

Course Learning Outcomes for Unit I

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Assess the influences toward urban blight in 19th century America, including immigration, political machines, and government corruption.
 - 2.1 Examine political leadership during the Gilded Age.
 - 2.2 Identify Native American assimilation efforts, including the Dawes Roll, land allotments, and the creation of the reservation system.
3. Compare and contrast the 19th century values of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.
 - 3.1 Analyze the impact of Manifest Destiny on 19th century values.
 - 3.2 Describe the allure of the American West, including the opportunities for mining, rich soils, and trade opportunities.

Reading Assignment

To gain further knowledge of the material, please view the PowerPoint presentations below. These will help you identify key people discussed in this unit, important details not covered within the lesson, and political cartoons from the time period to have a view into the mindset of people towards key topics.

For the Unit I PowerPoint, please click [here](#). For a PDF version please click [here](#).

Goodman, R. (2003). Transcendentalism. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentalism/>

Stearns, P. (1998). Why study history? Retrieved from <http://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-%281998%29>

Public Broadcasting Service. (2006, March 14). Manifest Destiny overview. Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/kenan/usmexicanwar/prelude/manifest_destiny_overview.html

Note: For this reading, be sure to click on and read each link within the resource.

Unit Lesson

Why is it important to study history? Philosopher George Santayana's (1906) famous adage, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," (p. 284) has justifiably stood the test of time. However, in practice, this only scratches the surface. Historical study opens the door to culture, communication, and perspective on the world. This course will provide the opportunity to develop these using past events of relative significance, communication in an academic setting, the application of cultural analysis using multiple academic methods, and honing the ability to evaluate the reliability of sources and information. The activities in this course will challenge you to embrace the settings and events of significance with a focus on discerning, analyzing, and learning how to interpret the world of the past using the methods of today. Additional introduction to the benefits of historical study can be found in an article by historian Peter N. Stearns entitled "Why Study History?" (for more information see <http://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/why-study-history-%281998%29>).

This course will survey the history of the areas that now make up the political boundaries of the United States of America. We will be starting from the aftermath of the American Civil War and Reconstruction and carrying through some of the most notable headlines of the 20th century.

The course grade will be calculated from a series of quizzes, assignments, and assessments, all of which are intended to engage your interest and provide context for interpreting the significance of landmark occasions, figures, and events. Some activities, such as the quizzes, encourage you to work while studying to ensure the retention and accuracy of the information. Others, such as the unit assignments, will ask you to use your general understanding of settings, attitudes, and events to become engaged in the time itself—more details will be available each step of the way.

Before starting any course, it is helpful to take the time to closely inspect the materials available to you. This class will be a “bookless” class, so all information will be found within the unit lessons, PowerPoint presentations, and other online reading assignments as well as the library and various other resources provided throughout. As we enter each unit, you will be directed on how and where to find these details, which will also come with an introduction to the online library and information concerning how to use an online digital database and library. For additional tips on success in the online classroom, review a recent article from *U.S. News* titled, “5 Tips to Succeed in an Online Course,” which can be found in the Suggested Reading section.

Each unit will include an informative lesson in the unit study guide that provides an overview of the different chronological events, including topics of greatest significance and references to readings, activities, and resources that will prove helpful to your study and completion of course requirements. Answers to common issues will be provided in the announcements, but if there are questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact your instructor.

Watershed Moment

An argument can be made that 1865 was a watershed moment, making it the most significant year in America's young history. After four brutal years, the Civil War came to an end. As the nation struggled to rebuild and reunite, old wounds re-emerged with the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, the hero of the North and a champion of abolition.

Change brought with it waves of hope but also negativity. In the wake of Lincoln's death, perhaps his greatest legacies were passed and enacted: the Civil Rights Act, the 13th Amendment (which freed the slaves), the 14th Amendment (defined citizenship as born in the U.S. or naturalized; no state could pass laws to deprive citizens of their rights), and the 15th Amendment (states could no longer deny the right to vote on the basis of race, color, or previous servitude). These ensured that physical factors would never again jeopardize the citizenship and inalienable rights of Americans.

With Andrew Johnson becoming president, a struggle for power began between Congress, which was still mostly run by Northern Republicans, and the presidency. Johnson was seen as a Southern sympathizer willing to forgive and forget what the South had put the country through. However, when the Southern states seceded from the Union, they not only went to war with the North, but they also left the government and Congress to be run by those from the North. This Northern-run Congress would make it very difficult for the South to regain its place within this government.

