

20 The Rise of an Urban Order

1870–1900



A stiff wind out of the southwest sent swirling bands of flame into the air, spreading the blaze that became the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. But the city would be rebuilt with remarkable speed, for it was located at the center of a new urban-industrial complex.

>> An American Story “THE DOGS OF HELL”

“**T**he dogs of hell were upon the housetops . . . bounding from one to another,” gasped Horace White, a Chicago reporter, as he described the fire consuming his city on a hot October day in 1871. Whipped by dry prairie winds, tornadoes of flame were whirling through Chicago, at times faster than fleeing residents. The flaming twisters, called “fire devils” by the locals, leapt from building to building, block to block, spinning and spewing fiery debris that fed the inferno. The heat was so intense that stone walls collapsed with a force that shook the earth. A burning ember set the roof of the Waterworks ablaze, leaving the city without enough water to fight the fire. Even the Chicago River burst into flame as industrial grease and oil floating on its surface ignited.

The Great Chicago Fire was the worst disaster in the city's history. When the flames finally burned themselves out more than a day later, a smoldering scar of cinders and rubble four miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide cut through the city. The fire destroyed the business district and left a third of the city's 300,000 residents homeless. As many as 300 people died. Could the city—any city—recover from such a calamity?

Unitarian minister Robert Collyer had the answer. "We have not lost, first, our geography," he told his congregation with little doubt that geography was destiny. "Nature called the lakes, the forests, the prairies together in convention long before we were born, and they decided that on this spot a great city would be built." Linking eastern railroads and the Great Lakes with the West, Chicago's prime location at the crossroads of continental commerce had not moved one inch.

More than geography favored recovery. An astounding assortment of assets survived the fire. The city's stockyards and packinghouses, the center of a meat industry that made Chicago "Hog Butcher of the World," lay untouched. Along the wharves on the Chicago River,

lumberyards and mills miraculously survived. To the west, two-thirds of the city's grain elevators still stood, their giant silos holding corn, wheat, and other grains for processing and shipment. And the rails that connected Chicago to the rest of the country remained largely intact.

Opportunity beckoned, and people poured into the city. Chicago grew vertically, attracting a whole school of young architects whose soaring structures created a new cityscape. It grew horizontally, with new rail and telephone lines spreading onto empty prairie. As its lines of commerce and industry radiated outward, the city transformed the ecosystems around it. Wheat to feed Chicago's millions replaced sheltering prairie grasses. Stands of white pine in Wisconsin vanished, only to reappear in the furniture and frames of Chicago houses or as fence rails shipped to farms on the Great Plains. By 1900 Chicago was the fastest-growing city in the world with a population that topped a million and a half people.

Chicago was not the only American city to flourish. In 1898 New York's five boroughs merged into one giant metropolis. Like Chicago, it was knitted together by a series of bridges and rail lines that allowed it and other industrial cities

to function with new precision and efficiency on a scale never before dreamed of. The industrial city reshaped the environment, remade the urban landscape, and gave rise to a new kind of politician drawn from the ranks of ordinary people, many of them immigrants or their children. They came from the streets and saloons, the slums and tenements, the firehouses and funeral homes. Many of their families had only recently arrived in America. While the Irish of Tammany Hall ran New York City, Germans governed St. Louis, Scandinavians Minneapolis, and Jews San Francisco.

In an earlier age, political leadership had been drawn from the ranks of the wealthy and native-born. America had been an agrarian republic where personal relationships were grounded in small communities. By the late nineteenth century, the country was in the midst of an urban explosion. Industrial cities of unparalleled size and diversity were remaking American life. They lured people from all over the globe, created tensions between natives and newcomers, refashioned the social order in a fluid urban world. A new urban age was dawning. The golden door of opportunity opened onto the city. <<

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A NEW URBAN AGE

The modern city was the product of industrialization. Cities contained the great investment banks, the smoky mills and dingy sweatshops, the railroad yards, tenements, mansions and new department stores. Opportunity—to work and play—drew people from as near as the countryside and as far away as Italy, Russia, Armenia, and China. By the end of the nineteenth century America had entered a new urban age, with tens of millions of “urbanites,” an urban landscape, and a growing urban culture.

The Urban Explosion >> During the 50 years after the Civil War the population of the United States tripled—from 31 million to 92 million. Yet the number of Americans living in cities increased nearly sevenfold. By 1910 nearly half the nation lived in cities large and small.

Cities grew in every region of the country. In the Northeast and upper Midwest, early industrialization created more cities than in the West and the South, although a few big cities sprouted there as well. Atlanta, Nashville, and later Dallas and Houston boomed under the influence of railroads. By 1900 Los Angeles with its 100,000 residents was second only to San Francisco on the West Coast.

Large urban centers dominated whole regions, tying the country together in a vast urban network. New York, the nation’s banker, printer, and chief marketplace, ruled the East. Smaller cities operated within narrower spheres of influence and often specialized. Milwaukee was famous for beer, Tulsa for oil, and Hershey, Pennsylvania, for chocolate.

Cities shaped the natural environment hundreds of miles beyond their limits. Chicago, gateway to the West, became a powerful agent of ecological change. As its lines of commerce and industry radiated outward, the city transformed the rich ecosystems of the West. Wheat to feed Chicago’s millions replaced sheltering prairie grasses. Great stands of white pine in Wisconsin vanished, only to reappear in the furniture and frames of Chicago houses, or as fence rails shipped to prairie farms.

The Great Global Migration >>

Between 1820 and 1920 some 60 million people across the globe left farms and villages for cities. Beginning in the 1870s new oceangoing, steam-powered ships extended the reach of migrating laborers across continents and created a labor exchange that spanned the globe. In Europe mushrooming

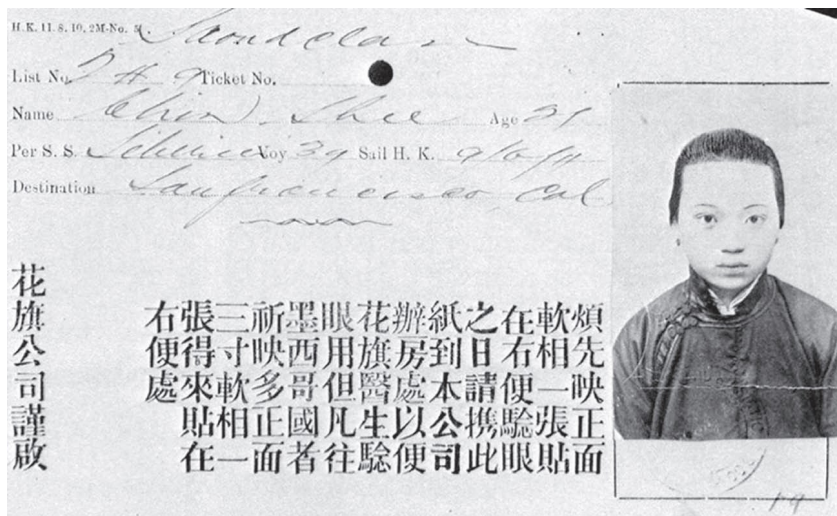
populations gave emigrants a powerful push out, while machinery cut the need for farmworkers.

Surplus farmworkers became part of a vast international labor force, pulled by industry to cities in Europe and America. The prospect of factory work for better pay and fewer hours especially lured the young. In the United States young farm women spearheaded the urban migration. Mechanization and the rise of commercial agriculture made them less valuable in the fields; mass-produced goods from mail-order houses made them less useful at home.

