

# HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

## NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY – 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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The history of North America was shaped by rapid technological and social change, along with wars which catalyzed the development of an American identity characterized by the notion of economic growth, global reach, and the American Dream. The American concept of itself was not shared by all of the world, and in fact, much of the century was consumed in a clash of ideologies, after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia created the platform from which the competing systems, capitalism and communism, could easily differentiate themselves. In the meantime, women and previously excluded groups gained new access and a clear voice and place in society.

### POLITICAL HISTORY

#### GOVERNMENT

**Federal Government:** The federal government expanded its influence in three important pulses in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, the anti-monopoly legislation and the breakup of the trusts into government-controlled smaller companies, in conjunction with the establishment of the Federal Reserve System streamlined and connected businesses in ways that had not been connected before. Second, the New Deal of the 1930s which was designed to combat the Great Depression resulted in social safety nets, such as Social Security. In the 1960s, the War on Poverty and the Civil Rights movement resulted in the creation of new agencies, which administered federal funds to states and communities, thereby further influencing communities.

**State Governments:** Each state has its own constitution, and also its own three-part government, with an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch. There is a great deal of difference between the states. For example, the Louisiana judicial system is modeled after the French and is quite different than any other in the nation.

**Tribal Nations:** Indian nations are sovereign and have their own tribal governments, with an executive branch, a judicial branch, and a legislative branch. They are not subject to all the taxation or trade restrictions of the U.S. federal government, and so are able to sell tax-free cigarettes, establish casinos, and have other types of business. Individuals in the nations are often paid headrights.

**City Governments:** City and municipal governments are smaller units of government, tasked with providing infrastructure, protection, education, and the other services that a community wishes to fund through tax dollars, which could include hospitals, clinics, recreation centers, family welfare centers, and more. City governments have many different structures. Most have either a mayor as the chief executive officer or a city manager.

**Judicial Branch:** The judicial system is a system of courts designed to administer the law and to

provide both punishment and protection under the law. The judicial branch is a part of checks and balances, designed to keep one group from dominating the others.

**Legislative Branch:** This is the law-making side of the government. In it, lawmakers pass laws. In the federal government, the bicameral system means that there is a House of Representatives and a Senate. In many states, there is only a single group of legislators, called, in some states, “assemblymen.” In other states, there are two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate.

**Executive Branch:** In the early years of the United States, the Executive Branch was smaller than the other branches, and the President had limited power. However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Executive Branch has expanded to the point that it intrudes into the other branches of government because it is able, through its cabinets, agencies, and Executive Orders, to pass regulations (which are forms of legislation) and to enforce the regulations with fines, injunctions, and even prison sentences. The power and disproportionate size of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Executive Branch has set the stage for a dictator or autocrat to run the country, with only fragile and dysfunctional judicial and legislative branches to resist them.

### Discussion/Questions

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, populist and grassroots movements have had profound effects on the structure and rights of the government. Take a look at the following movements: Anti-Trust, the New Deal, Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty. Describe the impact that each had on the structure of the government, and the way it interacts with its people..

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## MILITARY

**War in Central America / Mexico:** The Mexican Civil War included many skirmishes on the border of Mexico. Large corporations and oligopolies took advantage of the state of chaos in Mexico and invaded the Gulf of Mexico port of Veracruz with the aim of gaining control of oil and gas resources. For the most part, the efforts of the Americans was rebuffed. The Mexican attacks were led by Pancho Villa, who combined the tactics of vigilante avengers with those of a militia.

**World War I:** The American participation in World War I resulted in a number of military innovations, including improved submarines, airplanes, and different types of chemical warfare. Not all innovations were destructive; in World War I, more effective gas masks were developed, and for the first time, motorized vehicles were used to transport equipment, troops, and supplies.

**FBI / Al Capone -- Prohibition - organized crime wars:** Federal Bureau of Investigation came into prominence starting with Prohibition (making alcohol illegal) during the 1920s. The FBI was unique in that it was essentially a Federal law enforcement agency, with jurisdiction for the entire country, making coordination much more efficient.

