

Hello, all—

This week, we'll take a look at four of the important events and movements that shook the world in the first four decades of the twentieth century, from 1900 to 1940. It was also a time that really created the image and character of New York City. What do I mean? For example, the iconic skyline of Manhattan, now known throughout the world, was built during these years. This is when New York became New York, as the world pictures it even now.

**You'll see below a summary of these events and movements. At the end of this letter, you'll see an explanation of the assignment that will be due next week.**

### **Background: New York City in the early twentieth century**

**Okay, First**, because of the introduction of mass transit, cities like New York, in countries around the world, now began to have public concerts of popular music, and stadiums where you bought a ticket to enter and watch sports. So, the early twentieth century was really the beginning of pop culture. You'll see a video that looks at the introduction of some of the elements of the mass culture that we continue to live within today.

**Second**, with the industrialization that we've talked about—especially steamships and railroads—the turn of the twentieth century became a time of great movements of immigrants around the world. This was especially true among mostly poor southern and eastern Europeans, some who moved within Europe, and others who moved to the Americas, many of whom streamed into New York City, then across the United States. So, you'll see a video here about the now-iconic Ellis Island that looks at the human element of that era of mass migration.

**Third**, this is also the time when both European and American nations also begin to deal with urban problems, such as safe living conditions in crowded neighborhoods and worker safety in factories. In New York City, the "Progressive movement" aimed to deal with the new health and safety problems among people living in crowded conditions in the newly urban city. You'll see a video on the way the movement worked across the United States, and similar movements worked across Western Europe.

**And, fourth**, we'll take a look at the incredible catastrophe of a war that ranged across the world, a conflict that, at the time, they called the Great War. We now call it World War I. We'll see that this war, too, was bound up in the industrialization that we've been looking at through the 1800s.

### **New York City after World War I**

**After World War I ended in 1918, and into the 1920s, the U.S. had become the most powerful country in the world. That's when, financially, New York City became the world capital. Ten years later, when the nation's economy cratered with the Great Depression, NYC suffered a great fall.** The Great Depression began in 1929, and really extending through most of the 1930s,

and New York was hard hit. Here's what I mean: In 1929, the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building, like towers of prosperity, raced each other into the sky to become the world's two tallest buildings. By 1932, jobless people were building themselves homeless shelters in Central Park. New Yorkers felt themselves whiplashed.

So, the presidential election of 1932 was very important. How could the country get going again? The governor of New York was elected President. **Franklin Delano Roosevelt called his plan the New Deal.** He immediately began to use tax money to start building projects everywhere in the country to get people back to work. Many of these government projects were in New York City, and we can still many of them throughout the city. Big projects included, for example, the Triboro Bridge, the Brooklyn Public Library, and LaGuardia Airport. But there were a thousand projects across the city. I would bet that there is a New Deal project in your neighborhood.

### **Assignment parameters**

**So, here is the assignment that will be due next week. Its purpose is to offer a way to understand the way the New Deal helped shape New York City in a very specific and personal way:**

### **Living New Deal**

Please take a look at the website titled *The Living New Deal*: <https://livingnewdeal.org/new-york-chapter/>

On the site you'll see New Deal projects of all kinds in every state. Search for New York City and find a site near your home. It might be a power station or a bus terminal or a market. It might be a park or a school or a playground. It might be a war memorial or a housing project or a highway. Or choose another project from another borough that interests you more.

Please write a two-page report. Tell me which project you've chosen. How far is it from your home? What was the purpose of the project, and when was it built? (The New Deal continued for a decade.) What interests or puzzles you about this particular project? You might explain your own personal connection to the project, combined with the site's historical background and information. The goal is to move include both a description and an analysis that puts the site in context of the time. And maybe you'll want to take a walk to your site—if so, I'd enjoy seeing a photograph of the New Deal project you've chosen!

**As always, feel welcome to be in touch with any questions at all, okay?** Take care—