Asia sent comparatively fewer newcomers to the United States, Canada, and other industrializing nations hungry for workers. Still, Asian immigrants followed migration patterns similar to those of the workers leaving Europe and for similar reasons. Between 1850 and 1882 rising taxes and rents on land and declining markets drove some 370,000 Chinese across the Pacific to the United States. Nearly 400,000 Japanese arrived between 1885 and 1924.

Immigration from Europe dwarfed all others as new regions of the continent contributed growing numbers. Earlier in the century, European immigrants had come from northern and western Europe. In the 1880s, however, **“new” immigrants** from southern and eastern Europe began to arrive. Some, like Russian and Polish Jews, were fleeing religious and political persecution. Others left to evade famine and diseases such as cholera, which swept across southern Italy in 1887. But most came for the same reasons that motivated migrants from the countryside: a job, more money, a fresh start.

“new” immigrants called “new” because they differed from earlier arrivals from northern and western Europe; these newcomers came from eastern and southern Europe and were largely non-Protestant: Catholics, Jews, and Russian Orthodox Christians.



▲ Chin Shee was 21 years old and bound for San Francisco at the time this boarding pass was issued in Hong Kong in 1911.

IMMIGRATION, 1860–1920

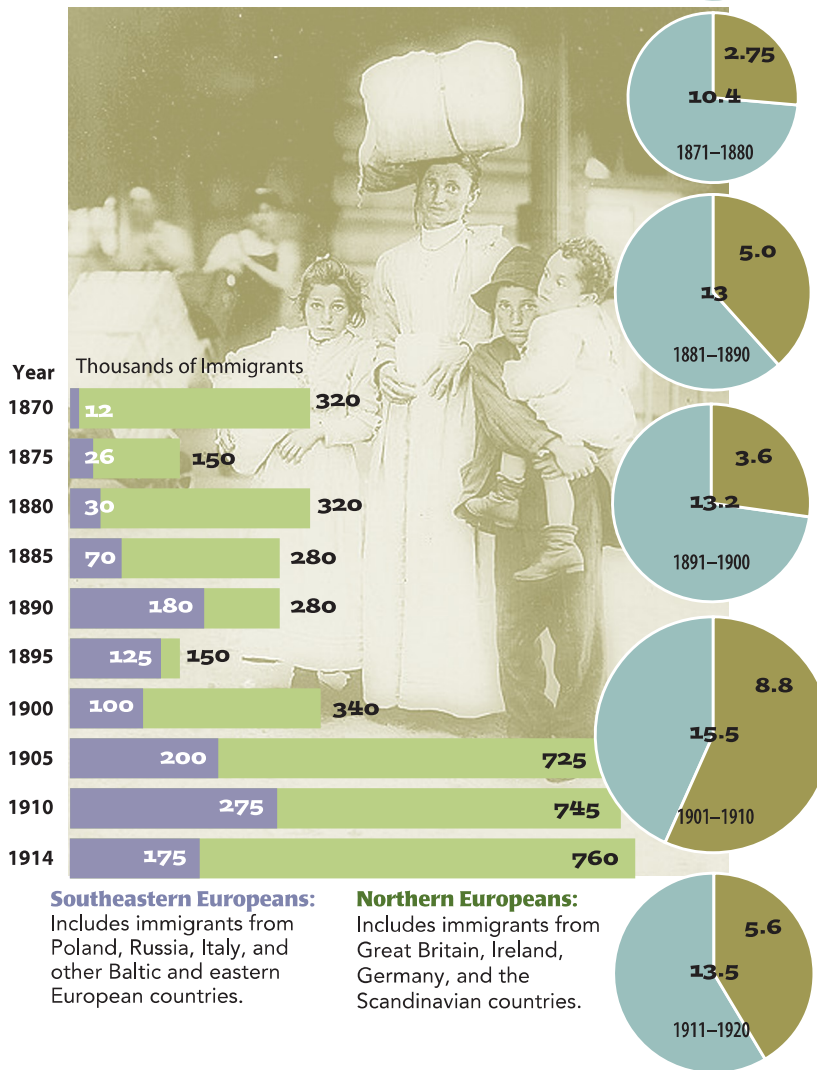
Between 1860 and 1920 immigration increased dramatically as the sources of immigrants shifted from northern Europe to southeastern Europe. Despite fears to the contrary, the proportion of newcomers as a percentage of population increases did not show nearly the same jump.

Ambitious, hardy, and resourceful, immigrants found themselves tested every step of the way to America. It took one to two weeks to cross the Atlantic. Immigrants spent most of the time below decks in cramped, filthy compartments called “steerage.” Most landed at New York’s Castle Garden or the newer facility on nearby Ellis Island, opened in 1892. If arriving from Asia, they landed at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. They had to pass a medical examination, have their names recorded by customs officials, and pay an entry tax. At any point, they could be detained or shipped home.

Most newcomers were young, between the ages of 15 and 40. Few spoke English or had skills or much education. Unlike earlier arrivals, who were mostly Protestant, these new immigrants worshiped in Catholic, Greek, or Russian Orthodox churches and Jewish synagogues. Almost two-thirds were men. A large number came to make money to buy land or start businesses back home. Some changed their minds and sent for relatives, but those returning home were common enough to be labeled “birds of passage.” Still, by 1900 some 30 million immigrants had arrived. They made up nearly 15 percent of the population.

Total immigration (millions)

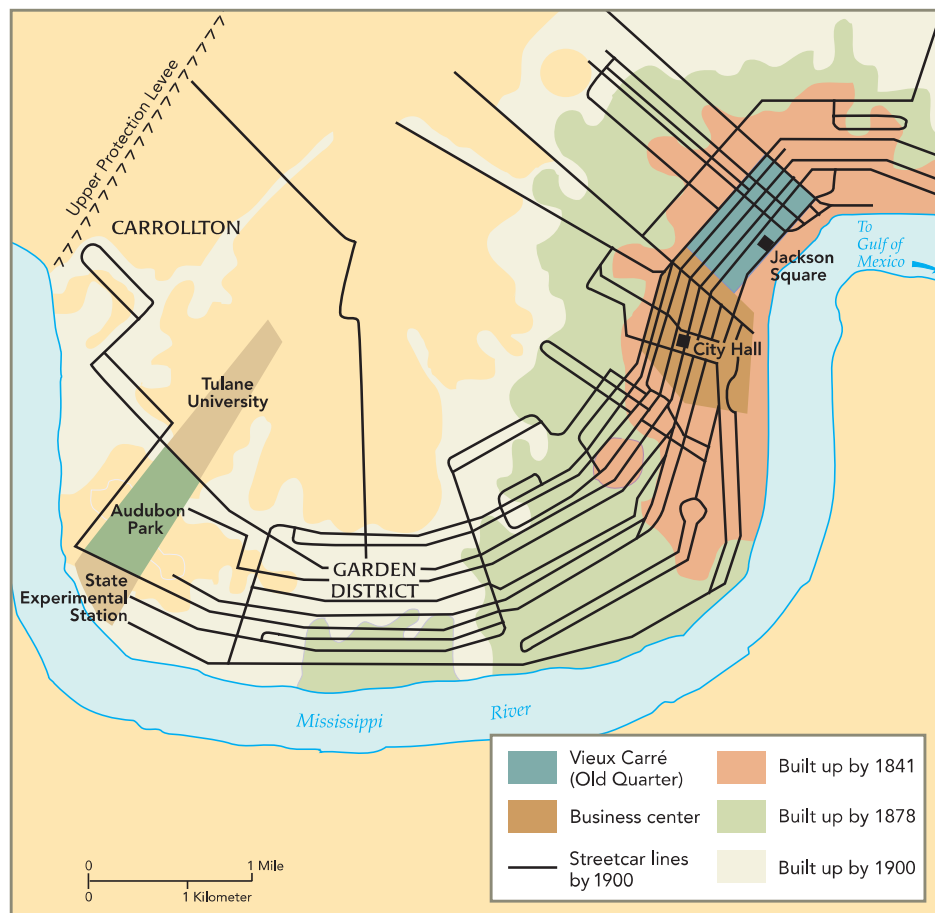
Overall population increase per 10-year period (millions)



Opinion

Did massive immigration from eastern and southern Europe help or hinder the United States in the late nineteenth century?

