

A SHORT SUMMARY OF UNITED STATES HISTORY: 1900 to 2006

1900 – 1919

In his 1905 inaugural address, Theodore Roosevelt, American president from 1901 to 1909, characterized the early twentieth century as a time of thriving. He asked Americans to first appreciate the opportunity for happiness, savor the gift of well-being, maintain a peaceful existence with other countries and at home, and act intelligently as great men had done in the past:

My fellow citizens, no people on earth have more cause to be thankful than ours, and this is said reverently, in no spirit of boastfulness in our own strength, but with gratitude to the Giver of Good who has blessed us with the conditions which have enabled us to achieve so large a measure of well-being and of happiness.

(Theodore Roosevelt Association, n.d., para. 1)

Although Roosevelt accentuated the positive, the 1900 to 1920 era had its share of physical and psychological struggle. During the Progressive Era (1900 to 1914), “eighteen million immigrants entered the United States. . .” (Mintz, 2004, p. 200). The “promised land” did not quite live up to their expectations (p. 201). Mintz continued that becoming an American meant living in poor housing in crowded neighborhoods (p. 202). Henretta, Brownlee, Brody, Ware, and Johnson (1997) add that eating substandard food, enduring factory and mining accidents, sending children off to work (p. 650), enduring low wages and poor working conditions (p. 653), or even expecting work-related death for women characterized the era. The 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City kept its doors locked all day so that women could not leave early. When fire broke out on March 25, 146 women died (p. 659).

Between 1900 and 1919, physical struggle was compounded by psychological struggle. Both inside and outside the home, new Americans suffered a loss of self-image (Mintz, 2004, p. 206). Within the home, parents and children battled over religion, language, and styles of dress (p. 202). Leaving traditions behind caused anguish, alienation, and inadequacy (p. 226). Immigrant children became “guides who helped their parents adjust to the American customs and fashions, and as cultural intermediaries who had to negotiate with landlords, school officials, and others” (p. 202).

Outside the home, immigrants often received a hostile reception from native-born Americans (Mintz, 2004, p. 202). If immigrants could find work, fellow employees mistrusted them (p. 207). Before World War I, African Americans, Mexicans, and women had less of an opportunity to make a living (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 724). After the war began, German Americans became the objects of suspicion (p. 727). Finally between 1900 and 1910, migration of African Americans to the North began and distressed white citizens to the point of race riots (p. 662).

Black migration occurred for a variety of reasons. From 1913 to 1915, cotton prices plunged and caused a depression. From 1914 to 1917, boll weevil pests plagued the South. The 1915 flood in Mississippi destroyed homes. In the North, industry was flourishing, and higher-paying jobs were available (“Great Migration,” 1999, p. 869). Some companies from the North went to the South to recruit African Americans (p. 871).

Moving to the North had some significant effects on African Americans. Racism was still plentiful although chances of being terrorized by whites diminished somewhat. In the North, African Americans could vote, earn more money, and find a somewhat better education for their children; however, the promised land was not perfect. Such

discrimination in housing occurred that African-Americans had no choice but to move into “ill-maintained and segregated housing,” and many of the jobs they could find were menial (“Great Migration,” 1999, p. 871).

Native-born American women endured their own psychological trauma. The ninety-nine who could not get to the windows to jump watched each other burn to death in the Triangle Shirtwaist fire (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 659). In general, women were considered second-class citizens. In 1909, only four states permitted women the right to vote in any election (p. 657). In 1914, activist Marie Jenny Howe began the feminist campaign entitled “‘Breaking into the Human Race’” (p. 658).

In this decade, African Americans continued to feel what W. E. B. DuBois, “the towering black scholar of the twentieth century” (West, 1999, p. 1967) called the “‘two-ness’” of being African American and trying to survive in America (p. 1969). In 1903, Ida Wells led the Black Women’s Club Movement, and Benjamin Singleton, A. A. Bradley, and Richard H. Cain led the migration movement. The purpose of both was to gain “respect and dignity, land and self-determination” (p. 1970). Between 1882 and 1930, the number of lynchings reported was 3,386—a number that was surely “understated” (Tuttle, 1999, “Lynching,” p. 1210). As Ida Wells noted, “lynching reflected a value system that put white men at the top of a hierarchy, above both the white women lynching was said to protect and the black men it was meant to intimidate” (as cited in Tuttle, “Lynching,” p. 1212). Lynching, however, was not the only terror: Blacks “were unable to choose freely where to work, live, eat, or go to school,” it would be another fifty plus years before the majority would have the right to vote, and they were constantly subjected to violence, job terminations, or arrest without due cause (p. 1212).

A silent film *Birth of a Nation* released in 1915 depicting the so-called noble purposes of the Ku Klux Klan and African Americans as “idling and brutish” sold approximately 3 million tickets and caused the KKK to celebrate in the streets of Atlanta, Georgia (“Birth of a Nation,” 1999, p. 237).

The twenty-year period also brought some relief. Muckraking journalists exposing substandard food, working conditions, and slum conditions raised readers’ awareness of the need for quality of life. Part of having quality of life meant protection from dangerous working conditions. Founded in 1903, the National Women’s Trade Union League helped women to champion their own causes (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 656) such as organizing a garment workers’ union in New York City and a glove factory in Illinois (p. 657). The 1908 case *Muller v. Oregon* decreased hours women worked on jobs outside the home (p. 653). After the Triangle Shirtwaist fire in 1911, the New York State Factory Commission was born, and over a four-year period, fifty-six worker safety laws resulted (p. 659). Between 1910 and 1917, workers’ compensation began (p. 661). Between 1917 and 1918, when American men left to fight in World War I, females saw an increase in employment opportunity (p. 724).

