

THE GROWTH OF CITIES AND AMERICAN CULTURE, 1865–1900

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.*

Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus," 1883
(Inscription on the base of the Statue of Liberty)

In 1893, Chicago hosted a world's fair known as the World's Columbian Exposition. More than 12 million people traveled to the White City, as Chicago's fairgrounds and gleaming white buildings were known. Visitors saw the progress of American civilization as represented by new industrial technologies and by the architects' grand visions of an ideal urban environment. In just six decades, Chicago's population had grown to more than one million. Its central business district was a marvel of modern urban structures: steel-framed skyscrapers, department stores, and theaters. Around this central hub lay a sprawling gridiron of workers' housing near the city's factories and warehouses, and a few miles beyond were tree-lined suburban retreats for the wealthy. The entire urban complex was connected by hundreds of miles of streetcars and railroads.

Visitors to Chicago also experienced a "gray city" of pollution, poverty, crime, and vice. Some complained of the confusion of tongues, "worse than the tower of Babel," for in 1893 Chicago was a city of immigrants. More than three-fourths of its population were either foreign-born or the children of the foreign-born. Both the real Chicago and the idealized "White City" represented the complex ways in which three great forces of change—industrialization, immigration, and urbanization—were transforming the nature of American society in the late 19th century. A previous chapter covered industrialization. This chapter focuses on immigration and urbanization.

A Nation of Immigrants

In the last half of the 19th century, the U.S. population more than tripled, from about 23.2 million in 1850 to 76.2 million in 1900. The arrival of 16.2 million immigrants fueled the growth. An additional 8.8 million more arrived during the peak years of immigration, 1901–1910.

Growth of Immigration

The growing connections between the United States and the world are evident during this period, especially in the area of immigration. A increased combination of “pushes” (negative factors from which people are fleeing) and “pulls” (positive attractions of the adopted country) increased migrations around the world. The negative forces driving Europeans to emigrate included (1) the poverty of displaced farmworkers driven from the land by political turmoil and the mechanization of farmwork, (2) overcrowding and joblessness in cities as a result of a population boom, and (3) religious persecution, particularly of Jews in eastern Europe. Positive reasons for moving to the United States included this country’s reputation for political and religious freedom and the economic opportunities afforded by the settling of the West and the abundance of industrial jobs in U.S. cities. Furthermore, the introduction of large steamships and the relatively inexpensive one-way passage in the ships’ “steerage” made it possible for millions of poor people to emigrate.

“Old” Immigrants and “New” Immigrants

Through the 1880s, the vast majority of immigrants came from northern and western Europe: the British Isles, Germany, and Scandinavia. Most of these “old” immigrants were Protestants, although many were Irish or German Catholics. Their language (mostly English-speaking) and high level of literacy and occupational skills made it relatively easy for these immigrants to blend into a mostly rural American society in the early decades of the 19th century.

New Immigrants Beginning in the 1890s and continuing to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the national origins of most immigrants changed. The “new” immigrants came from southern and eastern Europe. They were Italians, Greeks, Croats, Slovaks, Poles, and Russians. Many were poor and illiterate peasants who had left autocratic countries and therefore were unaccustomed to democratic traditions. Unlike the earlier groups of Protestant immigrants, the newcomers were largely Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish. On arrival, most new immigrants crowded into poor ethnic neighborhoods in New York, Chicago, and other major U.S. cities.

An estimated 25 percent of them were “birds of passage,” young men contracted for unskilled factory, mining, and construction jobs, who would return to their native lands once they had saved a fair sum of money to bring back to their families.

Restricting Immigration

In the 1870s, when the French sculptor Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi began work on the Statue of Liberty, there were few legal restrictions on immigration to the United States. By 1886, however—the year that the great welcoming-statue was placed on its pedestal in New York Harbor—Congress had passed a number of new laws restricting immigration. First came the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, placing a ban on all new immigrants from China. As already noted in the last chapter, this hostility to the Chinese mainly came from the western states. Restrictions also came in 1882 on the immigration of “undesirable” persons, such as paupers, criminals, convicts, and those diagnosed as mentally incompetent. The Contract Labor Law of 1885 restricted temporary workers to protect American workers. A literacy test for immigrants was vetoed by President Cleveland, but passed in 1917. Soon after the opening of Ellis Island as an immigration center in 1892, new arrivals had to pass more rigorous medical examinations and pay a tax before entering the United States.

Efforts to restrict immigration were supported by diverse groups such as (1) labor unions, which feared that employers would use immigrants to depress wages and break strikes, (2) a nativist society, the American Protective Association, which was openly prejudiced against Roman Catholics, and (3) social Darwinists, who viewed the new immigrants as biologically inferior to English and Germanic stocks. During a severe depression in the 1890s, foreigners became a convenient scapegoat for jobless workers as well as for employers who blamed strikes and the labor movement on foreign agitators.