Holding the City Together >> In colonial days Benjamin Franklin could walk from one end of Boston to the other in an hour. Only Franklin’s adopted home, Philadelphia, spilled into suburbs. Over the years these colonial “walking cities” developed ringed patterns of settlement. Merchants, professionals, and the upper classes lived near their shops and offices in the city center. As one walked outward, the income and status of the residents declined. Cities of the late nineteenth century still exhibited this ringed pattern, except that industrialization had reversed the order and increased urban sprawl. The wealthy now lived at the outskirts of the city and the poor and working poor at the industrial center.



MAP 20.1: GROWTH OF NEW ORLEANS TO 1900

Streetcars helped cities spread beyond business districts while still functioning as organic wholes. By 1900 streetcar lines in New Orleans reached all the way to Audubon Park and Tulane University, bringing these once-distant points within the reach of city dwellers and creating “streetcar suburbs.”

For all their differences, the circles of settlement held together as a part of an interdependent whole. One reason was an evolving system of urban transportation. By the mid-nineteenth century, horse-drawn railways were conveying some 35 million people a year in New York. Their problems were legendary: so slow, a person could walk faster; so crowded (according to Mark Twain), you “had to hang on by your eyelashes and your toenails”; so dirty, tons of horse manure were left daily in the streets.

Civic leaders came to understand that the modern city could not survive, much less grow, without improved transportation. San Francisco installed trolley cars pulled by steam-driven cables. The innovation worked so well in hilly San Francisco that Chicago, Seattle, and other cities installed cable systems in the 1880s. Some cities experimented with elevated trestles, to carry steam locomotives or cable lines high above crowded streets. But none of the breakthroughs quite did the trick. Cables remained slow and unreliable;

the elevated railways, or “els,” were dirty, ugly, and noisy.

Electricity rescued city travelers. In 1888 Frank Julian Sprague, a naval engineer who had once worked for Thomas Edison, installed the first electric trolley line in Richmond, Virginia. Electrified streetcars were soon speeding along at 12 miles an hour, twice as fast as horses. By 1902 electricity drove nearly all city railways. Sprague’s breakthroughs also meant that “subways” could be built without having to worry about tunnels filled with a steam engine’s smoke and soot. Between 1895 and 1897 Boston built the first underground electric line. New York followed in 1904 with a subway that ran from the southern tip of Manhattan north to Harlem.

The rich had long been able to keep homes outside city limits, traveling in private carriages. New systems of mass transit freed the middle class and even the poor to live miles from work. For a nickel or two, anyone could ride from central shopping and business districts to the suburban fringes and back. A network of moving vehicles held the segmented

and sprawling city together and widened its reach out to “streetcar suburbs.”

Bridges and Skyscrapers >> Since cities often grew along rivers and harbors, their separate parts sometimes had to be joined over water. The principles of building large river bridges had already been worked out by the railroads. It remained for a German immigrant, John Roebling, and his son, Washington, to make the bridge a symbol of urban growth.

Their creation—the legendary Brooklyn Bridge linking Manhattan with Brooklyn—took 13 years to complete, cost \$15 million and 20 lives, and killed designer John. When it opened in 1883 it stretched more than a mile across the East River, with passage broad enough for a footpath, two double carriage lanes, and two railroad lines. Its arches were cut like giant cathedral windows, and its supporting cables hung, said an awestruck observer, “like divine

messages from above.” Soon other suspension bridges were spanning the railroad yards in St. Louis and the bay at Galveston, Texas.

Even as late as 1880 church steeples towered over squat factories and office buildings. But growing congestion and the increasing value of land challenged architects to search for ways to make buildings taller. Thin air became valuable real estate. In place of thick, heavy walls of brick that restricted factory floor space, builders used cast-iron columns. The new “cloudscrapers” were strong, durable, and fire-resistant, ideal for warehouses and also for office buildings and department stores.

Steel, with greater flexibility and strength than iron, turned cloudscrapers into skyscrapers. William LeBaron Jenney first used steel in his 10-story Home Life Insurance Building (1885) in Chicago. By the end of the century steel frames and girders raised buildings to 30 stories or more. New York City’s triangular Flatiron Building used the new technology to project an angular, yet remarkably delicate elegance. In Chicago, Daniel Burnham’s Reliance Building (1890) made such heavy use of new plate glass windows that contemporaries called it “a glass tower fifteen stories high.”

It was no accident that many of the new skyscrapers arose in Chicago. The city had burned nearly to the ground in 1871. The “Chicago school” of architects helped to rebuild it. The young maverick Louis H. Sullivan promised a new urban profile in which the skyscraper would be “every inch a proud and soaring thing.” In the Wainwright Building (1890) in St. Louis and the Carson, Pirie, and Scott department store (1889–1904) in Chicago, Sullivan produced towering structures that symbolized the modern industrial city.

Slum and Tenement >> Far below the skyscrapers lay the slums and **tenements** of the inner

tenement building often in disrepair and usually five or six stories in height, in which cheap apartments were rented to tenants.

city. In cramped rooms and sunless hallways, along narrow alleys and in flooded basements, lived the city poor. They often worked there, too. In “sweaters’

shops” as many as 18 people labored and slept in foul two-room flats.

Slum dwellers often lived on poor diets that left them vulnerable to epidemics. Cholera, typhoid, and an outbreak of yellow fever in Memphis in the 1870s killed tens of thousands. Tuberculosis was deadlier still. Slum children—all city children—were most vulnerable to such diseases. Almost a quarter of the children born in American cities in 1890 never lived to see their first birthday.



^ Designed by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham and completed in 1902, the Fuller Building quickly became known as the “Flatiron Building” for its uniquely triangular shape. With a steel frame, it soared to a height of 22 stories, making it one of the tallest structures in New York City. “I found myself agape,” wrote science fiction novelist H. G. Wells when he saw the building, “admiring a sky-scraper, the prow of the Flat-iron Building, to be particular, ploughing up through the traffic of Broadway and Fifth Avenue in the afternoon light.”

The installation of new sewage and water purification systems helped. The modern flush toilet came into use only after the turn of the century. Until then people relied on water closets and communal privies, some of which catered to as many as 800. All too often cities dumped waste into old private vaults or rivers used for drinking water.

Slum housing was often more dangerous than the water. The tubercle bacillus flourished in musty, windowless tenements. In 1879 New York enacted a



▲ Tenement house yard, photographed by Jacob Riis.

new housing law requiring a window in all bedrooms of new tenements. Architect James E. Ware won a competition with a creative design that contained an indentation on both sides of the building. When two tenements abutted, the indentations formed a narrow shaft for air and light. From above, the buildings looked like giant dumbbells and packed up to 16 families on a floor.

Originally hailed as an innovation, Ware's dumbbell tenement spread over such cities as Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Boston "like a scab," said an unhappy reformer. The airshafts became giant silos for trash, which blocked what little light had entered and, worse still, carried fires from one story to the next. When the New York housing commission met in 1900, it concluded that conditions were worse than when reformers had started 33 years earlier.

✓ REVIEW

How did industrial cities grow and at what costs?

