1900-1940: A Growing Nation Essay, Research Paper

At the turn of the century many things were happening that would affect America in ways that would have never been expected. The 1900-1940 era would have truly been an exciting time to live in. Over these four decades Americans would face some of the

most difficult, and demanding trials in America’s history. These decades helped to firmly establish the American identity and without them America would be vastly different. When looking at how these four decades helped to establish the American identity one must look at the events, and the economy.

The first year of the sparkling new decade would turn out to be a sad one for most Americans because on Sept. 6,1901, an anarchist, Leon Czolgosz, shot president McKinley. McKinley was Speaking at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, N.Y. when he received a gun shot wound that turned fatal on Sept. 14, 1901.( Grolier ) Although, this was a terrible way to start out the decade events in America were becoming so exciting and fast paced that the public soon overlooked the death of William McKinley.( Johnson, Deb ) The man that would follow in McKinley’s footsteps was one of the most successful presidents in America’s history. Theodore Roosevelt was truly a people’s president. He fought the for the American people with exuberance, which gave the nation a president to be proud of.

During the first The first decade of the 20th century the economy was very unpredictable. New industries such the auto and telephone began to spring up all across America.( Grolier ). Which of course helped to raise the nations economy, but there were still many economic scares in this decade. An example of this would be May 9, 1901 the largest single-day decline in the stock market since 1803 occurred, with some stocks dropping twenty points. Some factor that effected the economy of this decade was the fact that America was trying to break up the huge corporations know as trusts. These companies would operate monopolies that controlled every aspect of there industry. Some examples of this would be the Norther Securities Company, and the Knickerbocker Trust Company. These companies were huge and very powerful, and was Americans were sick of being controlled by the big companies. Thus Trust era came to and end and the formation of Unions became a vital part of the American economy(Collins, Alan )

Some of the interesting events that occurred during this decade were things such as the wright brothers first flight at Kitty Hawk North Carolina; The first rapid transit system, the New Your City subway system, opens.( Johnson, Deb ); The infamous San Francisco earthquake and fire occurs.( Collins, Alan ); The invention of the automobile. These along with many other events would once more help America shape its identity.

The Next Decade of the 20th century held many things in store for the American people. The economy and events that took place during this time will never be forgotten by anyone in America.

The economy of this decade was once again a shaky one. America was dealing with the fact that times and the economy were growing faster than they could keep up with. One of the key factors that spurred the economy was the Ford Motor Company. In 1914 Henry Ford startled the country by instituting the then high base-wage scale of $5 a day.( Grolier ) This allowed for major changes to occur throughout America’s economy. Ford had set the precedent and other companies were forced to follow his example. This of course raised the standard of living in America and around the world. Another thing that allowed America’s economy to stay afloat was President Woodrow Wilson’s address to a joint session of Congress on April 2, 1917, asking for a declaration of war against Germany.( Collins, Alan ) “The world,” Wilson proclaimed, “must be made safe for democracy.” These and other events played large roles in the economy of the second decade of the 20th century.

World War I and pre to post World War I was the main theme and concern of the second decade.( Grolier ) It concerned the American people in many ways at that time. This was because the country was forced to make civil and financial sacrifices. Also the war left us uncertain as to its outcome and changed our overseas affairs. WWI effected us in other ways too. Our economy greatly increased because of war production and it boosted our army incredibly.( History Online ) Plus women won the suffrage movement because American troops overseas and people at home realized the value they put into the war and their contributions to it.( Grolier ) So congress finally succumbed to the political forces of states that had passed suffrage and to the unrelenting work of NAWSA. In some ways we still feel the war’s effects today. Such as WWII because of the German’s bitterness, the United Nations created from the League of Nations, the ending of “uncivilized warfare as agreed during the Geneva Convention, and the sad killing of millions of men and women from war, blockades, and extensive economic problems.

( Collins, Alan ) These issues concern all helped to create the main theme and identity of the next decade.

The main theme of this decade was the idea of the roaring 20’s leading into the depression. The country was full of good times and rebellion with things like the stock market, Jazz, bootlegging, flappers, high spirits, and a supposed strong economy.( History Online ). All this effected people in many ways then too. Role models were a big part of commercials and the new attitude for Americans. People like Babe Ruth an Jack Dempsey gave the people someone to believe and look up to.( Grolier ) The Jazz Age created new music for people to dance to. New untraditional styles of dancing were created with people like flappers who rebelled by creating new styles like short hair, shorter skirts, and make up.( Collins, Alan ) More economic freedoms and ideas started many more Americans than ever before investing in the stock market, buying on margin, and using credit.( Johnson, Deb ) This was all highlighted by the bootlegging and rum running that kept America wet during prohibition.( History Online ) All this came to a catastrophic end though in 1929 when the stock market crashed.

Some of the effects of this decade are with us still today. Like makeup, dancing without chaperones, credit, and people that are more cautious about money usage. Also because of the crash then and another drop in 1987 the government put computer blockers on the stock market to stop it from ever dropping that low again.( Johnson, Deb ) All this combined made the 1920’s one of the most important and pivotal decades of the 20th century.

The main theme of the 4th decade was the depression that was caused by the stock market crash in 1929.( Grolier ) It concerned and effected Americans then for many reasons. Not only was it a nationwide economic fall, but it caused a collapse of the world market as well.( Grolier ) It eventually effected all Americans and most of them blamed their troubles on President Hoover, because he was President during the crash, and he didn’t know what to do. People wanted jobs, but their were no jobs to obtain. In the Midwest the crisis was worsened by the dust bowl.( Stienbeck, John ) It was all too sudden of a change after the roaring 20’s and the economic boom.

The effects of the depression were harsh and unrelenting. Because of the depression, many people took pay cuts or lost their jobs entirely. Those who had jobs were sometimes forced to move at the will of their employers. An example of this is when many Midwestern farmers traveled to California for jobs during the dust bowl.( Grolier ) The rate of homelessness also increased as a result of the depression and people were forced to live in junk shacks named “Hoovervilles.” Some of these people starved to death or committed suicide because of the anxiety. When FDR came into office he created many government programs to create a better society and more jobs for these suffering Americans. This was the “New Deal” for the country and it started a bigger role and more responsibility for the government.( History Online )

The depression still has some ways that it has effected us into today. The survivors of the depression are much more cautious of money and credit. There are also some government programs created then that are still in affect. A minimum wage was set up during the depression which continues today. Prohibition was repealed during the depression and it continues to be today. And perhaps the most important effect of the depression still lasting into today is the increase in presidential power because of FDR’s actions in office.( Collins, Alan ) Other events that were happening around the world would soon lead America out of its “Great Depression.” However, it was not during this decade that this happened, but in the next when the U.S. entered WWII.

Many great lessons can be learned from the events that conspired in America from 1900-1940. It is truly amazing to read and understand the struggles that our ancestors faced in this bold new Country. Hopefully we can look at this time period remember some of the great things that our ancestors accomplished, and worked through. If we Americans follow the example of the people who lived from 1900-1940 we will be assured of a bright future that places America in the head role of world affairs.

Bibliography

Lost Bibliography, shouldn’t be that hard to make one, because of parenthetical referencing