However, anti-immigrant feelings and early restrictions did not stop the flow of newcomers. At the turn of the century, almost 15 percent of the U.S. population were immigrants. The Statue of Liberty remained a beacon of hope for the poor and the oppressed of southern and eastern Europe until the 1920s, when the Quota Acts almost closed Liberty’s golden door (see Chapter 23).

Urbanization

Urbanization and industrialization developed simultaneously. Cities provided both laborers for factories and a market for factory-made goods. The shift in population from rural to urban became more obvious with each passing decade. By 1900 almost 40 percent of Americans lived in towns or cities. By 1920, for the first time, more Americans lived in urban areas than in rural areas.

Those moving into the cities were both immigrants and internal migrants born in the rural United States. In the late 19th century, millions of young Americans from rural areas decided to seek new economic opportunities in the cities. They left the farms for industrial and commercial jobs, and few of them returned. Among those who joined the movement from farms to cities were African Americans from the South. Between 1897 and 1930, nearly 1 million southern blacks settled in northern and western cities.

Residential Suburbs The residential pattern in the United States contrasted with that of Europe, where wealthy people remained near the business districts of modern cities and lower-income people live in the outlying areas. Five factors prompted Americans who could afford to move to the suburbs: (1) abundant land available at low cost, (2) inexpensive transportation by rail, (3) low-cost construction methods such as the wooden, balloon-frame house, (4) ethnic and racial prejudice, and (5) an American fondness for grass, privacy, and detached individual houses.

Landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed New York's Central Park in the 1860s, went on to design suburban communities with graceful curved roads and open spaces—"a village in the park." By 1900, suburbs had grown up around every major U.S. city, and a single-family dwelling surrounded by an ornamental lawn soon became the American ideal of comfortable living. Thus began the world's first suburban nation.

Private City Versus Public City At first, city residents tried to carry on life in large cities much as they had in small villages. Private enterprise shaped the development of American cities, and provided services such as streetcars and utilities for a profit. In time, increasing disease, crime, waste, water pollution, and air pollution slowly convinced reform-minded citizens and city governments of the need for municipal water purification, sewerage systems, waste disposal, street lighting, police departments, and zoning laws to regulate urban development. In the 1890s, the "City Beautiful" movement advanced grand plans to remake American cities with tree-lined boulevards, public parks and public cultural attractions. The debate between the private good and the public good in urban growth and development has continued as an open issue.

Boss and Machine Politics

The consolidation of power in business had its parallel in urban politics. Political parties in major cities came under the control of tightly organized groups of politicians, known as political machines. Each machine had its boss, the top politician who gave orders to the rank and file and doled out government jobs to loyal supporters. Several political machines, such as Tammany Hall in New York City, started as social clubs and later developed into power centers to coordinate the needs of businesses, immigrants, and the underprivileged. In return, machines asked for people's votes on election day.

Successful party bosses knew how to manage the competing social, ethnic, and economic groups in the city. Political machines often brought modern services to the city, including a crude form of welfare for urban newcomers. The political organization would find jobs and apartments for recently arrived immigrants and show up at a poor family's door with baskets of food during hard times. But the political machine could be greedy as well as generous and often stole millions from the taxpayers in the form of graft and fraud. In New York City in the 1860s, for example, an estimated 65 percent of public building funds ended up in the pockets of Boss Tweed and his cronies.

Awakening of Reform

Urban problems, including the desperate poverty of working-class families, inspired a new social consciousness among the middle class. Reform movements begun in earlier decades increased strength in the 1880s and 1890s.

Books of Social Criticism A San Francisco journalist, Henry George, published a provocative book in 1879 that became an instant best-seller and jolted readers to look more critically at the effects of laissez-faire economics. George called attention to the alarming inequalities in wealth caused by industrialization. In his book *Progress and Poverty*, George proposed one innovative solution to poverty: replacing all taxes with a single tax on land. Another popular book of social criticism, *Looking Backward, 2000–1887*, was written by Edward Bellamy in 1888. It envisioned a future era in which a cooperative society had eliminated poverty, greed, and crime. So enthusiastic were many of the readers of George's and Bellamy's books that they joined various reform movements and organizations to try to implement the authors' ideas. Both books encouraged a shift in American public opinion away from pure laissez-faire and toward greater government regulation.

Settlement Houses Concerned about the lives of the poor, a number of young, well-educated women and men of the middle class settled into immigrant neighborhoods to learn about the problems of immigrant families first-hand. Living and working in places called settlement houses, the young reformers hoped to relieve the effects of poverty by providing social services for people in the neighborhood. The most famous such experiment was Hull House in Chicago, which was started by Jane Addams and a college classmate in 1889. Settlement houses taught English to immigrants, pioneered early-childhood education, taught industrial arts, and established neighborhood theaters and music schools. By 1910 there were more than 400 settlement houses in America's largest cities.