**World War II:** Rocketry, radar, aircraft carriers, and nuclear weaponry are generally viewed as groundbreaking technologies in World War II. In addition, new fabrics were developed such as rayon, which could be used for parachutes and other pieces of equipment used during the war.

**Korean War:** The U.S. involvement in the Korean War was a time of technological advancement. During the 3-year war, the U.S. dramatically increased its use of helicopters, particularly in medical evacuations and to deliver key supplies to isolated pockets of military personnel. Battlefield medicine was revolutionized by the use of the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) unit, combined with the aeromedical evacuation. In the Korean War, the fatality rate for seriously wounded soldiers was cut to a new low: 2.5 percent.

**Cold War:** The Cold War, which was both an arms / influence race and a complex spy game, saw breakthroughs in the use of satellite technologies, various types of surveillance technologies. The production of propaganda was an important area of contention, with both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. participating in both open and sub rosa operations. For example, student rebellions were often subsidized by communist coffers.

**Vietnam War:** The justification for United States involvement in the Vietnam War was the “domino theory” – the U.S. needed to help countries resist communist infiltration and domination. In many ways, the Vietnam War was an unethical “proxy war” and one of the first of its kind. In it, the main entities in conflict (Communist China, the Soviet Union vs. the United States) fought their conflict in a smaller country (Vietnam). The cruelty of this approach was not lost on anyone, and it was a war which provoked a great deal of protest. However unethical the proxy war might be, however, no one seemed to prefer direct nuclear conflict with the two main belligerents.

**Desert Storm:** A war fought over directional drilling (supposedly Iraq was using new directional drilling techniques to burrow under Kuwait and tap into their vast oil reservoirs), it there were questions from the beginning why the U.S. should be involved. So, this war was one of the first where the U.S. was supposedly the prominent global police force. It was also one that was remote-controlled, with rockets and other weapons launched via computer from remote control centers. There were other firsts as well: this was a war that was broadcast live on CNN, What was broadcast was a fireworks display of primarily rocket attacks, which gave it a rather sterile, bloodless character.

**War on Drugs:** Accompanied by publicity “Just Say “NO” and the spectacle of Nancy Reagan, the so-called “War on Drugs” was spectacularly unsuccessful if the real goal was to reduce the level of drug addiction as well as the activity of narcotraffickers in the U.S. What made this law enforcement effort, dubbed a “war” unique was the way in which satellite imagery based on hyperspectral, multispectral, and infrared sensors, was used to detect marijuana and poppy cultivation, as well as the location of rural methamphetamine labs.

## Discussion/Questions

1. In certain parts of Colombia during the height of the cartels, the underground “informal” economy was much larger than the formal economy. What this meant in functional terms was that while there was some circulation of the money used in trafficking (money spent in food, fiestas, rent, clothing, transportation, etc.), the flows were not official, and it was impossible to properly apply an income tax or to assure that the business contributed to the general good. Explain why it is problematic for a country to have informal trade networks (cartels, etc.) and discuss how they can have a devastating impact on legitimate trade.
2. Describe the role of technology in WWI and WWII. How did technology apply to surveillance. How did the U.S. contribute to technological changes in warfare? Describe the role of surveillance in the Cold War and also in subsequent wars or police actions.

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## **SOCIAL HISTORY**

### **SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

**Robber Baron:** Often monopolists, the robber barons manipulated the laws and the banking structures to acquire controlling interests in major industries and in natural resources. They later often donated money to philanthropic causes.

**Professional class:** Occupying a high rung in society, the college-educated professionals (doctors, lawyers, educators, accountants) often owned businesses as well. They were considered aspirational with an ability to move up in social scale.

**Middle class:** For many years, the middle class was the most upwardly mobile class, and it was possible to achieve that standing by means of education, thrift (savings and investment), and entrepreneurship.

**Factory worker / union:** The working classes gained a boost with the formation of unions, and the protections afforded the union workers. They were able to have better health, work shorter hours, and have better wages. Toward the end of the century, the unions were under attack for corruption and for contributing to costs that made the end products unable to successfully compete in the world marketplace.

**Entrepreneurs:** Successful entrepreneurs are able to catapult themselves into the highest rungs of society, particularly when their business acumen is coupled with technological breakthroughs such as the telephone, television, computer, airplanes, automobiles, etc.

