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Post-civil War America, the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era

Post-civil war America was characterized by radical change in the consequent years after the war. The gilded and progressive eras were the periods following the civil war, the gilded age is a period after the American Civil war characterized by resource exploitation, transport expansion, racial divide and disorganized urbanization. In contrast the progressive era is characterized by a push for social and political reform for a better society. The changes in these eras were pushed by government, corporate, individual and union effort. The main aim of this paper is to determine how these two eras shaped America's political, economic, scientific and social growth as well as establish whether the progressive era was able to reverse the corrupt elements of the gilded era.

Economic growth in America post-civil war was started by the second industrial revolution. This revolution was characterized by industrial innovation through introduction of compatible parts and assembly-line production. Mineral, lumber and cotton resources led to working opportunities for citizens in factories and fields that were involved in processing or manufacturing. Wealth was unevenly distributed as a few corporation owners created monopolies in industry cutting off any competition and amassing wealth for them. Workers on the other hand remained poor from low wages and hostile working conditions leading to a push for fair business practices and better working environments through legislation and formation of labor unions in the country.

After the civil war America had plans to takeover of non-contiguous territories and make them part of the United States. Baron Stoeckl of Russia offered to sell Alaska for it was no longer a viable piece of property according to the Russians and Fredrick Seward (the then secretary of state) took up this offer and negotiated the cession. Shortly after submission to the senate and executive consideration, the treaty to acquire Alaska was ratified (Smith 412-433). Though a controversial matter, Hawaii was also annexed by the United States in an attempt to expand the country's territory (Noenoe 125). The United States had many other territories in mind that they wanted part of the country but annexation was not possible due to a few factors such as public opposition.

America saw major disruption in scientific evolution after the civil war. This was punctuated by use of electricity that aided in research. New technologies such as the telephone and automobile manufacturing resulted in the advancement of communication and transport respectively. In addition, aircraft was invented at around the same time as well as stud of biological weaponry all of which was employed during the First World War by the United States.

'Robber barons' who were essentially business leaders that came up during the gilded age used unfair and unethical means to amass wealth and expand their corporations. An attempt to rein these robber barons during the progressive era was made through a push for regulation of business, formation of labor unions to protect workers and formation of consumer unions to protect product consumers in the market. Political corruption was rampant affording gain to politicians and policy makers during the gilded period at the expense of low wage workers and the general livelihood of American citizens. During the progressive era efforts were made to expose corruption in government as well as business malpractices.

Racial segregation came about the gilded period as abolishment of slavery was phasing off many of the American states. Despite this, African Americans were denied political and economic gains during this period. The denial of these rights for African Americans did not end in the progressive era and progressives are guilty of pushing a political agenda that supported this oppression. In addition, prejudice for immigrants grew as they were blamed for low wages and poor working conditions by American citizens by enactment of an immigration pushed by labor unions in the country. Urbanization was marked by industrial revolution after the civil war. During the gilded period the wealthy lived in good houses while the poor crowded in poorly conditioned settlements.

Expansion to the West was marked by the advance of the railroad boosting trade and transportation. This in turn resulted in an exploitation of agricultural and mineral resources in the western American states predominant in the gilded age. In contrast, the progressive period was earmarked by the conscious conservation of natural resources and rehabilitation of the environment for future generations. In conclusion, it is clear that America acquired tremendous growth in its economy, territory and scientifically after the American civil war as shown above in

the essay. In addition, the progressive era made changes to consequences brought about by the gilded age. Although some elements of the gilded age were upheld or unchanged tremendous steps were made in making society better for all and especially the economically disadvantaged, people of foreign races and immigrants.

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