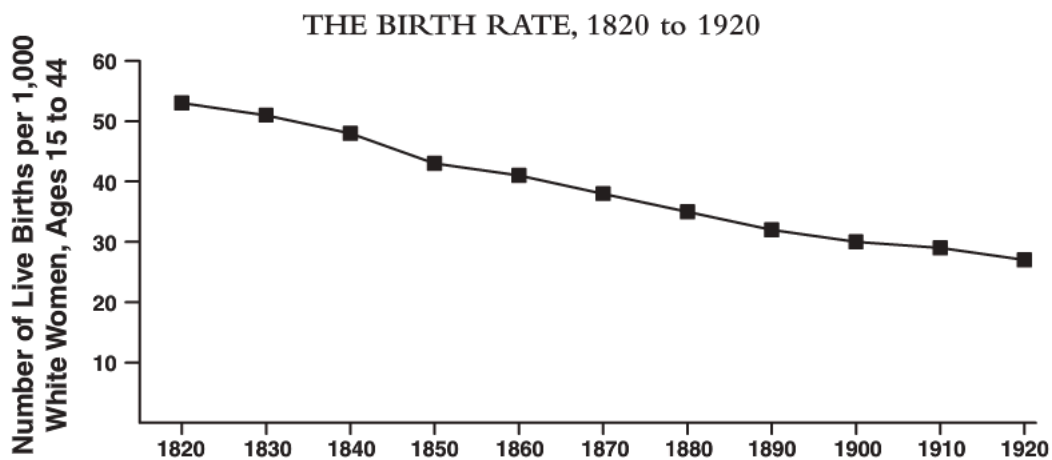
Settlement workers were civic-minded volunteers who created the foundation for the later job of social worker. They were also political activists who crusaded for child-labor laws, housing reform, and women's rights. Two settlement workers, Frances Perkins and Harry Hopkins, went on to leadership roles in President Franklin Roosevelt's reform program, the New Deal, in the 1930s.

Social Gospel In the 1880s and 1890s, a number of Protestant clergy espoused the cause of social justice for the poor—especially the urban poor. They preached what they called the Social Gospel, or the importance of applying Christian principles to social problems. Leading the Social Gospel movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a Baptist minister from New York, Walter Rauschenbusch, who worked in the poverty-stricken neighborhood of New York City called Hell's Kitchen, wrote several books urging organized religions to take up the cause of social justice. His Social Gospel preaching linked Christianity with the Progressive reform movement (see Chapter 21) and encouraged many middle-class Protestants to attack urban problems.

Religion and Society All religions adapted to the stresses and challenges of modern urban living. Roman Catholicism grew rapidly from the influx of new immigrants. Catholic leaders such as Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore inspired the devoted support of old and new immigrants by defending the Knights of Labor and the cause of organized labor. Among Protestants, Dwight Moody, who founded the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago in 1889, would help generations of urban evangelists to adapt traditional Christianity to city life. The Salvation Army, imported from England in 1879, provided basic necessities to the homeless and the poor while preaching the Christian gospel.

Members of the urban middle class were attracted to the religious message of Mary Baker Eddy, who taught that good health was the result of correct thinking about “Father Mother God.” By the time of her death in 1910, hundreds of thousands had joined the church she had founded, the Church of Christ, Scientist—popularly known as Christian Science.

Families in Urban Society Urban life placed severe strains on parents and their children by isolating them from the extended family (relatives beyond the family nucleus of parents and children) and village support. Divorce rates increased to one in 12 marriages by 1900, partly because a number of state legislatures had expanded the grounds for divorce to include cruelty and desertion. Another consequence of the shift from rural to urban living was a reduction in family size. Children were an economic asset on the farm, where their labor was needed at an early age. In the city, however, they were more of an economic liability. Therefore, in the last decades of the 19th century, the national average for birthrates and family size continued to drop.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*

Voting Rights for Women The cause of women’s suffrage, launched at Seneca Falls in 1848, was vigorously carried forward by a number of middle-class women. In 1890, two of the pioneer feminists of the 1840s, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony of New York, helped found the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) to secure the vote for women.

A western state, Wyoming, was the first to grant full suffrage to women, in 1869. By 1900, some states allowed women to vote in local elections, and most allowed women to own and control property after marriage.