Throughout the twenty-year period, psychological relief would come in many forms. In 1906, the Niagra Movement began: Later it would become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] (Henretta et al., 1997, pp. 662-663). Although Teddy Roosevelt’s 1910 New Nationalism promised that the government would look out for the average American by enacting federal child labor law, instituting workers’ compensation, and setting a national minimum wage for women (p. 670), much of the psychological relief occurred under Woodrow Wilson’s watch. In his

1917 second inaugural speech, Wilson looked back on his first four years as president as a time of “set[ting] our house in order”:

Perhaps no equal period in our history has been so fruitful of important reforms in our economic and industrial life or so full of significant changes in the spirit and purpose of our political action. We have sought very thoughtfully to set our house in order, correct the grosser error and abuses of our industrial life, liberate and quicken the processes of our national genius and energy, and lift our politics to a broader view of the people’s essential interests. (American Presidency, 1993-2005, para. 1).

Although he did not specifically mention them in the address, Wilson, no doubt, referred to the eleven states that granted women the right to vote (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 657), the 1914 emergence of feminism (p. 658), the 1916 National Women’s Party (p. 657), and the new identity that immigrant teens were finding for themselves as they in many cases held onto their own earnings (Mintz, 2004, p. 210) and began to attend social events, date, and acquire an education (p. 211).

Oddly enough, even after the United States entered World War I in 1917, Wilson was able to unite the nation:

We are a composite and cosmopolitan people. We are the blood of all the nations that are at war. The current of our thoughts as well as the currents of our trade run quick at all seasons back and forth between us and them, . . . (The American Presidency, 1993 – 2005, para. 4) We shall be the more American if we but remain true to the principles in which we have been bred. (para. 10) [L]et us dedicate ourselves to the great task to which we must now set our hand. For

myself, I beg your tolerance, your countenance and your united aid.(para. 16)
Although it occasionally spun out of control by stretching the truth, Wilson's 1917
Committee on Public Information (CPI) promoted community spirit and patriotism on the
home front (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 727).

1920 to 1929

In his March 4, 1925, inaugural address, Calvin Coolidge commented on a
country trying to put war out of its mind. America, he argued, must be fair, just,
reasonable, sound, prosperous, and ready to move on:

If we expect others to rely on our fairness and justice we must show that we rely
on their fairness and justice. (para. 6) The weight of our enormous influence must
be cast upon the side of a reign not of force but of law and trial, not by battle but
by reason. (para. 8) Our program is never to oppress, but always to assist. (para.
11) As they always do when they have a fair chance, the people demonstrated
that they are sound and are determined to have a sound government. (para. 13)
The encouraging feature of our country is not that it has reached its destination,
but that it has overwhelmingly expressed its determination to proceed in the
right direction. (para. 22)

Unlike certain other decades, struggle in the 1920s was less prominent. The
United States Department of State Bureau of International Information (2005, November)
reported that from 1921 to 1923, the economy under Warren Harding's leadership was
not fairing well ("War Prosperity," para. 17). Farmers experienced less prosperity than
the rest of society came to enjoy (para. 22). The newest immigrants from Russia, Poland,

Greece, and Italy experienced the most brutal of working conditions (para. 25). American children continued to experience high death rates (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 743).

Psychological struggle ranged from mild to severe. Parents of the 1920s worried about the “psychology of childrearing” (Mintz, 2004, p. 219). The United States Department of State Bureau of International Information (2005, November) reported that immigrants felt the wrath of being unwanted (“War, Prosperity,” para. 25). Perhaps no one experienced more fear and turmoil than African Americans as the Ku Klux Klan had three million members at this time (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 759).

The Tulsa Riot of 1921 was only one example of strife that African Americans endured in the 1920s. When a white elevator operator claimed that a teenage black man Dick Rowland assaulted her, Rowland was arrested. Crowds gathered at the courthouse, and black citizens who had previously armed themselves to protect against frequent Ku Klux Klan activity in the vicinity gathered to try to help the local sheriff protect Rowland. Infuriated at the sight of armed black men, a white man in the crowd provoked shootings, home burnings, and calling of the National Guard. Three hundred died (Myers, 1997, “Tulsa Riot of 1921,” 1999, p. 1893).

For the most part, however, the 1920s proceeded in the direction of prosperity. Physical relief occurred in many forms. Congress pledged in excess of one million dollars for “well-baby clinics, education programs, and visiting nurse projects” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 743). The average worker saw a reduction in the work week (p. 745). Although the average number of hours the average male worked in one week hovered between 58.5 and 50 in the first two decades of the twentieth century, by 1924, those hours had been reduced to 48 (Whaples, 2001, para. 6). New products such as sewing machines, washing

machines, irons, vacuum cleaners (Henretta, p. 748), and automobiles (p. 740) promised to improve quality of life.

Quality of life improved in other less tangible ways as well. Adults and children experienced a great deal of psychological relief. Harding and Coolidge had promised a return to “normalcy,” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 741), a term that can be interpreted as peace of mind. Since Congress passed a 1921 emergency bill to limit “immigrants to 3% of each national group. . .” (p. 754), native-born Americans felt some measure of calm: Fewer different faces would mean fewer things to fear. Instead of fearing the unknown, adults could enjoy leisure activities—baseball games, car rides, and fights to name a few (p. 739).

For African Americans, psychological relief meant staying alive and obtaining a voice. African Americans still had much to fear from the Ku Klux Klan, but after the 1921 legislation, Klan activity decreased somewhat (Henretta, 1997, p. 760). When one segment of the African American population expressed a desire to “reclaim a cultural identity with African roots,” the Harlem Renaissance was born (p. 762). In the 1920s, Carter G. Woodson, African American teacher and the second black man to obtain a Ph.D. from Harvard, continued to find ways to “dispel the racist myths of African American history” (Myers, 1999, “Woodson, Carter Godwin,” p. 2021). In 1921, he founded the Associated Publishers, and in 1926, he created Negro History Week, which later became Black History Month. In the previous decade, he started the *Journal of Negro History*, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (p. 2021).