RUNNING AND REFORMING THE CITY

Every new arrival to the city brought dreams and altogether too many needs. Schools and houses had to be built, streets paved, garbage collected, sewers dug, fires fought, utility lines laid. Running the city became a full-time job, and a new breed of full-time politician rose to the task. So, too, did a new breed of reformer, determined to help the needy cope with the ravages of urban life.

The need for change was clear. Many city charters dating from the eighteenth century included a paralyzing system of checks and balances. Mayors vetoed city councils; councils ignored mayors. Jealous state legislatures allowed cities only the most limited and unpopular taxes, such as those on property. At the same time, city governments were often decentralized—fragmented, scattered, at odds with one another. Each branch was a tiny kingdom with its own regulations and taxing authority. As immigrants and rural newcomers flocked to factories and tenements, the structures of urban government strained to adapt.

Boss Rule >> Why must there be a boss," journalist Lincoln Steffens asked Boss Richard Croker of New York, "when we've got a mayor—and a city council?" "That's why," Croker broke in. "It's because we've got a mayor and a council and judges—and—a hundred other men to deal with." The boss was right. He and his political system furnished cities with the centralization, authority, and services they sorely needed.

Bosses ruled through the **political machine**. Often, as with New York City's Tammany Hall, machines dated back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They began as fraternal and charitable organizations. Over the years they became centers of political power. In New York the machine was Democratic; in Philadelphia, Republican. Machines could even be found in rural areas such as Duval County, Texas, where the Spanish-speaking Anglo boss Archie Parr

political machine hierarchical political organization developed in the nineteenth century that controlled the activities of a political party and was usually headed by a political boss.



▲ Hester Street, New York City. In such crowded urban areas, city bosses thrived where municipal services were stretched thin.

molded a powerful alliance with Mexican American landowners.

In an age of enterprise, the boss operated his political machine like a corporation. His office might be a saloon, a funeral home, or, like the office of New York's George Washington Plunkitt, a shoeshine stand. His managers were party activists, connected in a corporate-like chain of command. Local committeemen reported to district captains, captains to district leaders, district leaders to the boss or bosses who directed the machine.

The goods and services of the machine were basics: a Christmas turkey, a load of coal for the winter, jobs for the unemployed, English-language classes for recent immigrants. Bosses sponsored fun, too: sports teams, glee clubs, balls, and barbecues. In return, citizens expressed their gratitude at the ballot box.

Sometimes the votes of the grateful were not enough. Bosses marshaled the "graveyard vote" by drawing names from tombstones to pad lists of registered voters. They hired "repeaters" to vote under the phony names. When reformers introduced the Australian (secret) ballot in the 1880s to prevent fraud, bosses pulled the "Tasmanian dodge" by premarking election tickets. Failing that, they dumped whole ballot boxes

into the river or used hired thugs to scare unpersuaded voters away from the polls.

Rewards, Accomplishments, and Costs >>

Why did bosses go to such lengths? Some simply loved the game of politics. More often bosses loved money. Their ability to get it was limited only by their ingenuity or the occasional success of an outraged reformer. The record for brassiness must go to Boss William Tweed. During his reign in the 1860s and 1870s, Tweed swindled New York City out of a fortune. His masterpiece of graft was a chunky three-story courthouse in lower Manhattan originally budgeted at \$250,000. When Tweed was through, the city had spent more than \$13 million, over 60 percent of which lined the pockets of Tweed and his cronies. Tweed died in prison, but with such profits to be made, it was small wonder that bosses nearly matched the emperors of Rome as builders.

In their fashion, bosses played a vital role in the industrial city. Rising from the bottom ranks, they guided immigrants into American life and helped some of the underprivileged up from poverty. They changed the urban landscape with a massive construction program. They modernized city government by uniting it and making it perform. Choosing the aldermen, municipal judges,

>> *The Sawdust Trail*, painted by George Bellows in 1916, depicts one of the revival meetings of William Ashley (“Billy”) Sunday in Philadelphia. Sunday, a hard-drinking professional baseball player turned evangelist, began his religious revivals in the 1890s and drew thousands. Here, Sunday leans down from the platform to shake the hand of an admirer. In the foreground, a swooning woman, overcome with a sense of her sins, is carried away.

mayors, and administrative officials, bosses exerted new control to provide the contracts and franchises to run cities. Such accomplishments fostered the notion that government could be called on to help the needy. The welfare state, still decades away, had some roots here.

The toll was often outrageous. Inflated taxes, extorted revenue, unpunished vice and crime were only the obvious costs. A woman whose family enjoyed a boss’s Christmas turkey might be widowed by an accident to her husband in a sweatshop kept open by timely bribes to the local political club. Filthy buildings might claim her children’s lives as corrupt inspectors ignored serious violations. Buying votes and selling favors, bosses turned democracy into a petty business—as much a “business,” said Plunkitt, “as the grocery or dry—goods or the drug business.”

Nativism, Revivals, and the Social Gospel >>

Urban blight and the condition of the poor inspired social as well as political activism, especially within churches. Not all of it was constructive. The popular Congregationalist minister Josiah Strong concluded that the city was “a menace to society.” Along with anxious economists and social workers, he blamed everything from corruption to unemployment on immigrant city dwellers and urged restricting their entry.

In the 1880s and 1890s two depressions sharpened such anxieties. Nativism, a defensive and fearful nationalism, peaked as war ignited prejudice. Organizations such as the new Immigration Restriction League attacked Catholics and foreigners. Already the victims of racial prejudice, the Chinese were easy targets. In 1882 Congress enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act banning the entry of Chinese laborers, stranding a mostly male Chinese population in the United States. It was the first time race was employed to exclude people from entry and represented a fateful step in the drive to restrict immigration.

To bridge the gap between the middle class and the poor, some clergy took their missions to the slums. Beginning in 1870 Dwight Lyman Moody, a 300-pound former shoe salesman, won armies of lowly converts with revivals in Boston, Chicago, and other cities. Evangelists helped to found American branches of the British-born Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and Salvation Army.

A small group of ministers rejected the traditional notion that weak character explained sin and that society would be perfected only as individual sinners were converted. They spread a new “Social Gospel” that