Temperance Movement Another cause that attracted the attention of urban reformers was temperance. Excessive drinking of alcohol by male factory workers was one cause of poverty for immigrant and working-class families. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was formed in 1874. Advocating total abstinence from alcohol, the WCTU, under the leadership of Frances E. Willard of Evanston, Illinois, had 500,000 members by 1898. The Antisaloon League, founded in 1893, became a powerful political force and by 1916 had persuaded 21 states to close down all saloons and bars. Unwilling to wait for the laws to change, Carry A. Nation of Kansas created a sensation by raiding saloons and smashing barrels of beer with a hatchet.

Urban Reforms Across the country, grassroots efforts arose to combat corruption in city governments. In New York, a reformer named Theodore Roosevelt tried to clean up the New York City Police Department. As a result of his efforts, he became a vice-presidential nominee in 1896, and later the president. However, many of the reformers of the Gilded Age would not see their efforts reach fruition or have a national impact until the early 20th century.

Intellectual and Cultural Movements

The change from an agricultural to an industrial economy and from rural to urban living profoundly affected all areas of American life, including education, sciences, literature, arts, and popular entertainment.

Changes in Education

The growing complexity of life, along with reactions to Darwin's theory of evolution, raised challenging questions about what schools should teach.

Public Schools Elementary schools after 1865 continued to teach the 3 R's (reading, writing, arithmetic) and the traditional values promoted in the standard texts, McGuffey's readers. New compulsory education laws that required children to attend school, however, dramatically increased the number students enrolled. As a result, the literacy rate rose to 90 percent of the population by 1900. The practice of sending children to kindergarten (a concept borrowed from Germany) became popular and reflected the growing interest in early-childhood education in the United States.

Perhaps even more significant than lower-grade schools was the growing support for tax-supported public high schools. At first these schools followed the college preparatory curriculum of private academies, but soon the public high schools became more comprehensive. They began to provide vocational and citizenship education for a changing urban society.

Higher Education The number of U.S. colleges increased in the late 1800s largely as a result of: (1) land-grant colleges established under the federal Morrill acts of 1862 and 1890, (2) universities founded by wealthy philanthropists—the University of Chicago by John D. Rockefeller, for

example, and (3) the founding of new colleges for women, such as Smith, Bryn Mawr, and Mount Holyoke. By 1900, 71 percent of the colleges admitted women, who represented more than one-third of the attending students.

The college curriculum also changed greatly in the late 19th century. Soon after becoming president of Harvard in 1869, Charles W. Eliot reduced the number of required courses and introduced electives (courses chosen by students) to accommodate the teaching of modern languages and the sciences: physics, chemistry, biology, and geology. Johns Hopkins University was founded in Baltimore in 1876 as the first American institution to specialize in advanced graduate studies. Following the model of German universities, Johns Hopkins emphasized research and free inquiry. As a result of such innovations in curriculum, the United States produced its first generation of scholars who could compete with the intellectual achievements of Europeans. As the curriculum was changing, colleges added social activities, fraternities, and intercollegiate sports, additions that soon dominated the college experience for many students.

Social Sciences The application of the scientific method and the theory of evolution to human affairs revolutionized the study of human society in the late 19th century. New fields, known as the social sciences, emerged, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science. Richard T. Ely of Johns Hopkins attacked laissez-faire economic thought as dogmatic and outdated and used economics to study labor unions, trusts, and other existing economic institutions not only to understand them but also to suggest remedies for economic problems of the day. Evolutionary theory influenced leading sociologists (Lester F. Ward), political scientists (Woodrow Wilson), and historians (Frederick Jackson Turner) to study the dynamic process of actual human behavior instead of logical abstractions.

One social scientist who used new statistical methods to study crime in urban neighborhoods was W. E. B. Du Bois. The first African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard, Du Bois was the leading black intellectual of the era. He advocated for equality for blacks, integrated schools, and equal access to higher education for the “talented tenth” of African Americans.

The Professions Scientific theory and methodology also influenced the work of doctors, educators, social workers, and lawyers. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. argued that the law should evolve with the times in response to changing needs and not remain restricted by legal precedents and judicial decisions of the past. Clarence Darrow, a famous lawyer, argued that criminal behavior could be caused by a person’s environment of poverty, neglect, and abuse. These changes in the professions, along with changes in the universities, would provide a boost to progressive legislation and liberal reform in the 20th century.

Literature and the Arts

American writers and artists responded in diverse ways to industrialization and urban problems. In general, the work of the best-known innovators of the era reflected a new realism and an attempt to express an authentic American style.

Realism and Naturalism Many of the popular works of literature of the post-Civil War years were romantic novels that depicted ideal heroes and heroines. Breaking with this genteel literary tradition were regionalist writers such as Bret Harte, who depicted life in the rough mining camps of the West. Mark Twain (the pen name for Samuel L. Clemens) became the first great realist author. His classic work, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), revealed the greed, violence, and racism in American society.