Quality of life also improved for teens. At home, families became “more democratic, affectionate, and child centered” (Mintz, 2004, p. 215). Finding themselves

more valued as people, teens began to seek independence from parents, to “establish their own customs” among peers, (p. 214) and to go out on dates (p. 227). New ways to have fun emerged: Movies began to have sound (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 751), families began to own radios, and someone had to fill the stands for baseball games (p. 755).

The stock market crash of 1929 replaced the prosperity and calm with a fear more severe than the conditions Coolidge wanted to escape.

1930 to 1939

On December 8, 1931, Herbert Hoover delivered a State of the Union Address: Wait, he urged a distressed America, and better days will come. From the hard times rife with unemployment (para. 20), drought (para. 21), and lack of confidence (para. 30), Americans would learn to appreciate better days:

It is a distressful time for many of our people, but they have shown qualities as high in fortitude, courage, and resourcefulness as ever in our history. With that spirit, I have faith that out of it will come a sounder life, a truer standard of values, a greater recognition of the results of honest effort, and a healthier atmosphere in which to rear our children. (para. 58)

And better days did come. Franklin D. Roosevelt, president from 1933 to 1945 had a vision of hope, an ability to see what changes America needed to make, and the capacity to enact those changes. As Roosevelt’s 1937 Second Inaugural Address indicated (Theodore Roosevelt Association, n.d.), most of the 1930s was a time of seeing needs and finding ways to meet them:

We [in 1933] dedicated ourselves to the fulfillment of a vision—to speed the time when there would be for all the people that security and peace essential to the

pursuit of happiness. (para. 1) This year [1937] marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Constitutional Convention which made us a nation. At that convention our forefathers found the way out of the chaos which followed the Revolutionary War; they created a strong government with powers of united action sufficient then and now to solve problems utterly beyond individual or local solution. A century and a half ago they established the federal government in order to promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to the American people. (para. 5) Today we invoke those same powers of government to achieve the same objectives. (para. 6). We have set our feet upon the road of enduring progress. (para. 15)

Relief is necessary only when problems abound. The 1930s, unlike certain decades, had an overabundance of physical struggles. In any direction one cared to look, failure was palpable. In the 1930s, “9,000 banks went bankrupt or closed their doors and 100,000 businesses failed” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 773). Nearly a quarter of the population was unemployed (p. 773). Teens had the highest unemployment rate of all (Mintz, 2004, p. 234). African-Americans continued to fear lynchings, as Arthur Draper noted in his 1933 book *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Sellman, 1999, p.117).

Lack of work produced physical effects. Fewer families decided to have children (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 776). Breadlines formed, although women often preferred to starve quietly at home rather than face the humiliation of accepting handouts (p. 774). Unemployment was only one cause of the 1935 Harlem Riot (p. 783). Some families were forced to relocate to Hoovervilles, shanty towns that made more visible the pain and suffering of many (p. 791). Hoovervilles may have provided more stability than the

“Depression Nomads” (Mintz, 2004, p. 242) knew: In the early 1930s, a quarter million youths were homeless (p. 241). These drifters earned new identities as hoboes and “sisters of the road” (Henretta et al., p. 778).

The 1930s also brought a wide variety of psychological turmoil. Several types of loss hung in the air like little black clouds over the heads of men, women, and children of all races. As Mintz (2004) reported, in “1930, 11% of all black teenagers were in high school and almost 300 counties in fourteen states provided no high school for black students” (p. 239). In the South, schools for African Americans “were open just 146 days a year” (p. 239).

Teens experienced a loss of childhood. Their homes, if they still had any, had been transformed from secure havens to Hoovervilles or the open road. Security and contentment were replaced by “insecurity, deprivation, and stress” (Mintz, 2004, p. 237). The 1930s was the first of three successive decades that forced teens to become adults more quickly (p. 253).

Finally, peace of mind became foreign to all ages. Men held onto the little money they had since the depression threatened to be long lasting (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 772). Not being able to work forced men to see themselves as failures whose lives had spun out of control (p. 775). Shame (p. 785), guilt (Mintz, 2004, p. 253), and caution (Henretta et al., p. 776) blew the black clouds together into a raging national storm.

For the most part, finding physical relief was not something most Americans could do for themselves. Some children did, however, stay in school where they were able to stay warm in the cold months (Henretta et al, 1997, p. 778). Franklin Roosevelt had many answers to the gnawing social pains. Farmers received cash, the Federal

Emergency Relief Administration “kept people from starving until other recovery measures took hold,” (p. 800), and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) gave conservation-related jobs to a quarter million young men (p. 799). In 1934, The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, “the first successful African-American trade union,” achieved success when the passing of the the Railway Labor Act permitted porters to sleep more than three hours per night (Tuttle, 1999, “Brotherhood of,” p. 314). In the Second New Deal of 1935 to 1938, FDR created the Wagner Act that “outlawed many unfair labor practices” (Henretta, p. 803), the Social Security Act of 1935 that provided “aid to [the] blind, deaf, and disabled and to dependent children,” and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) that built roads, buildings, parks, airports, and bridges (p. 804). The New Deal “would channel significant amounts of relief money toward blacks outside the South . . .” (p. 783).

Not all of the psychological relief found in the 1930s originated with FDR. The public flocked to movie theaters where escape was plentiful (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 778), to living rooms where radio entertainment was free (pp. 780-781), and to libraries where free items could be borrowed and taken home to be read aloud. Talking to each other was yet another form of free entertainment (p. 781).