**Women:** Women's standing in society dramatically changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as rights and privileges that were accorded men such as the right to vote, work outside the home, own property, and more, were installed.

**Civil Rights Movement:** African Americans, who had lost the right to vote, were re-enfranchised in 1964. Since that time, great improvements have been made, but still there are problems and racism exists in American society.

**Poor / underclass:** Despite the successes of people who have achieved the American Dream, and the possibility of upward mobility, poverty still exists in America. Persistent pockets of poverty exist in rural America, in mountainous coal-mining Appalachia, in old industrial centers (Detroit), in locations isolated from commerce and industry. There are also the poor in urban areas who are homeless or almost homeless, living a precarious existence in the shadows of society in homeless shelters, abandoned buildings, low-cost motels. Many of the poor are unwed mothers, their children, drug addicts, and formerly incarcerated males. Others are the working poor, who find they cannot subsist on the scanty hours and minimum wage of restaurants, etc.

### Discussion/Questions

In the twentieth-century, social mobility became more fluid with the advent of unions, the Civil Rights movement, the GI Bill and subsidized college educations, and the availability of entrepreneurial capital and investment. Describe the groups that had the most dramatic positive change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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## **GENDER**

**Traditional Nuclear Family Roles:** For the middle class, traditional patriarchal model, with the male as breadwinner and working outside the home, and the mother staying at home to tend to children and the house. For working class, many women worked in other women's homes during the day, or in factories and offices (especially after WWII), with a resulting rise in demand for daycare and longer school hours. At the beginning of the century, women's skirts were long, hairstyles required elaborate preparation, and women generally did not operate machinery or drive. They also did not smoke or drink alcohol (although tipping opiate drinks with laudanum was common and acceptable for women in the beginning of the twentieth century).

**Women in WWI:** Women entered health care (nurses) and education (teachers), and also in different types of factories during WWI, due to labor shortages and the demands of the war effort.

**Flappers:** Women's roles changed a great deal after WWI, and the "flappers" of the 1920s were the "new woman," with bobbed hair, short skirts, who listened to jazz, drove cars, smoked cigarettes, and embarked on careers in previously male-dominated fields. The flappers were a bit scandalizing and not every woman embraced "Flapper" values.

**Working Women / WWII:** Rosie the Riveter was the emblem; propaganda campaign; 5 million women entered the workplace, and of those, 350,000 women working in factories, also WASPs (Women's Airforce Service Pilots) and minority women.

**Women in the Universities:** All-women colleges: Bryn Mawr, Smith, Barnard, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley are just a few. Many became co-ed in the 1970s, but before that time, were an important place for women "bluestockings" to

**Women's Suffrage:** Women lost the right to vote in 1787 and did not regain it on a national basis until the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, passed in 1920. Women activists such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton worked state by state.

**Macho:** A hyper-masculine stance often depicted in films, literature, comics, and graphic novels, specifically for Westerns and action-adventure genres.

**Gender Ambiguity:** Characterized many roles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the 1960s when longer hair was in vogue for men, and a cross-over / sharing of roles began.

**Marriage Arrangements:** During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political pressure to allow marriage between divorced men and women, and then later, between homosexual couples. The question for the future is whether or not there will be marriage between humans and non-humans (animals or robots), and while the question seems highly offensive and dehumanizing to a traditional philosophical vantage point, futurists believe that the human-machine / human-alter-biological boundaries are problematic. Marriage arrangements in this situation are about preservation of patrimony (inheritance) and not about sexual desire.

### Discussion/Questions

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed reversals of gender roles, as well as various seemingly retrograde movements as traditional gender roles were reinforced in very conservative groups. At the same time, new technology and new products made it possible for men and women to interact in new ways. Describe some of the changes in women's roles that corresponded to the advent of new technology and also socio-political events such as wars. How were men's roles impacted as well?

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## **ECONOMIC HISTORY**

### **INNOVATION**

**Second Industrial Revolution:** The Second Industrial Revolution started at the turn of the century, and resulted in dramatic breakthroughs in communication, transportation, and public works. The inventions included forged steel, automobiles, telegraph, telephone, waterworks, public sewer systems, trams, gas and electricity in homes.

