

Society in Transition: Themes in Modern United States History

Summer 2004

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Course Description:

Specially designed for this class, this course examines fundamental social and cultural changes taken place in the United States since the end of the Civil War. The victory of the Union and the termination of slavery paved the road for the industrialization of American economy and modernization of American society. The unprecedented economic growth not only turned the United States into the greatest industrial power in the world by the mid-1890s, but also brought new challenges to American people and society. The farmers, who had been the backbone of the American culture, faced sharp decline in number as well as social and political status. Despite increase of work opportunities found in American cities, many industrial workers had to endure long and dangerous working days and live in absolute or relative poverty. Unhappy with their social as well as economic conditions, farmers and workers tried to seek relief through their own organized activities. However, their effort ended with little success as the nation continued to suffer from corruption, disease, vice, and poverty.

The strongest attack at the corruption, injustice, and inequality came from the Progressives composed mostly of middle class emerged largely as a result of the industrialization. Well educated, strongly motivated, and effectively organized, middle class reformers firmly rejected social Darwinism, a philosophical belief especially popular among successful business people and some intellectuals, and fought to ameliorate social, moral, economic, and political problems caused by industrialization. With support from workers and farmers, the Progressives succeeded in drastically reforming government at all levels, winning suffrage for women, giving more power to the people through direct political participation like direct primary, initiative, referendum, and recall, and offering minimum protection for workers, women, and children. As the middle class continued to grow both in number and influence, the spirit of reform became an indispensable dimension of American political culture, culminating in the New Deal. As a result, a new American society shaped largely by the middle class was finally born. Such a new social order has remained in place in the 21st century.

The purpose of this course is to go beyond the traditional focus on political parties and presidential elections in the study of modern U.S. history by putting more emphasis on social and cultural dimensions. This new emphasis will help us not only have a better understanding of industrialization of the United States, but also shed some new light on the societal transition in China. It will be considered a great success if more interest and attention would be aroused among students who could draw some useful lessons from the earlier American experience for China's effort to resolve the problem related to farmers, agriculture, and rural areas, handle the relations between government and big businesses, understand the nature and responsibility of the middle class, achieve advancement in political civilization, and build cities and suburbs in China.

Course Components and Requirements:

In order to achieve the above goals, this short course is composed of six three-credit-hour units covering various aspect of the societal transition in the United States around the turn of the last century. Each unit includes a lecture on the subject, reading of short original historical documents, viewing of historical images, and in-classroom discussion based on information received from all the above sources. There will be a short quiz in the middle of the course and an exam at the end. The quiz will have 10 multiple-choice questions and the final examination will be composed of short identification as well as essay questions. A list of review questions will be handed out prior to the examination. All questions will be given in English. However, you can answer the questions either in English or in Chinese. Attendance is required and participation encouraged. All reading assignments should be completed before class meetings.

Course Schedule:

Unit 1	5/29	8:00-11:00	The Rise of the Industrial Giant Railroad: Engine of Industrialization The Rise of New Industrials The Emergence of Big Businesses Causes and Consequences
Unit 2	5/30	8:00-11:00	Workers in the Age of Industrialization Work at a Different Age Life of Industrial Workers Union: Workers= Response
Unit 3	6/1	2:30-5:30	The Populist Uprising: A Desperate Response from Farmers Modernization and Decline From Granges to Alliances The Populist Party
Unit 4	6/3	2:30-5:30	The Middle Class and Progressive Reforms Roots of Progressivism Progressives and Their Ideology Reforming the Governments Progressives in the White House
Unit 5	6/5	8:00-11:00	The New Deal: Finalizing the New Social Order The First New Deal: Relief and Recovery Reforms: The Second New Deal The New Deal Heritage
Unit 6	6/6	8:00-11:00	The Rise of Suburbs: Urban Living Redefined by Middle Class Cities before Suburbs The Rise of Modern Suburbs Middle Class and the New Wave of Suburbs Social and Political Impacts of Suburbs

Office Hours:

5/29, 5/30, 6/5, 6/6 11:00-12:00 in classroom
6/1, 6/3 5:30-6:30 in classroom
Or at School of History by appointment

Required Readings:

Testimony of Thomas O'Donnell, Fall River Mule-Spinner, *Report of Senate Committee upon the Relations between Labor and Capital*, III (1883), pp. 451-457.

T.V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor*, (Columbus, Ohio: Excelsior Publishing House, 1890), pp. 243-246.

Andrew Carnegie, *Gospel of Wealth*, (North American Review, 1889), pp. 1-4, 10-11.

F.W. Taylor, *Scientific Management*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910), pp. 5-8.

Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1959), pp. 2-7.

William Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany*, (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1905), pp. 3-10.

Henry Ford, *The Case Against the Little White Slavery*, (Detroit: Henry Ford, 1914), pp. 5, 27-28.

Optional Readings:

Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.*, (New York: Vintage, 1955), pp. 131-185.

Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Women and the Creation of the American Welfare System*, @ Seth Koven and Sonya Michel ed., New York: Routledge, 1993.