10% Plan

Before Lincoln's death, he was working on a plan to bring the South back into the fold. His plan was known as the 10% Plan. Eric Foner (1990), in “A Short History of Reconstruction,” tells us, “Lincoln viewed Reconstruction as part of the effort to win the war and secure emancipation. His aim was to weaken the Confederacy by establishing State governments that attracted broad Southern support” (p. 29). He goes on to inform us, “To the Radicals, Reconstruction implied a far-reaching transformation in Southern Society; as a result, they wished to delay the process until after the war and to limit participation to a smaller number of ‘iron-clad loyalists’” (p. 29).

Lincoln's 10% Plan stated that those states that waged war with the Union could be readmitted when 10% of the White male population signed a loyalty oath. Once that was done, the voters in each readmitted state could hold elections and draft revised state constitutions to establish new state governments. Reconstruction had actually begun in Louisiana while the war was still going on, and it appeared to be working. Then, Lincoln was re-elected in March 1865, sworn in, and then killed by John Wilkes Booth in April 1865, thus ending his 10% Plan.

Reconstruction, Reestablishment, and Renewal

Andrew Johnson, a Democrat, would then take office with a House and Senate dominated by Northern Republicans who hated his Southern leanings. Johnson's plan for Reconstruction was put into effect while Congress was out of session in 1865. Maintaining that the South had never left, he provided amnesty and pardons as well as full restoration of property rights to all former Confederates who took the loyalty oath. The Southern states had to ratify the 13th Amendment, and secession would be voided so that the Southern states could elect new state officials and members of Congress.

Seeing what Johnson was attempting to do, Congress stepped in and began to take Reconstruction away from the Executive Branch. The following occurred due to the Congressional Reconstruction Acts of 1867:

- The former Confederacy was divided into five military districts.
- Union troops remained in these districts.
- Military governors were appointed to these districts.
- States acknowledged the 13th and 14th Amendments.
- New state constitutions had to guarantee Black male suffrage; once ratified, elections could be held for governor and state legislatures.
- Former Confederate officials were prohibited from holding office.
- Congress insisted that the new loyalty oath had to be taken by 50% of the White male population of a state before elections could be held.

At the same time, there was still a very vocal divide throughout the nation. Unmistakable factors, hard feelings, and corrupt politics were only part of the problem. As Reconstruction programs ended and the war-tattered South finished readmission and re-establishment efforts, the overcrowded Northeast also struggled with the end of the war.

Jobs associated with the war effort were no longer necessary, but migrations from Europe continued to pour in. The finality of slavery also ushered in another wave of migrants to the North; this time, however, from other parts of the United States—predominately from the South. Life after the war was difficult throughout the nation, as poor farmers who no longer had a place or former slaves who lacked the desire to remain among the plantations took their chances among the urban sprawl of the Eastern cities. Like the immigrants of earlier generations, these farmers and former slaves threatened job security and wages, limited housing, and overburdened the existing infrastructure, causing a renewal of harsh feelings and actions.

Thus began a turn toward renewal. Once again, in the wake of limited opportunity in the East, Manifest Destiny would stir up feelings of privilege and entitlement where the United States, through expansion, would begin forcibly taking its place as the next American empire. (For more information on this topic, see http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/prelude/manifest_destiny_overview.html.)

Frontier of Opportunity

The American West, this "Great American Desert," as Zebulon Pike would label it, would itself become a frontier of opportunity and possibility for those who had neither—no matter the costs. Unlike previous generations who trailblazed the paths to the Pacific Ocean and drove wagons through the Oregon Territory, the war had necessitated great advances in railroad transportation throughout the country.

Perhaps the greatest motivation was sentimental; for many adults, the frontier had been a fantasy of youth. Before the war, children had grown up reading Cooper and Irving and hearing stories about their ancestors settling the American frontier. Even those of the privileged middle class had their beloved Transcendentalists, such as Emerson and Thoreau, who proclaimed the importance of escaping the cities. (For more information on transcendentalism, see <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentalism/>.)

The latter half of the 19th century was a time of rebuilding and ceasefire in the East, but while those hostilities ended, others started anew. For the first time since Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act and the subsequent Trail of Tears, the United States once again set its eyes on lands previously promised to the Native American tribes.