**Third Industrial Revolution:** The Third Industrial Revolution had to do with computers, petrochemicals (plastics, nylon, etc.), airplanes, and space-age innovations. It started in the 1950s, with dramatic breakthroughs in plastics, in computing, and also in the development of materials and processes that allowed additional automation, television and radio broadcasting, space travel, air travel, satellite communication, and more.

**Fourth Industrial Revolution:** In the 1980s and 1990s, the development of the World Wide Web and the Internet led to dramatic change in what way people communicate, obtain information, and also monitor people and processes. It was accompanied by the development of computing power, which allowed the development of artificial intelligence and "smart" systems. The change in communication led to the dramatic transformation and automation of many professions and jobs, such as journalist, middle manager, secretaries, typists, clerks, commercial artists, and more.

**World War I Technologies:** The American inventions that were used in World War I were quite diverse. They ranged from the use of airplanes and a system of air traffic control, to on-the-ground

innovations. The more mundane included the development of cotton cellulose, which was used for medical purposes (wadding). Cotton cellulose was later developed into sanitary napkins for women, and later, paper tissues. Paper tea bags were developed by an American.

**Factory Technologies and Management:** The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the Americans develop a new kind of “scientific” management for making factories both efficient and keeping employees optimally happy (an implementation of Jeremy Bentham’s “felicific calculus”). It was called “industrial hygiene” and was adopted with great success in all kinds of factories and workplaces. The focus was on mass production, elimination of waste, and equitable treatment of workers. It was first used by Ford in the assembly-line manufacture of the Model T. Frederick Taylor was effectively articulated the concepts, and it was used as a foundation for later engineering endeavors, including industrial engineering and management.

**Rise of Labor Unions and Trade:** Due in large part to the exploitive, dangerous, and inefficient use of labor in mines, factories, ships, docks, and other areas, and the need for specialization, labor unions formed in order to fight the oligopolies that wished to minimize labor costs. The trade unions arose as a political choice in the early part of the century, when countries resolved the problem by not allowing private ownership at all, and elected socialism or communism. The U.S. upheld private ownership (either by individuals or corporations), and at the same time implemented protections through the use of labor laws and unions (who had strength through labor laws). The unions truly transformed American labor and resulted in a high standard of living for union members. However, with the advent of labor-saving technology, and the pressure of unions to continue to add benefits, many unions found themselves to be unsustainable. The trend in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was to rely on governmental protections of labor and not collective bargaining.

**Cultural Innovations:** This article has focused on industrial innovations, but it is worth mentioning that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was significant crossover, and the cultural innovations sparked new developments and demand for better communication, computing, and production techniques. Some of the examples are in the entertainment industry: music (jazz, rock, hip-hop, classical music); film industry (the “talkies” of the 20s, and then those with extreme special effects, starting with color, and ending with animation and 3D images); travel and tourism (the theme parks, such as Walt Disney World, and festivals such as Woodstock, Altamont (a negative impact), and Coachella (electronic music)).

### Discussion/Questions

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen numerous generations of innovation, some so profound that they are called revolutions. Explain the kinds of innovations that occurred during the Second, Third, and Fourth Industrial Revolutions, and provide a few examples of the way they changed everyday life for the average American, and how they opened opportunities for those seeking a better life (or a more interesting one) from countries experiencing crisis or ongoing instability.

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## **TRADE**

**Oligopolistic Trade of the early 20th Century:** The early 20th century was marked by monopolistic and oligopolistic control not only of the inputs for manufactured goods, but also the means of manufacture and transportation. The railroads were owned by oligopolies, as were the oil, steel, and coal producers. As a result, the costs for some goods were artificially high, and the companies with oligopolistic control tended to be able to influence politicians, not only in the U.S. but also in other countries such as Cuba, Mexico, and Central America.

**Anti-Monopolistic Legislation:** President Theodore Roosevelt's war on monopolies and oligopolies was not without its challenges. There were armed uprisings as labor unions, anarchists, and other organized groups fought the monopolies. The final result was legislation that led to the breakup of the monopolies into smaller companies that could compete with each other.