A younger generation of authors who emerged in the 1890s became known for their naturalism, which focused on how emotions and experience shaped human experience. In his naturalistic novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), Stephen Crane told how a brutal urban environment could destroy the lives of young people. Crane also wrote the popular *Red Badge of Courage* about fear and human nature on the Civil War battlefield before dying himself of tuberculosis at only 29. Jack London, a young California writer and adventurer, portrayed the conflict between nature and civilization in novels such as *The Call of the Wild* (1903). A naturalistic book that caused a sensation and shocked the moral sensibilities of the time was Theodore Dreiser's novel about a poor working girl in Chicago, *Sister Carrie* (1900).

Painting Some American painters responded to the new emphasis on realism, while others continued to cater to the popular taste for romantic subjects. Winslow Homer, the foremost American painter of seascapes and watercolors, often rendered scenes of nature in a matter-of-fact way. Thomas Eakins's realism included paintings of surgical scenes and the everyday lives of working-class men and women. He also used the new technology of serial-action photographs to study human anatomy and paint it more realistically.



Source: Winslow Homer, "The Life Line," 1836–1910, LACMA

James McNeill Whistler was born in Massachusetts but spent most of his life in Paris and London. His most famous painting, *Arrangement in Grey and Black* (popularly known as “Whistler’s Mother”), hangs in the Louvre. This study of color, rather than subject matter, influenced the development of modern art. A distinguished portrait painter, Mary Cassatt, also spent much of her life in France where she learned the techniques of impressionism, especially in her use of pastel colors. As the 19th century ended, a group of social realists, such as George Bellows, of the “Ashcan School” painted scenes of everyday life in poor urban neighborhoods. Upsetting to realists and romanticists alike were the abstract, nonrepresentational paintings exhibited in the Armory Show in New York City in 1913. Art of this kind would be rejected by most Americans until the 1950s when it finally achieved respect among collectors of fine art.

Architecture In the 1870s, Henry Hobson Richardson changed the direction of American architecture. While earlier architects found inspiration in classical Greek and Roman styles, his designs were often based on the medieval Romanesque style of massive stone walls and rounded arches. Richardson gave a gravity and stateliness to functional commercial buildings. Louis Sullivan of Chicago went a step further by rejecting historical styles in his quest for a suitable style for the tall, steel-framed office buildings of the 1880s and 1890s. Sullivan’s buildings achieved a much-admired aesthetic unity, in which the form of a building flowed from its function—a hallmark of the Chicago School of architecture. Frank Lloyd Wright, an employee of Sullivan’s in the 1890s, developed an “organic” style of architecture that was in harmony with its natural surroundings. Wright’s vision is exemplified in the long, horizontal lines of his prairie-style houses. Wright became the most famous American architect of the 20th century. Some architects, such as Daniel H. Burnham,



Frank Lloyd Wright, Robie House, Chicago, 1909. Library of Congress

who revived classical Greek and Roman architecture in his designs for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, continued to explore historical styles.

One of the most influential urbanists, Frederick Law Olmsted specialized in the planning of city parks and scenic boulevards, including Central Park in New York City and the grounds of the U.S. Capitol in Washington. As the originator of landscape architecture, Olmsted not only designed parks, parkways, campuses, and suburbs but also established the basis for later urban landscaping.

Music With the growth of cities came increasing demand for musical performances appealing to a variety of tastes. By 1900, most large cities had either an orchestra, an opera house, or both. In smaller towns, outdoor bandstands were the setting for the playing of popular marches by John Philip Sousa.

Among the greatest innovators of the era were African Americans in New Orleans. Jelly Roll Morton and Buddy Bolden expanded the audience for jazz, a musical form that combined African rhythms with European instruments, and mixed improvisation with a structured format. The remarkable black composer and performer Scott Joplin sold nearly a million copies of sheet music of his "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899). Also from the South came blues music that expressed the pain of the black experience. Jazz, ragtime, and blues music gained popularity during the early 20th century as New Orleans performers headed north into the urban centers of Memphis, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Chicago.

Popular Culture

Entertaining the urban masses became big business in the late 19th century. People wanted amusements as respites from their work.

Popular Press Mass-circulation newspapers had been around since the 1830s, but the first newspaper to exceed a million in circulation was Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*. Pulitzer filled his daily paper with both sensational stories of crimes and disasters and crusading feature stories about political and economic corruption. Another New York publisher, William Randolph Hearst, pushed scandal and sensationalism to new heights (or lows).

Mass-circulation magazines also became numerous in the 1880s. Advertising revenues and new printing technologies made it possible for the *Ladies' Home Journal* and similar magazines to sell for as little as 10 cents a copy.

