



# HISTORY snapshots™



U.S. History 1900-1949



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The average history textbook is a wealth of information, but often includes almost too much for quick study – leaving students to sieve through lines of text to understand the foundation of the issue at hand. The goal of our *Snapshots* series is to give students key information in bite-sized and manageable pieces without losing the trivia element that makes history fun.

Disclaimer notice: The content of any history contest is not limited to the events in this book. Dates and facts have been verified by at least two reliable sources, however, we encourage you to contact us if any information contained in this book is historically inaccurate.

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There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny.

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

# CONTENTS

## Chapter 1

Turn of the Century 1900-1909.....7

## Chapter 2

The Great War 1910-1919.....37

## Chapter 3

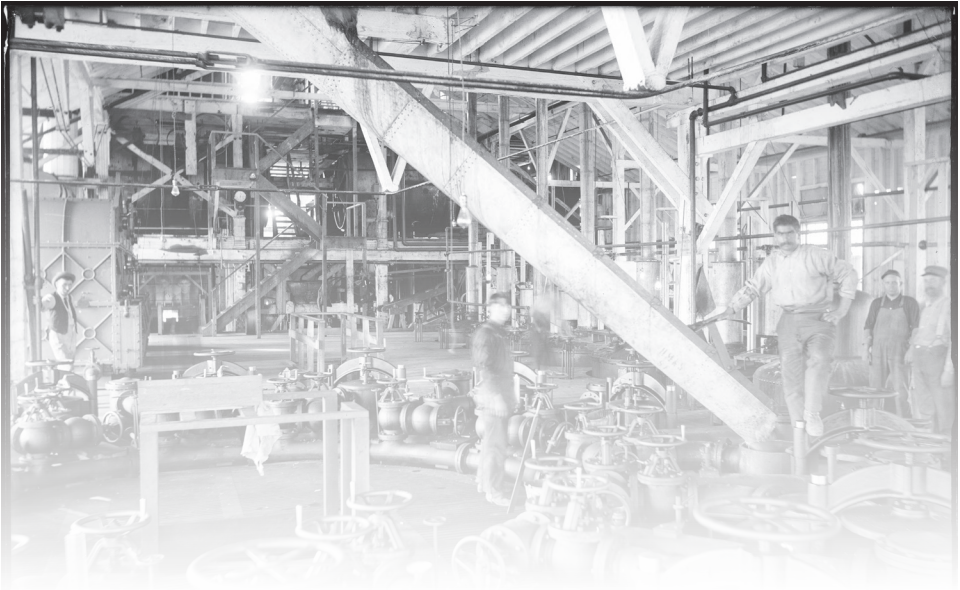
The Roaring Twenties 1920-1929.....65

## Chapter 4

The Great Depression 1930-1939.....103

## Chapter 5

World War II 1940-1949.....135



# **CHAPTER 1**

Turn of the Century  
1900-1909

## CONTEXT

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By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the 300-year period of expansion across the North American frontier had come to a close. The West was won and Native American groups were overcome, then forced to assimilate and move to reservations. The continent was settled from coast to coast, and the nation entered a period of dramatic growth and change.

The U.S. was on the road to becoming a global superpower. Technological innovations enabled large-scale farming, allowing the nation to become the globe's forerunner in agricultural production. Industrial growth abounded as new technology made way for the construction of transcontinental railroads, oil wells, steel industries, and the mass production of automobiles. Mass production and industrial growth also laid the foundation for a consumerist society. Urban areas grew. Electrical lighting began to light up cities. Telephones were widely used, and motion pictures were a modern curiosity, while the concept of radio was on its way.

The promise of opportunity attracted many immigrants between 1880 and 1920. These immigrants passed through checkpoints like Ellis Island and Angel Island and often moved to urban centers like San Francisco, New York City, Chicago, and Boston. Unlike previous waves of immigrants to the continent who were from Western Europe and typically well-educated, many of these hailed from Southern and Eastern Europe and represented increasingly diverse cultures. Conditions in the U.S. were often an improvement for these immigrants. Many took low-paying, unsafe jobs and lived in slum-like conditions.

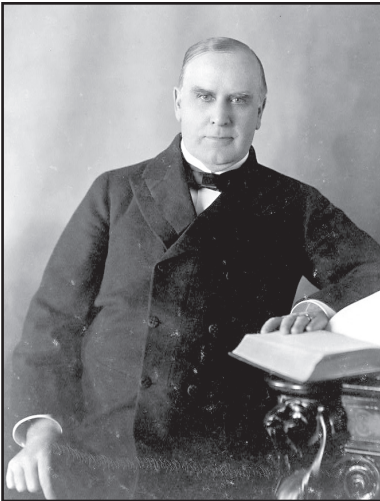
Progressives sought social and political reform to address issues often related to the fast pace of urban and industrial growth. Investigative journalism would come to characterize the Progressive Era. Corruption and unfair practices in politics, economics, and industry were exposed.