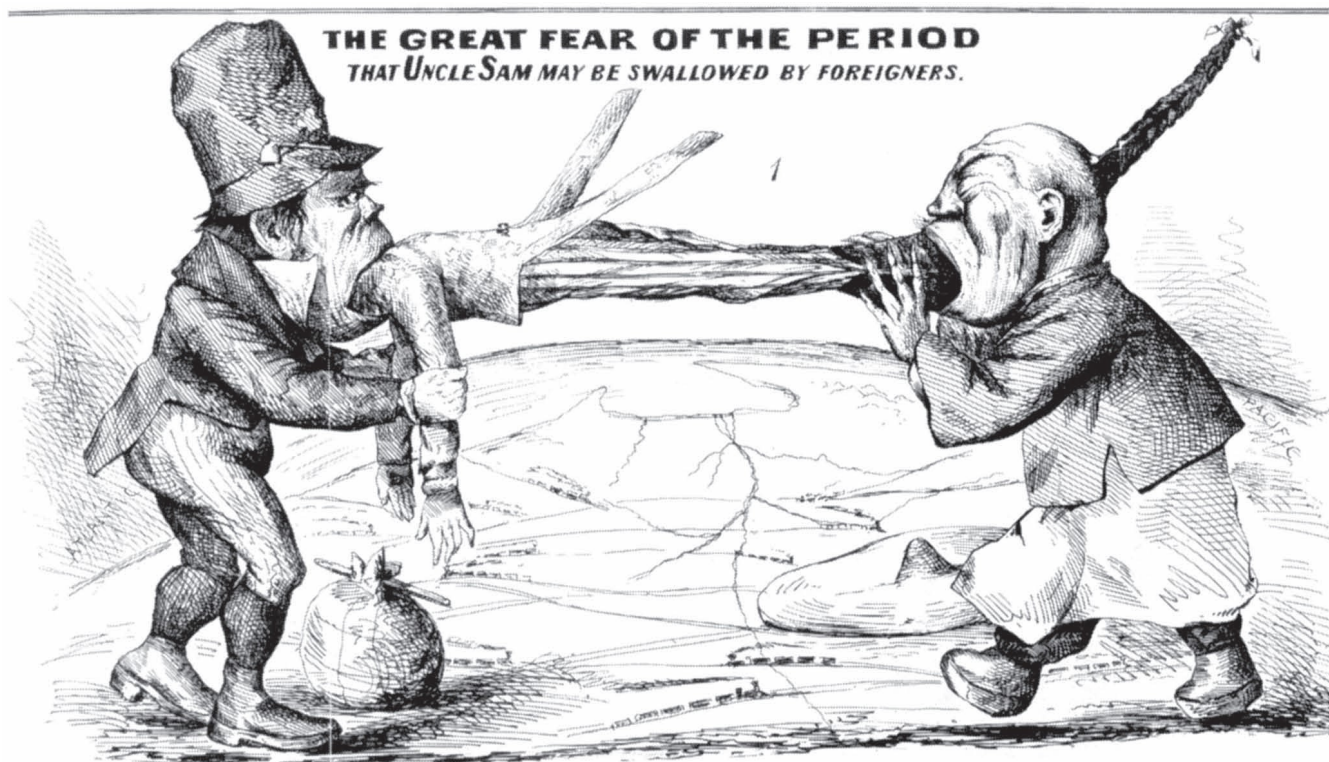


focused on improving the conditions of society to save individuals. In *Applied Christianity* (1886) the influential Washington Gladden preached that the church must be responsible for correcting social injustices, including dangerous working conditions and unfair labor practices. Houses of worship, such as William Rainford’s St. George’s Episcopal Church in New York City, became centers of social activity, with boys’ clubs, gymnasiums, libraries, glee clubs, and industrial training programs.

The Social Settlement Movement >>

Church-sponsored programs sometimes repelled the immigrant poor, especially when they saw them as thinly disguised missionary efforts. Immigrants and other slum dwellers were more receptive to a bold experiment called the **settlement house**. Situated in the worst slums, often in renovated old houses, these early community centers were run by middle-class women and men to help the poor and foreign-born. At the turn of the century there were more than 100 of them, the most famous being Jane Addams’s Hull House in Chicago. In 1898 the Catholic Church sponsored its first settlement house in New York City, and in 1900 Bronson House opened its doors to the Latino community in Los Angeles.

settlement house social reform effort that used neighborhood centers in which settlement house workers lived and worked among the poor, often in slum neighborhoods.



▲ By the 1800s a flood of southern and eastern European immigrants were streaming into the new receiving center of Ellis Island in New York Harbor, while the relatively few Asian immigrants who arrived (most were barred from entry by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882) came through Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. The rapid rise in immigration ignited nativist fears that immigrants were taking over the country. In the 1870s cartoon pictured here, Irish and Chinese immigrants in their native dress literally gobble up Uncle Sam.

High purposes inspired settlement workers, who actually lived in the settlement houses. They left comfortable middle-class homes and dedicated themselves (like the “early Christians,” said one) to service and sacrifice. They aimed to teach immigrants American ways and to create a community spirit of “right living through social relations.” Immigrants were also encouraged to preserve their heritages through festivals, parades, and museums. Like political bosses, settlement reformers furnished help, from day nurseries to English-language and cooking classes to playgrounds and libraries. Armed with statistics and personal experiences, they also lobbied for social legislation to improve housing, women’s working conditions, and public schools.

✓ REVIEW

In what ways did boss rule represent “reform” of city government, and at whose expense did such reform come?

CITY LIFE

City life reflected the stratified nature of American society in the late nineteenth century. Every city had its slums and tenements but also its fashionable

avenues, where many-roomed mansions housed the tiny 1 percent of city dwellers considered wealthy. In between tenement and mansion lived the broad middle of urban society, which made up nearly a third of the population and owned about half of the nation’s wealth. With more money and leisure time, the middle class was increasing its power and influence.

The Immigrant in the City >> When they put into port, the first thing immigrants were likely to see was a city. Perhaps it was Boston or New York City or Galveston, Texas, where an overflow of Jewish immigrants was directed beginning in 1907. Most immigrants, exhausted physically and financially, settled in cities.

Cities developed a well-defined mosaic of ethnic communities, since immigrants usually clustered together on the basis of their villages or provinces. But these neighborhoods were in constant flux. As many as half the residents moved every 10 years, often because of better-paying jobs or more members of their family working.

Ethnic communities served as havens from the strangeness of American society and springboards to a new life. From the moment they stepped off the boat, newcomers felt pressed to learn English, don

American clothes, and drop their “greenhorn” ways. Yet in their neighborhoods they also found comrades who spoke their language, theaters that performed their plays and music, restaurants that served their food. Foreign-language newspapers reported events from both the Old World and the New in a tongue that first-generation immigrants could understand. Meanwhile, immigrant aid societies furnished assistance with housing and jobs and sponsored baseball teams, insurance programs, and English-language classes.

Houses of worship were always at the center of immigrant life. They often catered to the practices of individual towns or provinces. Occasionally they changed their ways under the cultural pressures of American life. Where the Irish dominated the American Catholic Church, other immigrants formed new churches with priests from their homelands. Eastern European Jews began to break the old law against men sitting next to their wives and daughters in synagogues. The Orthodox churches of Armenians, Syrians, Romanians, and Serbians gradually lost their national identifications.

Where immigrants came from often influenced their choice of jobs. Because Chinese men did not scorn washing or ironing, more than 7,500 of them could be found in San Francisco laundries by 1880. Sewing ladies’ garments seemed unmanly to many native-born Americans but not to Russian and Italian tailors. Slavs, who valued steady income over education, often pulled their children from school, sent them to work, and worked themselves in the mines for better pay than in factories.

On the whole, immigrants married later and had more children than did the native-born. Greeks and eastern European Jews prearranged marriages according to tradition. They imported “picture brides,” betrothed by mail with a photograph. After marriage men ruled the household, but women managed it. Although child-rearing practices varied, immigrants resisted the relative permissiveness of American parents. Youngsters were expected to contribute like little adults to the welfare of the family.

In these “family economies” of working-class immigrants, key decisions—over whether and whom to marry, over work and education,

over when to leave home—were made on the basis of collective rather than individual needs. Though immigrant boys were more likely to work outside the home than girls, daughters often went to work at an early age so sons could continue their education. It was customary for one daughter to remain unmarried so she could care for younger siblings or aged parents.

The Chinese were an exception to the pattern. The ban on the immigration of Chinese laborers in the 1880s had frozen the gender ratio of Chinese communities into a curious imbalance. Like other immigrants most Chinese newcomers had been single men. In the wake of the ban, those in the United States could not bring over their wives and families. Nor by law in 13 states could they marry white Americans. With few women, Chinese communities suffered from high rates of prostitution, large numbers of gangs and secret societies, and low birth totals. When the San Francisco earthquake and fire destroyed birth records in 1906, resourceful Chinese immigrants created “paper sons” (and less often “paper daughters”) by forging birth certificates and claiming their China-born children as American citizens.