**Protectionism:** Trade was restricted throughout the first part of the twentieth century in the United States because of a wall of tariffs, which created, in essence, a barrier to trade. Many economists have blamed the Great Depression of the 1930s to high tariffs, import quotas, and foreign exchange controls that resulted in pernicious protectionism.

**Rise of Labor Unions and Trade:** Labor unions were protectionist in their orientation since they wanted to protect the jobs of their union members. However, in order to have jobs as longshoremen, Merchant Marines, steelworkers, etc., it was necessary to have markets and an

industry. So, labor unions were often in the paradoxical position of both supporting free trade and imposing restrictions and limits on what could be done in junction with the movement of goods.

**Interstate Commerce Compacts:** With the rise for the Interstate Highway System (freeways), was the realization that every state had regulations governing what could be sold within the borders. There were often controls imposed on agricultural products in order to avoid disease and parasites. In order to make sure that regulations were uniform, and that truck drivers and shippers knew the rules before heading on their journey, the Interstate Compact Commission was formed, and agreements were forged and signed between the different states of the Union. The regulations governing the transport of goods applied to vehicles as well as pipelines.

**Cartels (Drug Trafficking, Human Trafficking):** Illegal activities did not cease just because they were illegal. If anything, in some cases, the trafficking increased spurred on by higher profits which could be gotten by not paying taxes (since bribes are usually lower than taxes) for the activities that were putatively legal. Illicit trade of drugs, human beings, etc., was controlled by gangs and sometimes foreign national-controlled cartels. The impact on society has been negative.

**NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement):** With the assumption that trade between neighbors would expand markets, aid in competition, and result in better business conditions for all, the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed. While it has resulted in better relationships between Mexico and Canada, there are also downsides in that it has led to a dramatic need for decreased costs of production, resulting in downward pressure on wages.

**Intellectual Property and Technology Trade in Digital World:** Trade in intellectual property used in communications technology, computing, high-tech manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, the health industry, and more, have had a significant impact on on the development of products and services in the United States. Every activity and transaction is, in essence, trade, which means that what is often commonly through of as "services" is, in another sense, trade.

### Discussion/Questions

In the first part of the 20th century, different phenomena occurred which created deep imbalances in trade, and which had deleterious effects on the economy. The first was the control of markets by monopolies. The second was protectionism in the form of tariffs, import quotas, and foreign exchange restrictions. Describe what was done to combat the imbalances and the impact that the changes had.

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## **CULTURAL HISTORY**

### **SCIENCE**

**Overview:** The enabling sciences for the explosion of technological breakthroughs included a better understanding of physics, chemistry, materials science, and mathematics. New abilities to process complex mathematics and to fabricate new materials made inventions possible that totally transformed every aspect of life. Ironically, the same breakthroughs that could have enormous positive impact also had deadly ones, such as in the case of nuclear physics, and the development of the nuclear bomb, but also nuclear power.

**Vladimir Zworykin:** Known for perfecting x-rays and the cathode ray tube, Zworykin has been credited for developing the early television. Originally from Russia, Zworykin, like many others, moved the U.S. to escape political oppression.

**Niels Bohr:** With other early 20<sup>th</sup>-century physicists, Bohr made contributions to the understanding of the atom, of subatomic particles, and nuclear physics.

**Medicine:** Understanding in the area of microbiology, anatomy, and also in the ability see (microscopes) and to image (xray, ultrasound, scanning electron images) made it possible to evaluate medical conditions in a new way, and to devise new, ethical experiments and treatment protocols. Great advances were also made in pharmacology, with breakthrough developments in pain management and anesthesia, enabling better surgical procedures. Other breakthroughs in the use of genetics to develop more effective antibiotics and immunizations had dramatically positive effects on the population.

**Edward Teller:** Known as the “father of the hydrogen bomb,” Edward Teller advanced theoretical physics to the point that his group at Los Alamos Lab in New Mexico was able to harness nuclear fission and create the atomic bomb.

**Wilbur and Orville Wright:** Often in competition with Curtiss (in upstate New York), the Wright brothers perfected the first flying machine in the U.S., which had its first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

**John Bardeen:** Miniaturization and solid-state electronics were key elements in the development of fast, economical super-computing. John Bardeen invented the transistor, which was the first step to miniaturization.

