all reform-minded Americans since their time: the New Dealers of the Depression, the Civil Rights advocates in the 1950s and 60s, and the Peace Protesters during the Vietnam Era. The model continues today as well, with many people protesting for reform on such issues as abortion laws, gun control, marijuana laws, and, in the wake of Enron, corporate accountability. So how did the Progressive model work? And how does it continue to inform reform to this day?