FDR, president for three terms, and his prominent wife Eleanor, “restored . . . hope and confidence. . .” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 797). The public believed FDR when he said that banks were safe again (p. 799), and they began to remove the money from under their mattresses and put it into the banks. The New Deal served as an early civil rights movement (p. 810). Eleanor also had a rapport with the public and served as one of the most well-known first ladies in history: Her “talent for combining partisan political

activity with devotion to social welfare causes made her the center of an ever-growing female reforms network” (Chafe, 1997, para. 15). As much an action-oriented figure as her husband, the first lady “toured the country repeatedly, surveying conditions in the coal mines, visiting relief projects, and speaking out for the human rights of the disadvantaged.” Through newspaper and radio, she “communicated to the country her deep compassion for those who suffered” (para. 19). In the 1930s, she also lent her support to the NAACP (para. 23) and “reached out to make contact” with young people (para. 24). As a team, the Roosevelts saw crisis and found ways to solve it, truly saw Americans and lifted their spirits, and provided a warm blanket of comfort to a nation chilled by distress.

1940 to 1949

If Roosevelt began the process of soothing the stomach, putting many people back onto their feet, putting a spring into their step, and giving them back their ability to own homes, Harry Truman told them how to put those homes back in order. Now that many Americans had food, dignity, and freedom thanks to the programs of the 1930s and the victory of World War II in 1945, Truman called for a more free and secure nation as his June 29, 1947, Address to the NAACP, indicated:

As Americans, we believe that every man should be free to live his life as he wishes. He should be limited only by his responsibility to his fellow countrymen. If this freedom is to be more than a dream, each man must be guaranteed equality of opportunity. The only limit to an American’s achievement should be his ability, his industry, and his character. (para. 8) Every man should have the right to a decent home, the right to an education, the right to adequate medical care,

the right to a worthwhile job, the right to an equal share in making the public decisions through the ballot, and the right to a fair trial in a fair court. (para. 11)

Our case for democracy should be as strong as we can make it. It should rest on practical evidence that we have been able to put our own house in order. (para. 17). With these noble charters to guide us, and with faith in our hearts, we shall make our land a happier home for our people, a symbol of hope for all men, and a rock of security in a troubled world. (para. 24)

The greatest physical struggle of the 1940s was United States' entry into World War II. On the homefront, mothers began to seek employment outside the home (Mintz, 2004, p. 260). Maintaining the household and holding down an outside job paled in comparison to the race riots started by housing shortages (p. 258). Japanese-Americans sent to internment camps endured "severe economic hardship [and] physical dislocation. . . ." (p. 269). In Europe, 291,557 Americans died in battle ("Casualties in," n.d.).

The dramatic increase in black voters in the South caused some whites to retaliate (Sullivan, 1999, p. 445). Sullivan offered several examples:

There were countless individual acts of violence of blacks who voted, as well as public campaigns on the part of candidates like Eugene Talmadge of Georgia and Theodore Bilbo in Mississippi, inviting whites to do what was necessary to keep blacks from the polls. In several cases, black veterans were gunned down after voting. Publicly staged acts of violence against blacks increased during the 1946 primary season and included the execution-style murders of two black couples in Walton County, Georgia. (p. 445)

As Mintz (2004) noted, “wartime conditions imposed severe emotional and psychological stress, and the effects could still be noticed decades later” (p. 253). Fathers who returned from the war were not the same, and families struggled to make sense of the changes. Divorce often resulted (p. 273), and children were in many cases “left to deal with their anxieties largely on their own” (p. 256).

Overall, the 1940s brought physical relief in the form of “unprecedented affluence and prosperity” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 861). During the war, jobs were readily available (p. 833). Truman’s 1945 Fair Deal promised all Americans a right to a job, a place to live, medical care, and a decent education. This plan included setting a minimum wage (p. 877) and offering social security and low-income housing (p. 878). The 1944 GI Bill “provided education, job training, medical care, pensions, and mortgage loans to men and women who had served . . .” (p. 841).

Since the United States emerged from World War II as “the strongest nation in the world” (Roosevelt, E. 1963, p. 11), “putting the house in order” would involve enjoying positive psychological relief. Strength and national unity became palpable through displays of patriotism (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 843) and “heavy emphasis on family life” (Mintz, 2004, p. 274). In 1944, many Americans began to pay more attention to civil rights (Henretta et al., p. 840), and in the 1946, a National Civil Rights Commission promoting increased government involvement in civil rights was established (p. 878). These developments followed the 1941 Fair Employment Practices Committee declaring “no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin” (p. 840). In 1948, the United States desegregated its armed forces (p. 878).

1950 to 1959

In his August 23, 1956, speech to the Republican National Convention, Dwight D. Eisenhower hoped for the opportunity to lead the nation for another four years through the era of “good life, good will and good hope for all men” (para. 88). To do so would involve his “three imperatives of peace” : “maintaining our own national strength—moral, economic and military (para. 65), [believing in] collective security (para. 71), [and] bridg[ing] the great chasm that separates us from the peoples under communist rule” (para. 77). Americans should keep the faith while looking about themselves (para. 72), and they should feel the pain of other nations less free (para. 74). A year before the launching of the Sputnik satellite, Eisenhower urged the nation to become more familiar with Russia and other communist nations; doing so, he urged, would bring us peace (para. 77).

Eisenhower’s “good life,” however, did not extend to all. Quiet poverty gnawed at “one in four Americans”: They had “lost their jobs in steel manufacturing, coal mining, automobile assembly, and other industries that were rapidly automating” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 901). African Americans, Latinos, and the elderly did not share the “good will and good hope” (p. 919). Mintz (2004) reported that “nearly a third of postwar children grew up near or below the poverty line” (p. 274). To help maintain the household, many women had to work outside the home (Henretta et al., p. 917).