**Space travel:** The scientists at NASA were funded by a U.S. government eager to show dominance in the Cold War. While the U.S. space program achieved remarkable results and fascinated the public, there were also many breakthroughs that benefited the world in unexpected ways. Space travel was accompanied by breakthroughs in plastics, new lightweight materials, electronics, optics, computing, new fabrics, and medicine.

**Medicine:** NIH (National Institutes of Health) led research in molecular genetics, genomics, biochemistry to identify, prevent, diagnose, and treat disease and disability. Combined with a private and well-funded health industry, dramatic breakthroughs occurred in the area of medical imaging (x-rays, acoustic, nuclear/ radiography, magnetic, etc.) laser technologies (surgery, etc.), immunology, public health (vaccinations, women's health), DNA / human genome mapping, improved pharmaceuticals, and more.

**Telecommunications:** Telegraph, telephones, radio and television broadcasts, satellite transmissions are just some of the ways in which a deeper understanding of physics combined with mathematics and computing power have transformed the United States.

### Discussion Question:

The twentieth century presents a dizzying array of truly society-changing inventions and scientific breakthroughs. And yet, the foundational building blocks upon which these are constructed are few. They include the development of a better understanding of the structure of matter (the atom, etc.), the ability to process vast arrays of numbers (supercomputing), and an understanding of electricity. Select a few examples of the most society-transforming inventions and discuss a) the role of physics, computing, and energy. Then, select one scientific breakthrough of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and discuss its impact for now and the future.

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## **RELIGION**

**Protestantism:** During the twentieth century, many of the denominations that were launched in the 19<sup>th</sup> century organized themselves and became more formal. They began to develop networks of churches as well as seminaries, bible colleges, and universities. With the increasingly rigid structure and social control of the formal churches, there arose a desire for religions that promised healing, physical prosperity, and immediate happiness. Using radio, television, and later the Internet, megachurches and televangelists appealed to millions of Americans. The result was the creation of a block of like-minded citizens, as well as a politicization of religion (more overt than in the past) Jerry Falwell / Liberty University, etc.

**African American churches and the Civil Rights Movement:** African Methodist / African Baptist churches flourished in African American communities and were important as a social support system. They helped organize and support grassroots movements that championed the right to vote, right for equal treatment and abolishing Jim Crow / Plessy vs. Ferguson (separate but equal) towns and facilities.

**Catholicism and Activism:** The Roman Catholic Church was very politically active in the twentieth century, and sometimes gave support for socially conservative movements, even backing authoritarian dictators. Much changed in the 1960s with activism and something that came to be known as Liberation Theology that was involved in the Civil Rights movement and the anti-war movement. Later, when the charismatic activist Pope died, the Catholic Church became very conservative again, marked by scandals relating to abuse and coverups.

**Apocalyptic doomsday cults:** Behind every utopian cult lies the possibility of a dystopian counterpart. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of cults that focused on the idea of end times emerged. The apocalyptic narrative of the book of Revelations in the New Testament of the Bible was often invoked, with the idea that the destruction of the earth was imminent, thanks to the wickedness of humanity, and that only “true believers” would survive. Pushed into a corner by perceived outside threats, they committed mass suicide. Groups included Jim Jones, David Koresh, Um Hari (Japanese nerve gas), Heaven’s Gate (the Halley-Bop Comet believers).

**Buddhist:** Japanese and other Asian communities established Buddhist temples. Buddhism became even more prominent in the 1970s after the exodus of South Vietnamese to the United States.

**Hindu:** Primarily from India, Hindu traditions have been maintained especially in the form of wedding traditions and holidays. Home altars feature Ganesh (the elephant-headed household deity) and holidays such as Diwali (Festival of Lights) are celebrated.

**Muslim:** The Muslim faith has many different manifestations in the United States. There are a number of mosques in communities and they have traditionally focused on education and social support.

**Judaism:** The Jewish faith is very important in many communities in North America, where there are temples for Orthodox Jews as well as more moderate or mainstream. In all cases, there is an emphasis on learning the sacred texts and traditions, which is a strong force in creating an ongoing cultural identity.