▲ The first Chinese telephone operator in San Francisco’s Chinatown, the largest community of Chinese outside Asia, is pictured here handling calls from local subscribers. The first switchboard was installed in 1894. Chinese operators had to memorize the names of their users because residents often asked to be connected by name, believing it was impolite to ask by number. This was no easy task. Some subscribers had the same name, so operators also had to learn the occupation and the address of each person on their service. And they had to master the five Chinese dialects spoken by residents.

Caught between past and present, pressed to adopt American ways, immigrants nonetheless clung to tradition and assimilated slowly. Their children adjusted more quickly. They soon spoke English like natives, married whomever they pleased, and worked their way out of old neighborhoods. Yet the process was not easy. Children often faced heartrending clashes with parents and rejection from peers.

Urban Middle-Class Life >> Life for the urban middle class revolved around home and family. By the turn of the century just over a third of middle-class urbanites owned their homes. Often two or three stories, made of brick or brownstone, these houses were a measure of social standing. The plush furniture, heavy drapes, antiques, and curios all signaled the status and refinement of their owners.

Such homes, usually on their own lots, also served as havens to protect and nourish the family. Seventeenth-century notions of children as inherently sinful had given way to modern theories about the shaping influence of environment. Calm and orderly

households with nurturing mothers would launch children on the right course. “A clean, fresh, and well-ordered house,” stipulated a domestic adviser in 1883, “exercises over its inmates a moral, no less than physical influence, and has a direct tendency to make members of the family sober, peaceable, and considerate of the feelings and happiness of each other.”

A woman was judged by the state of her home. The typical homemaker prepared elaborate meals, cleaned, laundered, and sewed. Each task took time. Baking a loaf of bread required nearly 24 hours, and in 1890 four of five loaves were still made at home. Perhaps 25 percent of urban households had live-in servants to help with the work. They were on call about 100 hours a week, were off but one evening and part of Sunday, and averaged \$2 to \$5 a week in salary.

By the 1890s a wealth of new consumer products eased the burdens of housework. Brand names trumpeted a new age of commercially prepared food—Campbell’s soup, Quaker oats, Pillsbury flour, Jell-O, and Cracker Jacks, to name a few. New appliances, such as “self-working” washers, offered mechanical assistance, but shredded shirts and aching arms testified to how far short mechanization still fell.

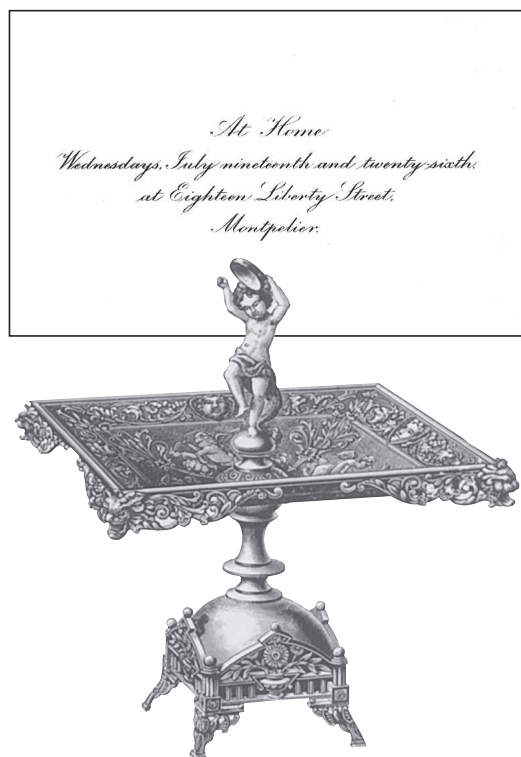
Toward the end of the century, Saturday became less of a workday and more of a family day. Sunday mornings remained a time for church, still an important center of family life. Afternoons had a secular flavor. There were shopping trips (city stores often stayed open) and visits to lakes, zoos, and amusement parks (usually built at the end of trolley lines to attract more riders). Outside institutions—fraternal organizations, uplift groups, athletic teams, and church groups—were becoming part of middle-class urban family life.

Victorianism and the Pursuit of Virtue >>

Middle-class life reflected a rigid social code called Victorianism, named for Britain’s long-reigning Queen Victoria. It emerged in the 1830s and 1840s as part of an effort to tame the turbulent urban-industrial society developing in Europe.

Victorianism dictated that personal conduct be based on orderly behavior and disciplined moralism. It stressed sobriety, industriousness, self-control, and sexual modesty and taught that demeanor, particularly proper manners, was the backbone of society. According to its sexual precepts, women were “pure vessels,” devoid of carnal desire. Their job was to control the “lower natures” of their husbands by withholding sex except for procreation.

The values of the Victorians migrated across the Atlantic. In the United States, even women’s fashions mirrored them. Strenuously laced corsets (“an instrument of torture,” according to one woman) pushed breasts up, stomachs in, and rear ends out. The resulting wasplike figure accentuated the breasts and



▲ Newly developed “electroplating,” which deposited a thin layer of silver or gold over less expensive material, allowed manufacturers to sell to middle-class consumers wares previously reserved for the wealthy. Pictured here are a silver- and gold-plated card receiver and a calling card, once part of the courtly culture of elites and by the 1880s found in more and more middle-class homes. This “downward mobility” of manners and material culture allowed the middle class to ape the conventions of their social superiors, in this case by using calling cards to reinforce social networks and to serve as social barriers should personal contact be unwanted.



Dueling DOCUMENTS

CITY SCENES

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, city scenes of daily life were the subject of countless renderings, from pen-and-ink drawings to lithographs and paintings to photographs beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Each brought a different perspective to the bustling life of industrial cities, and all reflected the point of view of the artist creating them. Two street scenes appear below, both from turn-of-the-century New York but in very different forms. Both offer panoramic views of busy New York streets. The first is a photograph taken in 1900 of an Easter Day parade on Fifth Avenue. The second is a crowded New York intersection, titled simply *New York* and painted in 1911 by the realist painter George Bellows.

DOCUMENT 1



Source: National Archives, *Easter Morning* (1900).

DOCUMENT 2



Source: George Bellows, *New York* 1911 (1911).

THINKING CRITICALLY

How many different types of urban transport can you see in each image? (Note, for example, an early automobile driving toward the camera on the left side of Fifth Avenue in the photograph.) What can these various forms of transportation tell us about the speed and nature of technological change? Which rendering captures the vibrancy of the city best? Why? What is each artist—photographer and painter—trying to say about city life? How, if at all, does each medium shape the message?

hips, promoting the image of women as child bearers. Ankle-length skirts were draped over bustles, hoops, and petticoats to make hips look even larger and suggest fertility. Such elegant dress set off middle- and upper-class women from those below, whose plain clothes signaled lives of drudgery and want.

When working-class Americans failed to follow Victorian cues, reformers helped them to pursue virtue. In 1879 Frances Willard, fearing the ill effects of alcohol on the family, became the second president of the newly formed Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU; 1874). Under her leadership the WCTU worked relentlessly to stamp out alcohol and promote sexual purity and other middle-class virtues. By the turn of the century it was the largest women's organization in the country, with 500,000 members.

Initially the WCTU focused on **temperance**—the movement, begun in the 1820s, to stamp out the sale

temperance movement reform movement, begun in the 1820s, to temper or restrain the sale and use of alcohol.

of alcoholic beverages and to end drunkenness. For these women the campaign seemed a way not merely to reform society but to protect

their homes and families from abuse at the hands of drunken husbands and fathers. And in attacking the saloon, Willard also sought to spread democracy by storming these all-male bastions, where political bosses conducted so much political business and where women were barred from entry. Soon, under the slogan "Do Everything," the WCTU was also promoting "woman" suffrage, prison reform, better working conditions, and an end to prostitution. Just as important, it offered talented, committed women an opportunity to move out of their homes and churches and into the public arena of lobbying and politics.