But not all physical suffering stayed behind closed doors. On August 28, 1955, Emmett Till, an African American teenager visiting family in Mississippi, was lynched for allegedly calling a white woman “baby” (Mintz, 2004, p. 303). The court’s lack of interest in pursuing the case, the eventual not-guilty verdict, and the blatant disregard for

eye-witness testimony “set the stage for the . . . Montgomery Bus Boycott three months later” (p. 303). In the 1950s gangs exhibited more race-related hate and acted more violently (p. 294).

Compared to the previous two decades, 1950s America was, for the most part, devoid of any serious nationwide psychological struggles. Teenagers were changing, and this caused teen crime to rise (Mintz, 2004, p. 293). Teens became “symbols of self-conscious introspection, estrangement, and confusion” (p. 298). In 1957, Russia launched the Sputnik satellite, and America became concerned about its educational system: Educational improvements would surely be needed to keep pace with an apparently more scientifically advanced nation (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 884). Although the 1950 Brown v. Board of Education declared segregated public schools unconstitutional (Mintz, p. 303), confusion and doubt surrounded the event. Although Eisenhower had previously considered this type of action as part of the “good life,” he did send troops to a high school in Arkansas in 1957 to ensure that desegregation occurred (Henretta et al., p. 884).

Unlike the 1930s, the 1950s offered little in the way of physical relief. When life is good, physical relief is less necessary. On the other hand, much can be said of the psychological relief that the era offered. In all probability, the “good life” earned its name as a result of the many forms of relief offered to the troubles of the past.

Not since the 1920s had the average American had so much leisure time and money to enjoy himself (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 913). Mintz (2004) reported that “rock and roll spoke to the alienation and boredom of teenagers in newly built suburbs” (p. 200). Younger children went to cub scouts and other organized activities (p. 282). Since the 1954 desegregation of parks, beaches, and transportation, some minorities could

experience some of the same leisure activities as the rest of the nation (Henretta et al., p. 910-911).

In this “child friendly time” (Mintz, 2004, p. 274), life was calm: Families welcomed the “quieter national mood” that Eisenhower established (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 883). Rather than wanting their children to be all-stars, 1950s parents just wanted children to be “normal, average—congenial and well adjusted” (Mintz, p. 281). Most families had protective parents (p. 276), close relationships, and confidence (Henretta et al., p. 919). Teenage girls learned that they had more opportunities in life than their mothers (Mintz, p. 285).

In the 1950s, African Americans experienced some psychological relief. Lynching was coming to an end. Society was becoming intolerant of such activity, and the Civil Rights Movement was beginning. Lynching decreased in part because African Americans were migrating to the North and West (Sellman, 1999, “Antilynching Movement,” p. 117). The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 protested the “mistreatment of blacks on city buses” (Badger, 1999, p. 1096). In 1957, Martin Luther King Jr. established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference “aimed [at] challeng[ing] racial segregation” (p. 1098).

1960 to 1969

As the 1950s faded, so did predictability and security. Eleanor Roosevelt (1963) captured the sentiment:

This is the era of world revolution. (p. 23) It is high time that we discover our own (p. 24) revolution, understand what it is doing to us, and its implications for the future. There is a general awareness that for a decade we

have been going through a scientific revolution. But what we have failed to grasp is that *if you have a revolution in one area, it is bound to affect all the other areas*. Social revolution will affect our whole approach to education. (p. 25)

As the 1960s continued, the revolution became more physically and metaphorically bloody. Martin Luther King's 1967 speech "The Casualties of the War in Vietnam" addressed the physical atrocities but also the loss of trust that Americans came to feel in their government:

We see the broken bodies left prostrate in countless fields; we see young men being sent home half-men—physically handicapped and mentally deranged. Most tragic of all is the casualty list among children. (para. 2) It is obvious that our government blatantly violated its obligation under the charter of the United Nations (para. 4) A third casualty of the war in Vietnam is the Great Society. (para. 13) The promises of the Great Society have been shot down on the battlefield of Viet Nam. The pursuit of this widened war has narrowed domestic welfare programs, making the poor, white and Negro, bear the heaviest burdens. . . . (para. 14)

The physical struggle could be felt both at home and in Vietnam. Eleanor Roosevelt (1963) noted the "lagging" production (p. 36) and the unemployment (p. 38) on the home front. While the suffering of unemployment is significant, perhaps it cannot be compared to the 58,226 United States soldiers killed in Vietnam ("Vietnam War, n.d.) or the victims of race riots. Although it had dissipated substantially, the KKK was still operating in the 1960s. In 1964, Civil Rights activist James Earl Chaney was killed by the Klan as he rode in a voter registration drive called *Freedom Summer* (Robinson, 1999,

“Chaney, James Earl,” p. 410). The summer months became known for race riots in Newark; New York City; Cleveland; Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Atlanta; and Detroit. In the Detroit Riot alone, there were forty-three African American fatalities (Robinson, 1999, “Detroit Riot of 1967,” p. 597).

Psychological struggle in the 1960s reached even greater proportions. Eleanor Roosevelt (1963) noted that “young people seem[ed] to be losing their sense of adventure, their courage, their zest in the face of the future” (p. 80). The assassination of President John F. Kennedy “set off a wave of self-examination” and made Americans question who they really were (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 933). Eleanor Roosevelt noted that a sense of responsibility was disappearing from the culture of youth, and a “herd” mentality was forming (p. 120). In order to be noticed as an individual, one needed to claim association with a certain group. Movement toward the “herd” often meant movement away from the family: Mintz (2004) noted that the great chasm became known as the “generation gap” (p. 316). Collectively, the herd expressed its inward chaos in sexual, cultural, and civil rights revolutions (p. 312). Counter culture capitalized on comparison/contrast. In the quest to be “free” and different, the young were striving for a new brand of sameness: “personal liberation through musical and clothing style, spiritual exploration, and experimentation with sex and drugs” (Henretta et al., p. 971). In the late 1960s, the newly liberated conducted strikes and protests across the country (p. 971).