### Discussion/Questions

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the advent of mass media profoundly changed the way that we obtain information and how we decide the best way to practice our religious beliefs. Describe how mass communications transformed religious groups from intimate networks of social co-dependency to something else, that looked like self-determination, but could be argued was mass indoctrination.

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## **PHILOSOPHY**

**Charles Sanders Peirce:** One of the “greats” of American philosophy, Charles Sanders Peirce was renowned as a logician. In addition, he made contributions to the philosophy of language and explored how and why language has meaning. With an underpinning in mathematics, probability and statistics, Peirce proposed that language has semiotic meaning and functions as a “sign” – that idea alone allowed the breakthrough notions of signs, with their different categories, to flow into deconstructivism and the notion that the meaning of language is influenced by who / how / why a sign is assigned a meaning.

**George Santayana:** Originally from Spain, Jorge (or “George”) Santayana was raised in the U.S. He was a pragmatist and was an early advocate of bridging mathematics and logic, as well as looking at the essential work of language in the creation of meaning and a concept of reality.

**Charlotte Gilman Perkins:** An ardent advocate of individual self-expression and the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, Perkins wrote about women’s worlds and roles, and the essential powerlessness of women. Perkins was an advocate of women’s rights to vote and to own property individually and independently. She wrote a utopian novel, *Herland*, which details a world where women are in command. Despite that, Perkins is less a feminist and more a humanist who advocates for social equality for all.

**John Dewey:** As a pragmatist who focused on the consequences of free will and the implications of human agency, Dewey believed that the most important change agent was the individual who was willing to build educational and philanthropic institutions. Dewey is best known for his writings on democracy and education.

**Richard Rorty:** A controversial neo-pragmatist, Rorty offended many feminists because they accuse him of creating a philosophical framework that reinforces privilege and excludes ideas that are considered in the realm of the “Other.” Rorty suggests that human rights arguments are often tainted by sentimentalism, a stance which alienated him from feminists.

**Cornel West:** One of the most outspoken and influential philosophers of race, race relations, and social hierarchies, West has written influential texts that have provided a foundation for social equality and justice.

### Discussion/Questions

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a kind of philosophy emerged that suggested that words had no meaning except those that had been assigned to them by the dominant class, and that all kinds of non-textual signs transmitted messages and stories just as well as words. The result was that the study of semiotics (signs that have meaning) merged with the study of language and literature. What resulted was the notion that every text has many possible meanings and interpretations, and because of that, there is always a level of indeterminacy, flux and non-meaning in all forms of communication, but especially in language. What were some of the destabilizing consequences of such a belief or mindset?

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### ART

**American Impressionism:** Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and continuing into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American Impressionists were known for their bright palettes and energetic brush strokes. Artists include Childe Hassam and Mary Cassatt.

**Ashcan School:** Realism returned with the “Ashcan School” which focused on social change through art and literature by painting scenes of everyday life in middle and working class settings. Examples include George Bellows, Everett Shinn, and George Benjamin Luks.

**Harlem Renaissance:** The 1920s and 30s Harlem Renaissance was a literary and artistic movement which brought together music, poetry, prose, and painting. The techniques were influenced by music, and known for their bright colors and cultural elements. Examples include Romare Bearden, Palmer Hayden, and Jacob Lawrence.

**Socialist Realism / New Deal art:** Thomas Hart Benton is perhaps the best-known of the artists commissioned by the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) established during the Great Depression. Influenced by the Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera, the artists brought together myth and populist movements. Examples include Grant Wood, Reginald Marsh, and Thomas Hart Benton.

**Abstract Expressionism:** After World War II, artists in New York took the minimalism and modernist painting many steps further than the famous New York Armory Show of 1911, where Cubism and other abstract works were shown. Abstract Expressionism was characterized by experimental paint application and dramatic brush strokes. Examples include Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Arshile Gorky, Robert Motherwell, and Alexander Calder.

**Color Field:** Color Field painting focused on large canvases with paint applied in unique ways, including dripped from a stick or poured directly from the can. Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko were the first, and in the 1960s, color field painting continued with Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Helen Frankenthaler.