Anthony Comstock crusaded with equal vigor against what he saw as moral pollution, ranging from pornography and gambling to the use of nude art models. In 1873 President Ulysses S. Grant signed the so-called Comstock Law, a statute banning from the mails all materials "designed to incite lust." Two days later Comstock went to work as a special agent for the post office. In his 41-year career he claimed to have made more than 3,000 arrests and destroyed 160 tons of vice-ridden books and photographs.

Victorian crusaders like Comstock were not simply missionaries of a stuffy morality. They were apostles of a middle-class creed of social control, responding to an increasing incidence of alcoholism, venereal disease, gambling debts, prostitution, and unwanted pregnancies. No doubt they overreacted in warning that the road to ruin lay behind the door of every saloon, gambling parlor, or bedroom. Yet the new urban environment did reflect the disorder of a rapidly industrializing society.

The insistence with which moralists warned against "impropriety" suggests that many people did not heed

their advice. Three-quarters of the women surveyed toward the turn of the century reported that they enjoyed sex. The growing variety of contraceptives—including spermicidal douches, sheaths made of animal intestines, rubber condoms, and forerunners of the diaphragm—testified to the desire for pregnancy-free intercourse. Abortion, too, was available. According to one estimate, a third of all pregnancies were aborted, usually with the aid of a midwife. (By the 1880s abortion had been made illegal in most states following the first antiabortion statute in England in 1803.) Despite Victorian marriage manuals, middle-class Americans became more conscious of sexuality as an emotional dimension of a satisfying union.

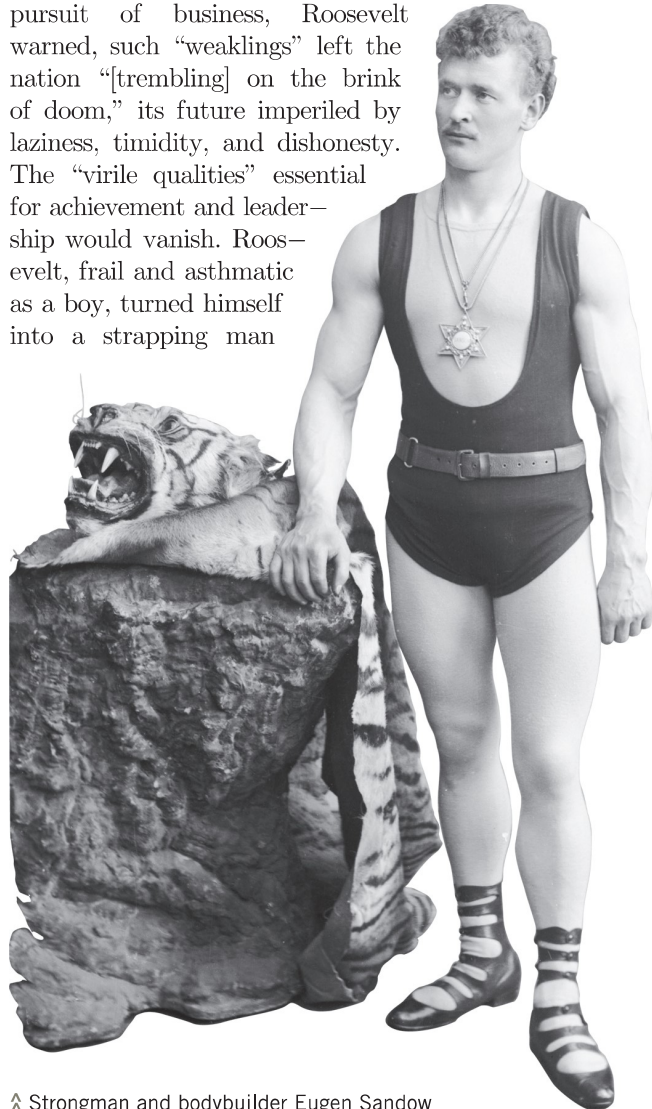
Challenges to Convention >> A few bold men and women challenged conventions of gender and propriety. Victoria Woodhull, publisher of *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, divorced her husband, ran for president in 1872 on the Equal Rights Party ticket, and pressed the case for sexual freedom. "I am a free lover!" she shouted to a riotous audience in New York. "I have the inalienable, constitutional, and natural right to love whom I may, to love as long or as short a period as I can, to change that love every day if I please!" Woodhull made a strong public case for sexual freedom. In private, however, she adhered to strict monogamy and romantic love.

The same cosmopolitan conditions that provided protection for Woodhull's unorthodox beliefs also made possible the growth of self-conscious communities of homosexual men and women. Earlier in the century, Americans had idealized romantic friendships among members of the same sex, without necessarily attributing to them sexual overtones. But for friendships with an explicitly sexual dimension, the anonymity of large cities provided new meeting grounds. Single factory workers and clerks, living in furnished rooms rather than with their families in small towns and on farms, were freer to seek others who shared their sexual orientation. Homosexual men and women began forming social networks: on the streets where they regularly met, at specific restaurants and clubs, which, to avoid controversy, sometimes passed themselves off as athletic associations or chess clubs.

Only toward the end of the century did physicians begin to notice homosexual behavior, usually to condemn it as a disease or an inherited infirmity. Not until the turn of the century did the term *homosexual* even come into existence. Certainly homosexual love was not new. But for the first time in the United States, the conditions of urban life allowed gays and lesbians to define themselves in terms of a larger, self-conscious community, even if they were stoutly condemned by the prevailing standards of morality.

The Decline of “Manliness” >> The corrupting influence of city life on manhood troubled some onlookers as much as political or moral corruption distressed reformers. The components of traditional “manliness”—physical vigor, honor and integrity, courage and independence—seemed under assault by life in the industrial city. White middle- and upper-class men who found themselves working at desks and living in cushy comfort appeared particularly at risk. As early as the 1850s Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. (father of the famous Supreme Court justice) lamented that “such a set of stiff-jointed, soft-muscled, paste-complexioned youth as we can boast in our Atlantic cities never before sprang from the loins of Anglo-Saxon lineage.”

The dangers of this decline in “Anglo-Saxon” manliness courted catastrophe according to anxious observers. Soft, listless white men lacked vitality but also the manly discipline and character that came from living what Theodore Roosevelt called “The Strenuous Life” of action and struggle. Debased by the seamy pursuit of business, Roosevelt warned, such “weaklings” left the nation “[trembling] on the brink of doom,” its future imperiled by laziness, timidity, and dishonesty. The “virile qualities” essential for achievement and leadership would vanish. Roosevelt, frail and asthmatic as a boy, turned himself into a strapping man



▲ Strongman and bodybuilder Eugen Sandow

through backbreaking workouts. He commanded desk-bound, “civilized” white men to follow his lead, even to reinvigorate their intellects with the “barbarian virtues” of physical strength he saw in darker-hued “primitives.” Gender and race were thus being blended into a heady brew of white supremacy.

A frenzy of fitness spread across the nation. Bicycling, rowing, boxing, and what one historian called a college “cult of sports” promised to return middle- and upper-class men to “vigorous and unsullied manhood.” Prussian bodybuilder Eugen Sandow ignited a weightlifting craze when he toured the country in the 1890s with feats of strength and poses he dubbed “muscle display performances.” In a show of manly courage, a young Roosevelt lit out for the Dakota Badlands, writer Richard Harding Davis for Cuba in the middle of the Spanish–American War, and explorers Robert Peary and Matthew Henson for the North Pole in 1898. Exploration and adventure became exercises in undaunted manliness.

✓ REVIEW

How did class and ethnicity determine life for city dwellers?