In an age of belonging, however, not everyone belonged. Civil rights was still in its infancy. Eleanor Roosevelt (1963) reported that society as a whole was still unready to give the “Negro” equal opportunity (p. 56). In 1965, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan spoke of the “twenty-five percent of black families [who] were single-

parent and female-headed” (as cited in Mintz, 2004, p. 321). Martin Luther King (1967) lamented the loss of the Great Society that would have lightened the load for the poor of all races (para. 13-14).

As Eleanor Roosevelt (1963) indicated, this was the era of revolution (p. 23), and in revolution, little relief can be found. Kennedy’s New Frontier Campaign drew attention to “health care for the elderly [and] urban renewal” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 926). The Area Redevelopment Act drew attention to impoverished areas (p. 932). The War on Poverty did lower the unemployment rate for the average family, and this included the average African American family (p. 945). The 1963 Equal Pay Act drew attention to the capabilities of women (p. 954).

Most of the psychological relief stemming from the 1960s concerned advances in civil rights, children’s rights, and expanded identity. Although Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society did not achieve its full potential, it did establish the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Headstart that formed in 1964 (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 943), and Upward Bound, a program that “gave low-income teenagers skills and motivation to go to college” (p. 945). Through these avenues, low-income children could utilize more of their potential.

Other legislation promoted some measure of security for Americans. Kennedy’s 1960 New Frontier Campaign drew attention to civil rights at home and to the “containment of communism abroad” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 926). In 1964 and 1965, more Americans were invited to join the collective society, to be insiders, rather than outsiders. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 “outlawed discrimination in employment . . . [and] barred discrimination of public accommodations” (p. 939). The Voting Rights Act

of 1965 gave voice to the silenced (p. 940). Finally, as a result of civil rights legislation, American ethnic groups from all nations found license to be who they really were, to “embrace a new identity” (p. 952).

In the 1960s, African-Americans experienced more psychological relief than in the 1950s as Civil Rights was taking a stronger hold. The 1963 March on Washington led by Martin Luther King, Jr. raised consciousness and led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The 1965 protest march planned from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, that became known as *Bloody Sunday* was intended to call attention to voting rights (Badger, 1999, p. 1099). Two months after King’s assassination approximately 50,000 Americans marched on Washington, D. C. as part of the Poor People’s Campaign. King had organized the demonstration to protest housing and working conditions as well as actual hunger of blacks in the South (Aguiar, 1999, p. 1535).

1970 to 1979

In the title of his July 15, 1979. Address to the Nation, President Jimmy Carter captured the spirit of the decade. It was indeed a “crisis of confidence”:

It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation. (para. 32) The erosion of confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America. (para. 33)

Some of the confusion and distrust of the 1970s stemmed from the 1974 impeachment of President Richard M. Nixon as a result of the Watergate incident. Article 1 of the Articles of Impeachment adopted by the Committee on the Judiciary (Watergate.info, 1995-2006) explained:

In his conduct of the office of President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon, in violation of his constitutional oath faithfully to execute the office of President of the United States and, to the best of his ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States, and in violation of his constitutional duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed, has prevented, obstructed, and impeded the administration of justice in that (para. 3) on June 17, 1972, and prior thereto, agents of the Committee for Re-election of the President committed unlawful entry of the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in Washington, District of Columbia, for the purpose of securing political intelligence. (para. 4)

In the 1970s, physical and psychological struggle far outweighed any forms of relief. Most physical forces were beyond the control of the average man. As the Vietnam war neared its end, “58,000 U. S. troops died and 300,000 were wounded” (Henretta, et al, 1997, p. 984). “Crisis of Confidence” acquired a new meaning when shots fired into a crowd of Kent State students protesting the war killed four (p. 980). The death of the confident collective spirit soon followed as the 1960s protestors began to concentrate on their own individual careers and bank accounts (p. 998). The family dynamic changed with “the rapid increase in unmarried parenthood, single parent households, and working mothers” (Mintz, 2004, p. 334). America’s second Depression peaked in 1975.

Unemployment (Henretta et al., p. 1011) knew no racial boundaries (p. 1007), child poverty increased (Mintz, p. 344), and the Energy Crisis raged on (Henretta et al., p. 997).

Psychological struggle developed in relation to a national and personal identity. As a result of Watergate, the “defining experience of the decade,” Americans became distrustful and skeptical (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 989). An identity crisis on a personal level soon followed. Parents were torn between their need to “provide their children with every possible opportunity” (Mintz, 2004, p. 343) and the downward trend of the economy that would enable them to provide those opportunities. Families continued to feel “generational estrangement” (p. 339).

A widespread societal struggle for identity took many forms. Unlike the 1950s, teenagers had no place to call their own (Mintz, 2004, p. 348) and suffered from a kind of psychological homelessness. The 1960s collective spirit had crumbled and blown away, and 1970s teens felt the aftermath of isolation (p. 347). Teens were often unsuccessful academically and had a difficult time finding jobs (p. 353). Even belonging to one’s own neighborhood became threatened when “court-mandated busing of children to achieve school integration proved to be the most disruptive social issue of the 1970s” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 1007).