Amusements In addition to urbanization, other factors also promoted the growth of leisure-time activities: (1) a gradual reduction in the hours people worked, (2) improved transportation, (3) promotional billboards and advertising, and (4) the decline of restrictive Puritan and Victorian values that discouraged "wasting" time on play. Based on numbers alone, the most popular form of recreation in the late 19th century, despite the temperance movement, was drinking and talking at the corner saloon. Theaters that presented comedies and dramas flourished in most large cities, but vaudeville with its variety of acts drew the largest audiences. The national rail network encouraged traveling circuses such as Barnum and Bailey and the Ringling Brothers to create circus

trains that moved a huge number of acts and animals from town to town, as the “Greatest Show on Earth.” Also immensely popular was the Wild West show brought to urban audiences by William F. Cody (“Buffalo Bill”) and headlining such personalities as Sitting Bull and the markswoman Annie Oakley.

Commuter streetcar and railroad companies also promoted weekend recreation in order to keep their cars running on Sundays and holidays. They created parks in the countryside near the end of the line so that urban families could enjoy picnics and outdoor recreation.

Spectator Sports Professional spectator sports originated in the late 19th century. Boxing attracted male spectators from all classes, and champions such as John L. Sullivan became national heroes. Baseball, while it recalled a rural past of green fields and fences, was very much an urban game that demanded the teamwork needed for an industrial age. Owners organized teams into leagues, much as trusts of the day were organized. In 1909, when President William Howard Taft started the tradition of the president throwing out the first ball of the season, baseball was the national pastime. However, Jim Crow laws and customs prevented blacks from playing on all-white big-league baseball teams between the 1890s and 1947.

Football developed primarily as a college activity, with the first game played by two New Jersey colleges, Rutgers and Princeton, in 1869. In the 1920s professional football teams and leagues were organized. Basketball was invented in 1891 at Springfield College, in Massachusetts. Within a few years, high schools and colleges across the nation had teams. The first professional basketball league was organized in 1898.

American spectator sports were played and attended by men. They were part of a “bachelor subculture” for single men in their twenties and thirties, whose lives centered around saloons, horse races, and pool halls. It took years for some spectator sports, such as boxing and football, to gain middle-class respectability.

Amateur Sports The value of sports as healthy exercise for the body gained acceptance by the middle and upper classes in the late 19th century. Women were considered unfit for most competitive sports, but they engaged in such recreational activities as croquet and bicycling. Sports such as golf and tennis grew, but mostly among the prosperous members of athletic clubs. The very rich pursued expensive sports of polo and yachting. Clubs generally discriminated against Jews, Catholics, and Africans Americans.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: MELTING POT OR CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

To what extent did immigrants give up their heritage to become Americanized, or fully assimilated into the existing culture? The prevailing view in the 19th and early 20th centuries was that the United States was a melting pot, in which immigrant groups quickly shed old-world characteristics in order to become successful citizens of their adopted country. This view was expressed as early as 1782 by a naturalized Frenchman, J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur. In his *Letters From an American Farmer*, Crèvecoeur described how the American experience “melted” European immigrants “into a new race of men.” The term “melting pot” became firmly associated with immigration in a popular play by that name: Israel Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot* (1908). One line of this drama described “how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them [immigrants] with purging flames!”

In recent decades, the melting pot concept has come under intense scrutiny and challenge by modern historians. Carl N. Degler, for example, has argued that a more accurate metaphor would be the salad bowl, in which each ingredient (ethnic culture) remains intact. To support this view, Degler points to the diversity of religions in the United States. Neither immigrants nor their descendants gave up their religions for the Protestantism of the American majority.

In his groundbreaking study of immigration, *The Uprooted* (1952), Oscar Handlin observed that newcomers to a strange land often became alienated from both their native culture and the culture of their new country. According to Handlin, first-generation immigrants remained alienated and did not lose their cultural identity in the melting pot. Only the immigrants’ children and children’s children became fully assimilated into mainstream culture.

Many historians agree with Handlin that, after two or three generations, the melting pot, or assimilation, process reduced the cultural differences among most ethnic groups. However, certain groups have had a different experience. Historian Richard C. Wade has observed that African Americans who migrated to northern cities faced the special problem of racism, which has created seemingly permanent ghettos with “a growingly alienated and embittered group.”

Historians remain divided in their analysis of the melting pot. Those who accept the concept see people of diverse ethnic backgrounds coming together to build a common culture. Others see American urban history characterized by intergroup hostility, alienation, crime, and corruption. The questions about past immigration shape current views of ethnic tensions in contemporary society. Is there a process, common to all groups, in which initial prejudice against the most recent immigrants fades after two or three generations? Is the cultural diversity in U.S. society today a permanent condition—or just unmelted bits of foreign ways that will someday fuse into a homogeneous culture?