**Mixed Media Pop Art:** Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein incorporated everyday objects of popular culture and also blended photos, newsprint, comic strips and discarded objects. Their goal was often satiric commentary on American life, and in particular, consumerism.

### Discussion/Questions

The 20th century began with a break from the values, hierarchies, and techniques of the past, and in regular succession, sought to break with its immediate forebears, even if they were only a decade or so in use. Describe the early 20<sup>th</sup> century artworks in America and explain how they represented a break from the past and a commentary on America. Then, follow up and create a timeline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that links art movement with an underlying philosophical or aesthetic idea or ideal.

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## **LITERATURE**

**Imagism:** An early version of Modernism, Imagism flowed from the experiments of French (Apollinaire, Rimbaud, Baudilaire) and reacted against ornate Romanticism and Victorian poetry. Ezra Pound wrote that imagism attempted, with great simplicity, to capture an intellectual and emotional complex at a particular moment in time. Pound’s poem, “In a Station in the Metro” is considered the quintessential example.

### **Modernism:**

American modernists included T. S. Eliot, whose poetry of the “Lost Generation” included *The Wasteland*, and *Four Quartets*. It was allusory, fragmentary, and incorporated tenets of imagism as well as minimalism. Gertrude Stein’s prose was ground-breaking in its exploration of emotional landscapes but using minimalist forms in such works as *The Making of Americans*. Hemingway was deeply influenced by Stein and his prose, *The Snows of Mount Kilimanjaro*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *Death in the Afternoon* influenced a generation of writers.

**Minimalism:** William Carlos Williams was one of the first of the poets whose work reflected the Armory Show of 1913 in which the modernist art of Europe exploded upon the New York arts scene and the consciousness of a nation and a world in flux. Key elements were meaning through juxtaposition and informal, spoken-word syntax. His collection *Spring and All* was tremendously influential. The experimental Black Mountain School further explored minimalism. The poetry included that of Robert Creeley and Mina Loy’s *Lunar Baedeker*, which is a travel guide to magical, nether world.

**Surrealism:** Exploring the impact of unlikely juxtapositions and the sense of hype-reality, poets were inspired by artists such as Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte, Marc Chagall and Frida Kahlo. They include John Ashbery, whose *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* was very influential.

**Social Realism:** John Dos Passos wrote a trilogy, *U.S.A. Trilogy*, which include *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936). It explores the experience of immigrants. Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* was an expose of food processing practices. Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust* and *Miss Lonelyhearts* explore the dark side of the American Dream with its attendant loneliness and nihilism.

**Postmodernism:** Postmodernist writing counters the ideas and values that realism and positivism promotes. For Postmodernist writers, reality is a construct, teleology is suspect, time is

fragmented into a series of perpetual presents, and a profound rejection of “master narratives” for history and culture. Examples include Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, William Gass’s *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* and *On Being Blue*, Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*.

**Beat Poets:** Influenced by Walt Whitman and Imagistic notions of freedom of expression, as well as a pulling together of Buddhist philosophy, the Beat poets wrote to counter the status quo in the 1950s. They included Alan Ginsberg and *Howl* and Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s *A Coney Island of the Mind*.

**New York School:** Influenced by Abstract Expressionism and a painterly, imagistic approach to descriptions and prosody, the New York School included Kenneth Koch, Wallace Stevens, Barbara Guest, and Frank O’Hara.

**Confessional Poets:** The Confessional School of poetry built on the flow and emotional expressionism of the Beat Poets, but focused more on exploring the notions of psychology and the idea that truth can be found by delving deeply into repressed ideas, emotions, memories and dreams. Examples include Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and W. D. Snodgrass. It is hard to find a confessional poet who did not eventually commit suicide.

**Magical Realism:** The structures and themes are deeply influenced by the Boom writers in Latin America who combine history with visions, time travel, magic, and human behavior / emotions. Examples include Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, John Updike’s *The Witches of Eastwick*, and *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko.

### Discussion/Questions

The twentieth century was a time of rapid technological, social, and communication change, all of which is explored in the literature of the century. Describe the types of writing that seem to be most extreme (social realism as opposed to minimalism, for example) and discuss how they could, despite their different modes of expression, be exploring the same basic questions about the human condition.

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