Adults’ identity also became an issue. Feminism became a heated topic (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 990). Claiming “reverse discrimination,” white males reacted negatively to affirmative action (p. 1010): They feared that their ability to obtain employment was under fire. Other emotionally charged personal issues such as abortion and homosexuality (Mintz, 2004, p. 363) became as visible and vocal as feminism.

While struggle was plentiful in the 1970s, relief of any kind was in short supply. Beyond 1972 reduction of troops in Vietnam (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 979) and the eventual cease fire of 1973 (p. 981), only the consumer movement offered any kind of protection. Ralph Nader led the country on an awareness campaign “to eliminate harmful products and curb dangerous practices by American corporations” (p. 1004).

Psychological relief was also in short supply. Some of the national identity crisis eventually produced positive results. Americans became “obsess[ed] with lifestyle and personal well-being” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 999). Before he was impeached, President Nixon began to set into motion Lyndon Johnson’s affirmative action plan from 1965.

Affirmative Action refers to

policies used in the United States for minorities by favoring them in hiring and promotion, college admissions, and the awarding of government contracts.

‘Minorities’ might include any underrepresented group, especially one defined by race, ethnicity, or gender. Generally, affirmative action has been undertaken by governments, businesses, or educational institutions to remedy the effects of past discrimination of a group, whether by a specific entity, such as a corporation, or by society as a whole. (Finkelman, 1999, p. 18)

Civil Rights law began to put Jim Crow in the past-- *Jim Crow* referring to “the system of laws and customs that enforced racial segregation and discrimination throughout the United States, especially in the South, from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s” (Tuttle, 1999, “Jim Crow,” pp. 1050-1051).

1980 to 1989

After the 1960s and 1970s, America needed hope, guidance, and renewal of spirit. Ronald Reagan, president from 1981 to 1989, delivered. The public trusted Reagan as they did Franklin Roosevelt and settled down to a calm and rejuvenating decade. In his January 11, 1989, Farewell Address to the nation, Reagan characterized his legacy:

That's what it means to be an American in the 1980s. We stood, again, for freedom. I know we always have, but the past few years the world again—and in a way, we ourselves—rediscovered it. (para. 7) We've made a difference. The way I see it, there were two great triumphs, two things that I'm proudest of. One is the economic recovery, in which the people of America created—and filled—19 million new jobs. The other is the recovery of our morale. America is respected again in the world and looked to for leadership. (para. 9)

Compared to other decades, the 1980s appeared to have few nationwide physical and psychological struggles that touched the average American's daily life. Although the decade gave the appearance of stability, early on, company downsizing stripped some Americans of their jobs (U. S. Department of State, "The New Conservatism," 2005, November, para. 7). Segments of the population who seemed to fair less well economically were farmers (para. 27) and the "poor and middle class" (para. 32). Nothing plagued the country more than a newly identified disease called AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (para. 10).

In the 1980s, a term—*environmental racism*—emerged. In 1982, a North Carolina town heavily populated with minorities was to be the new home of a toxic dump. Public protest of the plan led to later studies revealing that toxic dump sites were often created in areas with large populations of minorities (Weiskel, 1999, p. 679). Later, in 1987, a study

revealed that “60 percent of blacks and Hispanic Americans live in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites” (p. 680).

With the exception of the Iran-Contra incident, most of Americans’ mistrust was directed toward each other, rather than the government. In the Iran-Contra scandal, Americans learned that the United States government “had secretly sold arms to Iran in an attempt to resume diplomatic relations with the hostile Islamic government to win freedom for American hostages held in Lebanon. . . (U. S. Department of State, “The New Conservatism,” 2005, November, para. 43). The new villain AIDS caused Americans to live in fear for their lives, their children’s lives, and their partners’ lives. Still within the home, many children lived among “unstable families, neglectful parents, . . . and teenage immorality” (Mintz, 2004, p. 370).

Reagan’s “unflagging optimism” (U. S. Department of State, “The New Conservatism, 2005, November, para. 20) was in itself a form of relief. His presidency enjoyed “one of the longest periods of sustained economic growth since World War II” (para. 30), and he lowered income taxes (para. 31) although certainly he could not cure AIDS, the most significant threat to the nation. In the 1980s life became easier as computers became readily available (para. 5). Americans were not the only ones who felt the optimism of the day: In 1980, immigration reached its highest peak in sixty years (para. 9).

1990 to 1999

As George H. W. Bush mentioned in his August 20, 1992, speech at the Republican National Convention, the 1990s began as a decade of change for the nation and for its citizens:

The world is in transition, and we are feeling that transition in our homes. The defining challenge of the nineties is to win the economic competition, to win the peace. We must be a military superpower, an economic superpower, and an export superpower. (para. 41) We believe that now that the world looks more like America, it's time for America to look more like herself. And so we offer a philosophy that puts faith in the individual. . . ; a philosophy that empowers people to do their best, so America can be at its best. (para. 42) We passed the Americans with Disabilities Act, bringing 43 million people into the economic mainstream. (para. 34) We are rebuilding roads, providing jobs for more than half a million Americans. (para. 36) We passed a child care law, and we took a stand for family values(para. 37)

Despite these early triumphs, the decade had far more struggles than it had measures of relief. Foreign and domestic war, health, and work issues choked the nation: The 1991 Gulf War killed 293 Americans (“Statistical Summary,” n.d., para. 2). At home in 1995, 168 died in the Oklahoma City Bombing of the Murrah Federal Building (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 1049). Pollution (p. 1048), child poverty (Mintz, 2004, p. 380), and AIDS (Henretta et al., p. 1040) caused national concern. Bush’s decade of change would in other ways acquire a negative connotation. The 1990s was the era of job shifting as “lifetime careers with a single employer were increasingly rare” (p. 1031). When “companies deliberately shed permanent workers to cut wage costs and increase profits,” America acquired a new vocabulary term: downsizing (p. 1031). Urban Americans became accustomed to unemployment and single-parent households (p. 1035), and

welfare recipients were given two years to find work (p. 1047). Overall, “the poor got poorer” (p. 1031).