KEY NAMES, EVENTS, AND TERMS

Immigration (PEO, POL)

causes of immigration
old immigrants
new Immigrants
Statue of Liberty
Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
Immigration Act of 1882
Contract Labor Act of 1885
American Protective Association
Ellis Island 1892
melting pot vs. cultural diversity

City Growth (PEO, POL)

causes of migration
streetcar cities
steel-framed buildings
tenements, poverty
ethnic neighborhoods
residential suburbs
politic machines, "boss"
Tammany Hall
urban reformers
"City Beautiful" movement

Reformers (CUL)

Henry George
Edward Bellamy
Jane Addams
settlement houses
Social Gospel
Walter Rauschenbusch
Cardinal Gibbons

Dwight Moody
Salvation Army
family size, divorce
Susan B. Anthony, NAWSA
Francis Willard, WCTU
Antisaloon League
Carrie Nation

Education (CUL)

kindergarten
public high school
college elective system
Johns Hopkins University

Professions (CUL)

new social sciences
Richard T. Ely
Oliver Wendell Holmes
Clarence Darrow
W.E.B. Du Bois

Arts and Writing (CUL)

realism, naturalism
Mark Twain
Stephen Crane
Jack London
Theodore Dreiser
Winslow Homer
Thomas Eakins
Impressionism
James Whistler
Mary Cassatt
Ashcan School
Armory Show
abstract art

Architecture (CUL)

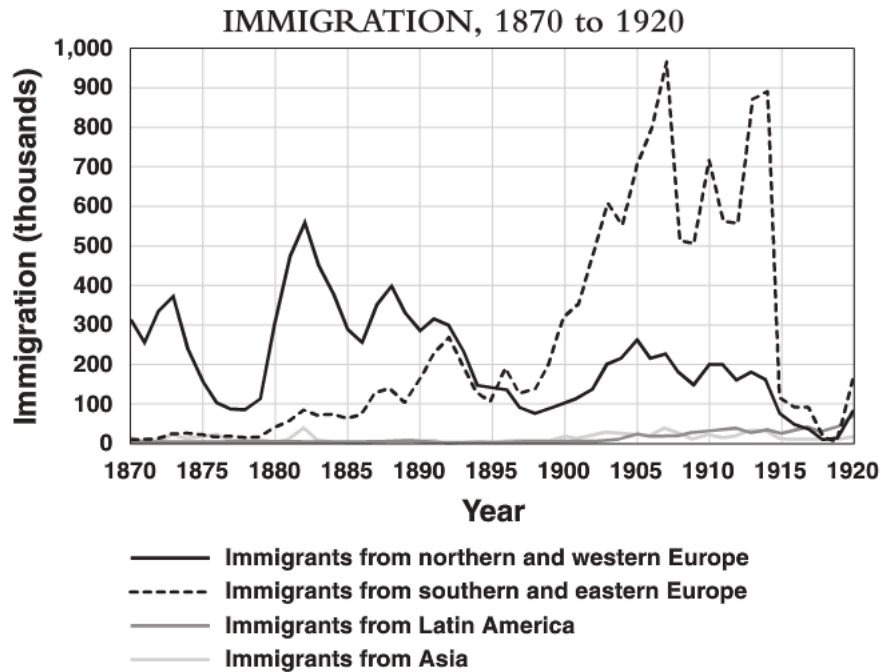
Henry Hobson Richardson
Romanesque style
Louis Sullivan
"form follows function"
Frank Lloyd Wright
organic architecture
Frederick Law Olmsted
landscape architecture

Popular Culture (CUL)

growth of leisure time
John Philip Sousa
jazz, blues, ragtime
Jelly Roll Morton
Scott Joplin
mass circulation
newspapers
Joseph Pulitzer
William Randolph Hearst
Ladies' Home Journal
circus trains
Barnum & Bailey
"Greatest Show on Earth"
"Buffalo Bill" Wild West Show
spectator sports, boxing, baseball
amateur sports, bicycling, tennis
social class and discrimination
country clubs, golf, polo, yachts
corner saloon, pool halls

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Questions 1–2 refer to the graph below.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*

1. In the chart above, the “new immigrants” include those who arrived in the United States from
 - (A) northern and western Europe
 - (B) southern and eastern Europe
 - (C) Latin America
 - (D) Asia
2. Which of the following most likely explains the significant reduction of immigration during the 1870s and 1890s to the United States?
 - (A) Conflicts between the “old” and “new” immigrants.
 - (B) Competition for jobs from Asian immigrations
 - (C) Financial panics and depressions
 - (D) Military conflicts in Europe

Questions 3–5 refer to the excerpt below.

“Today three-fourths of its [New York’s] people live in tenements. . . .