From the 1850s to the 1890s, the United States' claims grew from the Oklahoma Territory to the Pacific Ocean and included almost all of the land in between. "Improvement" would become a weapon of genocide for many of the traditions of the Plains. While the Native Americans had lived their lives based on the migration of herds, railroads required fixed, unblocked paths. Native Americans had also passed down generational traditions of how to use every part of an animal so nothing went to waste. Settlers, however, found the once-ample buffalo numbers shrinking drastically as hides proved to be a quick way to earn money, and the herds themselves provided a chance for sport.

Luther Standing Bear (1928) relates to us in "The Plains Were Covered with Dead Bison" in *My People the Sioux*:

Our scouts, who had gone out to locate the buffalo, came back and reported that the plains were covered with dead bison. These had been shot by the white people. The Indians never were such wasteful, wanton killers of this noble game animal. (p. 125)

Native American Assimilation

This interference did not go unnoticed by the Native Americans. Like many of the Eastern tribes generations before, they knew they had to fight if they wanted any chance to save their lands. Fresh from war, President Ulysses S. Grant did not encourage frontier conflicts but instead opted for peace through segregation. However, by the 1870s, peace was no longer an option.

The Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876 is long remembered for its unbelievable outcome and legendary cast of characters. However, it was but one example of the frontier battles taking place on the land considered sacred by tribes like the Lakota (Sioux). The prize in these lands, in addition to the ample farming areas, was the vast mineral deposits that were being discovered in the newly divided territories. For those few knowledgeable—or lucky—enough to act, the American West proved to be a gold mine of potential wealth. Of course, news of this wealth would spread fast, and, with it, the race began—and not just from the East. Prospectors from around the world would try their luck at striking it rich in the all-too-dangerous mines.

As was expected, the fallout of the frontier battles would still ensure that loose ends were tied—often with Army officers hunting down Native American leaders throughout the Plains as well as the outright taking of any lands not freely surrendered. Still, with the interests of respecting the Native Americans' right to live, a renewed attempt at required assimilation was attempted, enforced by the U.S. military. It would prove less than successful, and a new plan was devised to allot lands equally by registering Native Americans and assigning to them plots of land under the Dawes Allotment Act.

This would fail. It would prove to be a final nail in the Plains culture's coffin; the majority of these plots would find their way into the hands of White settlers. With the once-sprawling hunting grounds now divided into segments of private property, the Plains' Native Americans had no choice but to assimilate or die off entirely. The few attempts at refusal, such as Geronimo's raids and the Paiute Ghost Dance, often ended in violent confrontations such as the 1890 Massacre at Wounded Knee. Before the turn of the century, the U.S. had solidified itself as an American empire by settling the entire width of the continent.

The Gilded Age

American storyteller Mark Twain designated this post-war period in America as *The Gilded Age*, a reference to cheap or imitation valuables. He argued that the cutthroat, greedy attitude of many in the American West was not one of providence, as had been the promise with Manifest Destiny, but a shallow view of the human psyche. While his initial target had been the "Wild West," he again attributed the colorful term to another, perhaps even more savage scene: Washington, D.C. Political scandal was nothing new in Washington, but it had never before been so public. The post-Civil War presidents, in short, were disappointing. Immediately after Lincoln's assassination, Andrew Johnson, a Southerner from Tennessee, was sworn in but did not gain nearly the support of his predecessor. He was largely regarded as too sympathetic to the rebuilding South.

Johnson was far from the only President to lose the confidence of the nation after the war, although he would be the first and only president to face impeachment until Bill Clinton in the 1990s. Former Union hero Ulysses S. Grant dealt with corruption and party politics throughout his administration. Grant would deal with a constant barrage of corruption investigations, with such scandals as Black Friday in 1869, The Whiskey Ring in 1875, the Trading Post Ring in 1876, and the Cattle Ring of 1876 to name just a few.

Rutherford B. Hayes's election ended in an informal agreement, which abruptly ended government enforcement of Reconstruction. His successors either did not live long enough to make an impact (Garfield) or were simply ineffective (McKinley). Democrat Grover Cleveland would be the next big name to take over the office following the election of 1884—despite his own personal scandals. Four years later, Harrison took the office from Cleveland, only to pass a very controversial tariff and pass it right back to Cleveland in the 1892 election.