Unlike the 1980s, Americans in the 1990s endured nationwide psychological trauma. The 1980s’ optimism fading fast, adults faced news worries that their leaders were not addressing problems with “inner cities, unemployment, the environment, and AIDS” (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 1028). Washington, D. C. no longer stood as a symbol of stability. Americans worried that the United States “corporations were no longer competitive in the global marketplace” (p. 1032). On April 19, 1995, worry about well-being turned into paralysis as the Murrah Federal Building exploded in Oklahoma City (p. 1049). Although George H. W. Bush could not have known it, the 1990s would be a transition indeed: a transition into terror that would one day dwarf the Oklahoma bombing. The future became a concern for all (p. 1030).

Since the 1970s, American children have faced their own crises: “unstable families, neglectful parents, juvenile oversophistication, and teenage immorality” (Mintz, 2004, p. 370), but 1990s’ teens swallowed the seeds of crisis and often grew a cancerous demeanor:

A 1999 survey found that a majority of teens agreed with the statement that young people were powerless, that they would make little difference to the country, or would make things worse. Other surveys reported that many felt lonely and isolated, overwhelmed by stress, pressure, and responsibility. (p. 380)

It was, indeed, a time of transition as two “angry, alienated” Columbine High School students shot and killed thirteen and wounded another twenty-one inside the Colorado

school (p. 373). Teen-committed school-ground violence escalated after the Columbine tragedy (pp. 376-377).

Although President Bush had high hopes for a new age of relief for Americans, very few vestiges of national physical or psychological relief could be detected. Compared to other U. S. wars, the Gulf War had far fewer casualties (Henretta et al., 1997, p. 1028), and some progress was made toward decreasing air and water pollution (p. 1048). Bush enacted specific legislation concerning “federal standards on urban smog, automobile exhaust, toxic air pollution, and acid rain . . .” (U. S. Department of State, “The New Conservatism,” 2005, November, para. 52). Americans did, however, breathe more easily as Bush helped to end the Cold War (para. 56) and disposal of nuclear weapons began (para. 57). In 1995, 900,000 black men joined the Million Man March led by Louis Farrakhan and Benjamin Chavis (Hudson, 1999, p. 1311). Farrakhan asked these men “to assume responsibility for themselves, their families, their communities, and American as a whole” (p. 1312). The event was criticized for not paying enough attention to the racism that remained in the United States (p. 1312).

In his January 20, 1997 Second Inaugural Address, William J. Clinton called for a new hope and a new day, a time to step forward into the new century with renewed hope:

When last we gathered, our march to this new future seemed less certain than it does today. We vowed then to set a clear course to renew our nation. (para. 6) At the dawn of the 21st century, a free people must now choose to shape the forces of the information age and the global society, to unleash the limitless potential of all our people, and yes, to form a more perfect Union. (para. 5) The preeminent mission of our new government is to give all Americans an

opportunity, not a guarantee but a real opportunity, to build better lives. (para.

8) The promise we sought in a new land, we will find again in a land of new promise. (para. 15)

2000 to 2006

Although Clinton predicted a “land of new promise,” the first decade of the twenty-first century has begun as a land of new terror, new precautions, and new physical and psychological struggle of historic proportions. In his address to a joint session of Congress on terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush reassured the nation that the September 11 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York would not disable the country, but rather unite it:

We have seen the state of our union in the endurance of rescuers. . . . We’ve seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers We have seen the decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own. My fellow citizens, for the last nine days, the entire world has been for itself the state of our Union—and it is strong. (American Rhetoric, 2001, September 20, para. 3)

In the 9-11 incident, as it came to be known, Middle Eastern terrorists hijacked airplanes and drove them into the World Trade Center (U. S. Department of State, “Bridge to the,” 2005, November, para. 65) killing 3,000 Americans (para. 66). Five years later, the nation shrouds itself in shock, fear, disbelief, and grief. Not long after 9-11, anthrax bacteria sent to members of government became a threat: In all, five died, and others became ill after opening letters tainted with the substance (para. 67).

The hunt for al-Qaida, the source of the 9-11 attacks, soon expanded into a search for other enemies. In 2002, President Bush warned the nation about the possibility that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction that it would use on the United States (U. S. Department of State, “Bridge to the,” 2005, November, para. 72). On March 19, 2003, the United States declared war on Iraq (para. 76), but weapons of mass destruction were never found (para. 78). As of March 18, 2006, 2,323 United States military personnel had been killed in battle (GlobalSecurity.org, 2000-2005). Three years later, the war continues, and like the 1960s, Americans fail to understand the point. Usama bin Laden, Al-Qaida’s leader, remains elusive.

Though physical and psychological struggle have been plentiful so far this decade, relief has been in short supply. In 2002, President Bush did create a Department of Homeland Security “designed to coordinate the fight of domestic terrorist attack” (U.S. Department of State, “Bridge to the,” 2005, November, para. 69). Americans watched as nightly newscasts announced red alerts for severe threats; orange, for high-level threats; yellow, for elevated risk; blue, for “guarded” risk; and green, for “low” risk (United States Department of Homeland Security, n.d., para. 1) While the color system promoted awareness and vigilance, Americans appear to take little comfort in it: Some, in fact, have long since stopped paying attention to the distinctions. Since 2001, tragedy of epic proportions has been bringing Americans closer together: Widespread demonstration of patriotism not seen since World War II’s end wraps itself around the nation like an old familiar blanket. But as the war in Iraq continues, Americans grow weary of worry.

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