“If it shall appear that the sufferings and the sins of the ‘other half,’ and the evil they breed, are but as a just punishment upon the community that gave it no other choice, it will be because that is the truth. . . . In the tenements all the influences make for evil; because they are the hotbeds of the epidemics that carry death to rich and poor alike; the nurseries of pauperism and crime that fill our jails and police courts; that throw off a scum of forty thousand human wrecks to the island asylums and workhouses year by year; that turned out in the last eight years around half million beggars to prey upon our charities; that maintain a standing army of ten thousand tramps with all that that implies; because above all, they touch the family life with deadly moral contagion. . . .”

—Jacob A. Riis, journalist, *How the Other Half Lives*, 1890

3. Which phrase best summarizes what Riis considers the cause of the problems he sees?
 - (A) “are but as a just punishment upon the community”
 - (B) “In the tenements all the influences make for evil”
 - (C) “throw off a scum of forty thousand human wrecks”
 - (D) “touch the family life with deadly moral contagion”
4. During the late 19th century, which of the following groups most benefited from the poverty described by Riis?
 - (A) Impressionists
 - (B) Political machines
 - (C) Social Darwinists
 - (D) Social scientists
5. Which individual would be most likely to argue that the government should not intervene to improve the tenements?
 - (A) Herbert Spencer
 - (B) Eugene Debs
 - (C) Walter Rauschenbusch
 - (D) Jane Addams

Questions 6–8 refer to the excerpt below.

“I stand before you tonight under indictment for the alleged crime of having voted at the last presidential election, without having a lawful right to vote. It shall be my work this evening to prove to you that in thus voting, I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my citizen’s rights, guaranteed to me and all United States citizens by the National Constitution, beyond the power of any state to deny. . . . Are women persons? And I hardly believe any of our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are citizens; and no state has a right to make any law, or to enforce any old law, that shall abridge their privileges or immunities. Hence, every discrimination against women in the constitutions and laws of the several states is today null and void, precisely as is every one against Negroes.”

—Susan B. Anthony, “Is It a Crime for a Citizen of the United States to Vote?” 1873

6. Susan B. Anthony was arrested and fined \$100 for casting an illegal vote in the presidential election of 1872. She refused to pay the fine. To whom of the following were her actions most similar?
 - (A) Molly Pitcher
 - (B) Henry David Thoreau
 - (C) Dred Scott
 - (D) John Brown
7. Susan B. Anthony’s arguments for women’s suffrage can best be understood in the context of
 - (A) *Marbury v. Madison*
 - (B) The Monroe Doctrine
 - (C) The Reconstruction amendments
 - (D) The American Protective Association
8. Anthony targeted the states as the parts of government discriminating against women primarily for which of the following reasons?
 - (A) Except for the 14th and 15th amendments, the United States Constitution left the power to the states to determine who could vote
 - (B) She believed that all states were in violation of federal voting laws
 - (C) The states established marriage laws and at the time these laws kept women in an inferior legal position to men
 - (D) The federal government already supported suffrage for women

Question 4 is based on the two following excerpts.

“After all, the country club is nothing more than a rendezvous for a colony of congenial spirits. . . . Spring opens with polo, lawn tennis and yachting. . . . Turn your back on the racecourse and you well might fancy yourself at a huge garden party. . . . There is a shooting box where clay pigeons are used, a toboggan slide, golf course, and good tennis courts. . . .

“Who shall deny the country club to have been a veritable blessing, what with its sport and pleasure and health-giving properties that have brushed the cobwebs from weary brains, and given us blue sky, green grass and restful shade in exchange for smoke-laden atmosphere, parboiled pavements and never ceasing glare and racket of the city?”

—Caspar Whitney, sportwriter, *Harper’s New Monthly*, 1894

“The saloon was the only club the workingmen had then. For a few cents we could buy a glass of beer and hours of congenial society. Talk in these meeting places has a peculiar freedom from formality that engendered good-fellowship. . . . The saloon rendered a variety of industrial services. Frequently, wages were paid there—in checks which the saloonkeeper cashed. Of course, it was embarrassing to accept that service without spending money with him.

“All too frequently the saloonkeeper also served as an employment agent. But on the other hand the saloonkeeper was often a friend in time of strikes and the free lunch he served was a boon to many a hungry striker.”

—Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, 1925

4. Using the excerpts, answer a and b.
- a) Briefly explain TWO economic developments during this period that contributed to the social divisions reflected in these excerpts.
 - b) Briefly explain the significance of leisure time activities during the Gilded Age.

THINK AS A HISTORIAN: STATEMENTS ABOUT INTERPRETATION

Which TWO of the following statements best express historical interpretations?

- 1. By giving people shared experiences as fans, spectator sports promoted the blending of diverse immigrants into Americans.
- 2. Globalization in recent years has caused historians to focus on European influences on American culture in the late 19th century.
- 3. People today still read the works of Jack London and Stephen Crane.