## ELECTIONS & PRESIDENTS

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### Election of 1900

Incumbent and Republican candidate William McKinley defeated Democratic candidate **William Jennings Bryan**. This election took place after the Spanish-American War (1898), during which the U.S. secured Cuba's independence from Spain and gained overseas territories. Thus, the topic of U.S. expansionism turned out to be one of the election's key issues. McKinley garnered 292 electoral votes, while Bryan received a total of 155. Theodore Roosevelt served as McKinley's vice president.

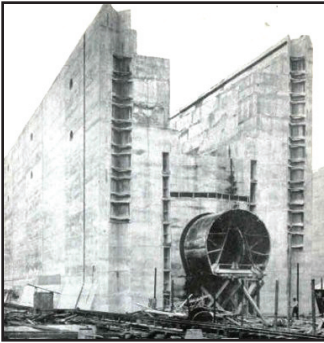


William McKinley

### William McKinley 1843-1901

McKinley was born and raised in Ohio. He was employed as a schoolteacher before enlisting and serving in the Union Army during the Civil War. After the war, he studied and practiced law and became involved in Ohio politics, first serving as a member of Congress and then as the state's governor. McKinley (Republican) ran for the presidency in the Elections of 1896 and 1900, defeating William Jennings Bryan (Democrat) both times. He was the 25<sup>th</sup> president, and his administration was

focused on foreign policy. Some of his chief accomplishments while in office included raising protective tariffs intended to support American industry and winning the Spanish-American War. His second and final term was cut short in 1901, when a gunshot wound received from an anarchist at the Pan-American Exposition led to his death.



Panama Canal lock construction

## Panama Canal • 1903-1914

Previous attempts to construct this Central American canal had proven disastrous. When Theodore Roosevelt became president, he set his mind on its completion. Roosevelt launched warships to help Panama gain its independence in 1903 and signed the **Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty** with the newly independent republic later that year. This treaty, coupled with 10 million dollars and an agreement to pay an additional \$250,000

each year, paved the way for the U.S. to build the canal. Despite the threat of tropical diseases like malaria and yellow fever and inhumane working conditions, the canal was completed and opened on August 15, 1914. It connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the Isthmus of Panama. This waterway is important, dramatically shortening the voyages of ships and allowing for cheaper trade routes. Prior to the completion of the canal, vessels traveling between the East and West Coasts of the U.S. had to sail all the way around Cape Horn, which is located at the southernmost point of South America and dramatically lengthened journeys by sea. The U.S. controlled the canal until 1979, then presided over it with a Panama joint committee until 1999, when it was completely turned over to Panama.

## Roosevelt Corollary • 1904

President Theodore Roosevelt added what came to be called the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1823) in his State of the Union address. The Monroe Doctrine asked Europeans to cease expansion in the Western Hemisphere. At that point in time, the U.S. lacked the power to enforce the doctrine. The Roosevelt Corollary expanded on it, adding that the U.S. would intervene in Latin American affairs if unrest or wrongdoing occurred within the nation's next-door neighbors. The U.S. began enforcement of this policy in 1905 with its invasion of the Dominican Republic and, over the years, carved out a sphere of influence throughout the Western Hemisphere. This went hand-in-hand with Roosevelt's motto, "speak softly and carry a big stick." Latin Americans were angered by the interference.



## CIVIL RIGHTS & COURT CASES

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### National Negro Business League • 1900

**Booker T. Washington**, an African-American spokesman and founder of the **Tuskegee Institute**, created this league in hopes of promoting "commercial, agricultural, educational, and industrial advancement...and the commercial and financial development of the Negro." Washington believed that, if African Americans attained economic success, full equal rights would naturally follow.



