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Period E

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**Picturing Progressive Reform**

**Political Reform:** During the progressive era, there were many reforms to politics and government. One of the largest advocates for state-level reform was Robert La Follette. He was elected governor in 1900 and helped to turn Wisconsin into a model for other states to follow. Under his leadership, railroads and utilities were regulated, laws were passed to regulate the workplace, and some were passed to provide compensation for laborers injured on the job. Graduated taxes were instituted on inherited fortunes, and state levies on railroads and other corporate interests were doubled. His reforms eventually led to the welfare laws that are put into place today. People that are injured on the job and that are let go still receive help from the government in order to allow those people to provide food, water, and shelter for their families. Along with that, corporate centralization was fought in government in order to prevent corporate interests from abusing their power. Today, lobbyists and corporations attempt to influence government decisions as well; it is an issue that needs to be solved to protect the rights of Americans.

**Women’s Rights:** During the progressive era, there were many reforms to women’s rights. The most important reform, however, was the 19th amendment that gave women universal suffrage rights. Prior to the ratification of the 19th amendment, women had minimal influence in politics. With the Constitution stating that every citizen has equal rights, women took the ratification as a large step towards gender equality. The 19th amendment opened up a whole new demographic to voting; prior to ratification, the amount of the population that voted had declined. It would lead to the Equal Rights Act. Now, voting could occur on a new scale. Today, women play an important role in politics and even have the ability to run for president of the United States. Many representatives from various states are women and do their best to protect and look out for American citizens.

**Temperance:** Many progressives considered the elimination of alcohol from American life as a necessary step in restoring order to society. The scarce wages of workers were spent in saloons, placing added burdens on families already struggling to by. Drunkenness spawned violence, and occasionally murder, in urban families. Women saw alcohol as the greatest source of problems for middle-class workers, and hoped through the temperance movement to reform male behavior and improve their own lives. This is depicted in the central picture, where emerging from a bottle there are destitute men and women in the clutches of demon liquor. The effects on individual health and of alcoholism are detailed in the temperance map to the right. This transcends to modern alcohol abuse prevention campaigns in which the central focus is the negative health impacts of alcoholism. The 18th amendment prohibited the sale and transportation of intoxicating beverages, and while this reduced the level of drinking in the country for the first year overall bootlegging proved to be a lucrative business of mobsters and criminals alike. This led to the supercharging of cars to allow bootleggers to outrun law enforcement officers. Once prohibition ended, these refitted cars were repurposed and raced against other cars, creating a new form of public entertainment that today has evolved into NASCAR (as seen in the leftmost photo). The fear of the consuming effects of alcoholism is what spurred the creation of modern temperance societies such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

**Immigration:** During the 1920’s the growing immigrant population in America was creating social problems, lawmakers agreed, but there were differing views on how best to respond to the issue. Some argued that because efforts at assimilating the immigrant population into American society had failed, the only solution was to limit that problem. Statistics showed that between 1915 and 1920 the total immigration into the United States decreased by over 50%, showing that this thought was eventually put into action (Brinkley 595). The political cartoon illustrates that reality. The theory of Eugenics in humans emerged during this time: this was an effort to effectively grade races and ethnic groups according to their genetic qualities. Supporters of this theory promoted the sterilization of the mentally handicapped and criminals, and spread the belief that inequality was hereditary. Due to that, they claimed immigration was contributing to the increasingly higher numbers of the “unfit” in American society. The picture to the right expresses these feelings, claiming Americans are wasting hundreds of dollars supporting “undesirables” while the stock of Americans that is born to succeed is getting smaller. These thoughts and concerns led to the formation of organizations such as the American Immigration Center, which regulates the amount of immigrants that can come to the U.S. annually and works to help integrate immigrants into American society.

**Business Reform:** In government, 2 acts were passed in order to protect consumers from unhealthy products. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 helped to protect consumers by correcting misleading or incorrect labels on medicine. Heroine, alcohol, and other dangerous drugs were forced to have labels that deemed them “dangerous” in order to warn people of the consequences. On the same day that act was passed, the Federal Meat Inspection Act was also passed in order to protect consumers from buying tainted foods. This led to the development of the Food and Drug Administration. The FDA is an important association in today’s society because it regulates and tests new chemicals and products in order to see if they are healthy enough for consumers of the United States. They also regulate factories and farms to make sure that the conditions are sanitary.

Works Cited

Brinkley, Alan. *American History: A Survey*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007. Print.