The American people wanted a stable economy and an end to the ceaseless corruption that seemed to plague each of Lincoln's successors. Through this time came a series of economic changes. They were all geared toward stabilizing the American economy (from new regulations to trusts) and, finally, backing the gold standard (which regulated the value of the American dollar) with silver, which would ultimately be vetoed by Cleveland. This controversial decision led to the worst economic era in America up to that time.

While Twain was initially taking a swipe at political corruption, Washington D.C. was not the only city with significant ties to controversial business during this time. Magnates such as Carnegie, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and J.P. Morgan would use American free enterprise and savvy business sense to build economic empires in the late 1800s—often known today as *big business*. Not shying away from the opportunity to improve its infrastructure, the United States government was very willing to work with these men by making the spending of their wealth on investments and improvements a mutually beneficial situation, including tax breaks and private use of public lands.

While these men, and others of their ilk, competed only among each other regarding available funding and kickbacks, the already wide difference between rich and poor became even more staggering. Their companies, working with near-military precision, proved that economic success was still possible with help. Soon, new descriptive terms also became part of the American vernacular, including *Social Darwinism* and *Gospel of Wealth*, which became even more poignant illustrations of the separation of the classes.

In the post-Reconstruction American South, another form of class warfare quickly emerged. With the evolution of industry, tobacco once again became “king” in the Chesapeake regions, but cotton still dominated in the lower South. Segregation also remained an all-too-common feature. Despite the recent federal laws, there was still a wide gap between the practical rights of the two dominant races. With the absence of federal order, terror was a common occurrence, and Jim Crow laws once again became commonplace to ensure that segregation was practiced by all. Discrimination, however, was not unique to African Americans. Migrants of other races, many of whom had come to the United States during the Gold Rush, also felt similar pressures throughout the nation.

Women, too, felt segregation, but it was even challenging their rights as citizens. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 had made this a national discussion—most notably for the Declaration of Sentiments that literally declared women's equality and the controversial rally for voting rights. However, the war quickly halted any progress on that front.

Feeling snubbed by the explicit male-specific wording of the 15th Amendment in 1869, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) was founded by two of the most influential voices (male or female) of the 19th and 20th centuries: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. These reform-minded women would help inspire women throughout the nation to again take up the fight against other issues, such as alcoholism and abuse, and form other successful organizations, such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).

Progressive Era

Twain is remembered fondly for his humor, phrasing, and philosophies because he spoke the truth in a very blunt and sincere fashion. His illustrations of the American experience remain equally celebrated and controversial, and many of his observations could be considered eerily valid even today. This time was not without a silver lining, however. The last decade of the 19th century through the first two decades of the 20th century would be known as the *Progressive Era*—a romantic theme in contrast to the previous 40 years of

war, corruption, and greed. It is important to recognize this unsteady foundation, as it would finally bear fruit in terms of reform, economic advancement, and radical new ways of life. Unfortunately, no era is perfect, and war was again looming.

On a closing note, it is important to remember that with much of historical study—especially with all-too-often incomplete records and biased accounts—differences and even arguments in interpretation are not rare. In fact, they motivate understanding and are encouraged. The study of history is a living discipline. For that reason, it is important to consider multiple perspectives from a wide selection of sources and develop your own interpretation when preparing your assignments.

References

Bear, L. S. (1928). *My people the Sioux*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Foner, E. (1990). *A short history of Reconstruction*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Santayana, G. (1906). *The life of reason: Or the phases of human progress*. New York, NY: Scribner.

Suggested Reading

If you are struggling with tips on succeeding with online courses, the following article provides five tips that could benefit you.

Lytle, R. (2013, January 14). 5 tips to succeed in an online course. *U.S. News & World Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/education/online-education/articles/2013/01/14/5-tips-to-succeed-in-an-online-course>

To take a walk through the Gilded Age via Mark Twain, check out the scrapbook timeline below from PBS:

Public Broadcasting Service. (n.d.). Mark Twain: The Gilded Age 1869-1871. Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/marktwain/scrapbook/05_gilded_age/index.html

Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

Flash Cards

For a review of the key terms of the unit, click [here](#) to access the interactive Unit I Flashcards in PowerPoint form. (Click [here](#) to access a PDF version.)

Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions, contact your instructor for further guidance and information.