National Negro Business League (Booker T. Washington seated front center), 1909  
North Carolina Digital Collection

### *Lochner v. New York* • 1905

New York's Bakeshop Act limited the number of hours bakers could work to no more than 10 hours a day with a maximum of 60 hours per week and set sanitation standards. Joseph Lochner owned a small bakery. Most of his customers arrived early, so some of his employees slept in the back of the bakery overnight if they had worked late the previous day. Some of Lochner's employees worked more than 60 hours per week. Lochner was reported

## TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATIONS, & DISCOVERIES

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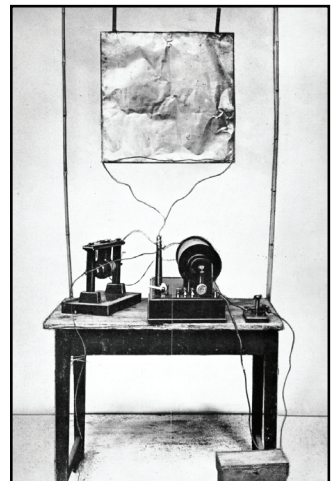
Brownie camera

### Brownie camera invented 1900

Can you imagine a universe without camera phones? The Brownie film camera was created and launched by the **Eastman Kodak Company**. It cost \$1 and, for the first time, made cameras and photography accessible to the general public. Their introduction of removable roll film containers permitted consumers to take film from the camera to develop photographs. Prior to this, the entire camera had to be packaged and sent back to Eastman-Kodak for development.

### Transatlantic transmission • 1901

Though he was not the first to conduct experiments with electromagnetic waves, the first wireless communication company was created by **Guglielmo Marconi** in 1897. He sent the first electromagnetic signal across the Atlantic in 1901. These waves were transmitted code composed of dots and dashes. It was not until 1906 that the human voice and music were transmitted. Reginald Fessenden, a Canadian, transmitted this communication from Brant Rock, Massachusetts.



Marconi's first radio transmitter

## Victrola • 1901

Thomas Edison invented the **phonograph**, a machine that both recorded and played sound, in 1877. The Victor Talking Machine Company, founded around 1901 by Eldridge Johnson, was the most successful maker of phonographs.



Nikola Tesla

## Nikola Tesla • 1856-1943

Tesla was born in Croatia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire but immigrated to the U.S. in 1884. The Serbian-American inventor was an engineer and is best known for his innovations in electrical power.

He worked for Thomas Edison's company before striking out on his own. Edison, now his rival, promoted the direct current system, and Tesla and George Westinghouse promoted the **alternating current** system. This U.S. conflict was called the "**War of the Currents**." Edison's direct current was unable to transport electrical

energy across long distances. Tesla's alternating current motor and electric systems are still used across the world today.

Tesla was a visionary and a prolific inventor. Key inventions include the Niagara Falls hydroelectric power plant, the Tesla coil, fluorescent lights, laser beams, wireless communications, the remote control, and much, much more. He did not receive recognition for many of his achievements during his lifetime. Today, Tesla's birthday, July 10<sup>th</sup>, is celebrated as Nikola Tesla Day.

Interestingly enough, the U.S. executive's home was called the "Executive Mansion," "President's Palace," or "President's House" until Teddy Roosevelt began calling it the "White House" in 1901.



**Which president's likeness can be found on the penny?**



**You guessed it — Abraham Lincoln.** His image was added to the one-cent coin in 1909 and was the first American coin decorated with the portrait of a historical figure. It was done so in honor of the centennial of Lincoln's birth.



Between 1892 and 1954, Ellis Island was the primary entry point for the new wave of immigrants. Situated roughly a mile from Manhattan Island, it served as an immigration station. Some speculate that roughly 40 percent of today's American citizens are related to at least one person who passed through Ellis Island (including your author!)

## Major Companies



**Pepsi-Cola  
Company, 1902**



**General Motors  
Company, 1908**

## NOTABLE INNOVATIONS

**Vacuum cleaner • 1901  
First radio broadcast • 1906  
Bakelite • 1907  
Electric washing machine • 1909**

Jazz Age, 73, 90, 95-96, 156  
 Jeep, 153  
 Jitterbug, 156  
*Jungle (The)*, 26  
 Karpis, Alvin, 116  
 Keaton, Buster, 93  
 Kellogg-Briand Pact, 99  
 Key, Francis Scott, 90, 127  
 King Tutankhamun ("Tut"), 81  
*Korematsu v. United States*, 143  
 Ku Klux Klan (KKK) march on Washington, 97  
 Ku Klux Klan, 113  
 laissez-faire, 109  
 Lange, Dorothea, 123  
 League of Nations, 17, 48  
 League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), 99  
 Lend-Lease Act, 142  
 Leopold and Loeb murder trial, 79  
 Lewis, Sinclair, 91  
 Lincoln Memorial, 86  
 Lincoln, Abraham, 36, 86-87  
 Lindbergh, Charles, 82, 114  
 Little Tramp, 93  
*Lochner v. New York*, 18  
 London, Jack, 26  
 Long, Huey P., 115  
 Los Alamos Laboratory, 146  
 Lost Generation, 89  
 Louis, Joe, 125  
 Louisiana Purchase, 59  
 Luce, Henry, 89  
 Lucky Lindy, 82  
*Lusitania*, 39, 45  
 Machine Gun Kelly, 116  
 Macy's Thanksgiving Parade, 97  
 Madison Square Garden Riot, 128  
 Mafia, 73, 99, 114  
 Manhattan Project, 146  
 Marconi, Guglielmo, 20  
 Marshall Plan, 151  
 Marvel, 163  
 McKinley, William, 11, 12, 30  
 Meat Inspection and Pure Food and Drug Acts, 26  
 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 94, 117  
 Mexican Revolution, 60  
 Mickey Mouse & Minnie Mouse, 92  
 minimum wage, 112  
 Mitchell, Margaret, 118  
 MLB integration, 155  
 Model T, 23, 82  
 Monroe Doctrine, 16  
 Monroe, Marilyn, 154  
 Morton, Jelly Roll, 96  
 Mount Rushmore, 87  
 Muckrakers, 25  
 Murphy, Audie, 145  
 Nagasaki, 146  
 National American Woman Suffrage Association, 74  
 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 19  
 National Baseball Hall of Fame, 85, 154  
 National Basketball Association (NBA), 154  
 National Football League (NFL), 84  
 National Hockey League (NHL), 64  
 National Negro Business League, 18  
 NATO, 152  
 Naval Expansion Act, 141  
 Nazi surrender, 148  
 Negro National League, 84  
 Neutrality Acts, 142  
 New Deal, 109, 111-112  
 New Freedom, 41  
 New London School, 128  
 New Mexico, 59  
 Niagara Falls, 21  
 Nickelodeons, 24  
 North Pole exploration, 24  
 O'Keeffe, Georgia, 88, 102  
 Okies, 105  
 Oklahoma, 32  
 Olympic Winter Games (First), 85  
 Operation Overlord, 145  
 Oppenheimer, Robert, 146  
 organic architecture, 121  
 Organization of American States (OAS), 151  
 Owens, Jesse, 125  
 Palmer Raids, 77  
 Palmer, Mitchell, 77  
 Panama Canal, 13, 16  
 Paris Peace Conference, 48  
 Paul, Alice, 63, 75  
 Pearl Harbor, 136, 142-143  
 Peary, Robert E., 24  
 Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, 31  
 Pentagon, 164  
 Pershing, John "Black Jack," 47  
 phonograph, 21  
*Pilgrim's Progress*, 25  
*Pinocchio*, 158  
 Platt Amendment, 15  
 Pluto, 127  
*Porgy and Bess*, 95  
 Porter, Edwin S., 23  
 Potsdam Conference, 148  
 Prairie style, 121  
 Presidential Succession Act, 140  
 Progressive Party, 41  
 Prohibition, 51, 67, 73, 110, 132  
 Project Y, 146  
 Pulitzer Prize, 56  
 Pulitzer, Joseph, 56  
 Rankin, Jeanette, 64  
 Reagan, Ronald, 170  
 Red Scare, 54, 77  
 Red Summer, 52  
 Rin Tin Tin, 101  
 Ripley, Robert L., 123, 131  
 Roaring Twenties, 67, 90, 99  
 Robinson, Jackie, 155  
 Rockefeller, John D., 25, 53  
 Rockwell, Norman, 130  
 Rocky Mountain National Park, 59  
 Rodgers, Jimmie, 96  
 Rogers, Roy, 162



## MEET THE AUTHOR

**"I was lucky to have the opportunity to compete in the University Interscholastic League and Academic Decathlon and recognize the impact these academic contests had on my life. It is a joy to remain a 'participant' in this corner of the academic world by cultivating my students' love of learning and competing."**

— Keisha Bedwell



Keisha Bedwell is the director of Hexco's National History Bee personal coaching program and serves as an in-house researcher, writer, and editor specializing in social studies and writing-related contests. She holds a B.A. in both Psychology and History from Schreiner University and is a veteran tutor and writing coach. She brings a unique wealth of knowledge and insight to her work from her years of experience with coaching students of all ages and applies methodology gleaned from working in university tutoring centers and from studying and observing the workings of the National History Bee. In 2017, each of her students across the U.S. qualified for the History Bee's National Finals. When she's not writing or coaching, she enjoys traveling or spending time on the Guadalupe River with friends and her Australian Shepherd, Indie.