CITY CULTURE

“We cannot all live in cities,” the reformer Horace Greeley lamented just after the Civil War, “yet nearly all seemed determined to do so.” Economic opportunity drew people to the teeming industrial city. But so, too, did a vibrant urban culture.

By the 1890s cities had begun to clean up downtown business districts, pave streets, widen thoroughfares, erect fountains and buildings of marble. This “city beautiful” movement aimed also to elevate public tastes and, like Victorian culture itself, refine the behavior of urbanites. Civic leaders pressed for public education and built museums, libraries, and parks to uplift unruly city masses. Public parks followed the model of New York’s Central Park. When it opened in 1858 Central Park was meant to serve as a pastoral retreat from the turbulent industrial city. Its rustic paths, leafy glades, and tranquil lakes, said designer Frederick Law Olmsted, would have “a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence” on even the rudest fellow.

Public Education in an Urban Industrial World

>> Those at the bottom and in the middle of city life found in public education one key to success. Although the campaign for public education began in the Jacksonian era, it did not make much headway until after the Civil War, when industrial cities began



^ Educational reformers in the 1870s pushed elementary drawing as a required subject. Their goal was not to turn out gifted artists but to train students in the practical skills needed in an industrial society. Winslow Homer's portrait of a teacher by her blackboard shows the geometric shapes behind practical design.

to mushroom. As late as 1870 half the children in the country received no formal education, and one American in five 14-year-olds could not read.

Between 1870 and 1900 an educational awakening occurred. As more and more businesses required workers who could read, write, and tally numbers, attendance in public schools more than doubled. The length of the school term rose from 132 to 144 days. Illiteracy fell by half. By the turn of the century, nearly all the states outside the South had enacted mandatory education laws. Almost three of every four school-age children were enrolled. Even so, the average American adult still attended school for only about five years, and less than 10 percent of those eligible continued beyond the eighth grade.

The average school day started early, but by noon most girls were released under the assumption that they needed less formal education. Curricula stressed the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Courses in manual training, science, and physical education were added as the demand for technical knowledge grew and

opportunities to exercise shrank. Students learned by memorization, sitting in silent study with hands clasped or standing erect while they repeated phrases and sums. Few schools encouraged creative thinking. In an age of industrialization, massive immigration, and rapid change, schools taught conformity and values as much as facts and figures. Teachers acted as drillmasters, shaping their charges for the sake of society. "Teachers and books are better security than handcuffs and policemen," wrote a New Jersey college professor in 1879.

As Reconstruction faded, so did the impressive start made in black education. Most of the first generation of former slaves had been illiterate. So eager were they to learn that by the end of the century more than half of all African Americans over 14 could read. But discrimination soon took its toll. For nearly 100 years after the Civil War, the doctrine of "separate but equal," upheld by the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), kept black and white students apart but scarcely equal. By 1882 public schools in a half-dozen southern states were segregated by law, the rest by practice. Underfunded and ill-equipped, black schools served dirt-poor families whose every member had to work.

Like African Americans, immigrants saw education as a way of getting ahead. Some educators saw it as a means of Americanizing newcomers. They assumed that immigrant and native-born children would learn the same lessons in the same language and turn out the same way. Only toward the end of the 1800s, as immigration mounted, did eastern cities begin to offer night classes that taught English, along with civics lessons, for foreigners. When public education proved inadequate, immigrants established their own schools. Catholics, for example, started an elaborate expansion of their parochial schools in 1884.

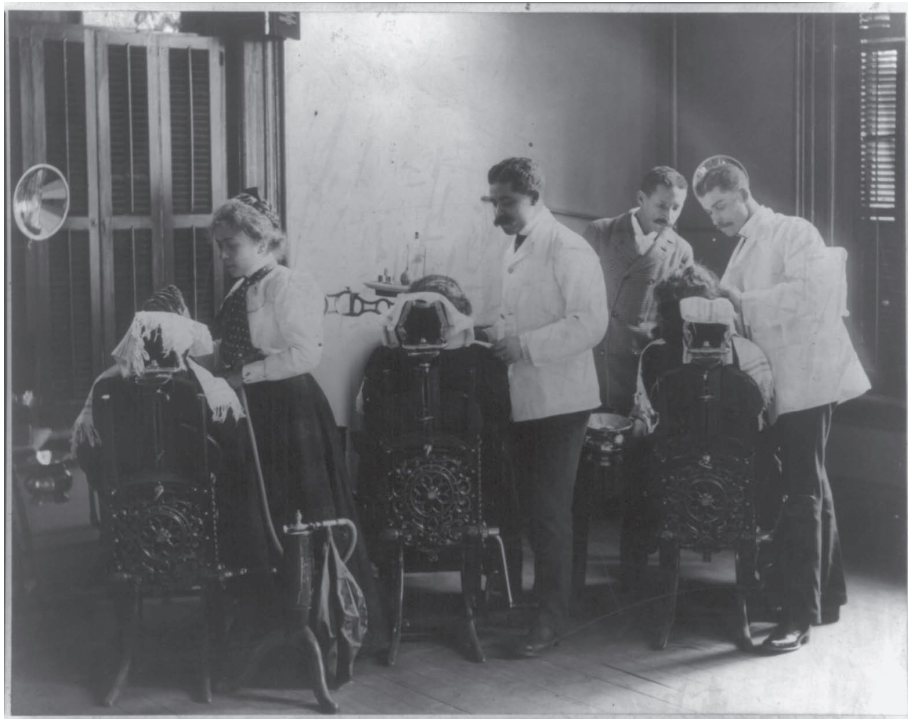
By the 1880s educational reforms were helping schools respond to the needs of an urban society. Opened first in St. Louis in 1873, American versions of innovative German "kindergartens" put four- to six-year-olds in orderly classrooms while parents went off to work. **Normal schools** multiplied to provide teachers with more professional training. And in the new indus-

normal schools schools that trained teachers, usually for two years and mostly for teaching in the elementary grades.

trial age, science and manual training supplemented more conventional subjects in order to supply industry with educated workers.

Higher Learning and the Rise of the Professional >>

Colleges served the urban industrial society, too, not by controlling mass habits but by providing leaders and managers. Early in the nineteenth century, most Americans had regarded higher learning as unmanly and irrelevant. The few who sought it often preferred the superior universities of Europe to those in the United States.



⚡ Dentistry students at Howard University, 1900.

As American society grew more organized, mechanized, and complex, the need for professional, technical, and literary skills brought greater respect for college education. The Morrill Act of 1862 generated a dozen new state colleges and universities, eight mechanical and agricultural colleges, and six black colleges. Private charity added more. Railroad barons such as Johns Hopkins and Leland Stanford used parts of their fortunes to found colleges named after them (Hopkins in 1873, Stanford in 1890). The number of colleges

and universities nearly doubled between 1870 and 1910, though less than 5 percent of college-age Americans enrolled in them.

A practical impulse inspired the founding of several black colleges. In the late nineteenth century, few institutions mixed races. Church groups and private foundations, such as the Peabody and Slater funds (supported by white donors from the North), underwrote black colleges after Reconstruction. By 1900 a total of 700 black students were enrolled. About 2,000 had graduated. Through hard work and persistence, some even received degrees from institutions reserved for whites.

In keeping with the new emphasis on practical learning, professional schools multiplied to provide training beyond a college degree. American universities

adopted the German model, requiring young scholars to perform research as part of their education. The number of law and medical schools more than doubled between 1870 and 1900; medical students almost tripled. Ten percent of them were women, though their numbers shrank as the medical profession became more organized and exclusive.

Professionals of all kinds—in law, medicine, engineering, business, academics—swelled the ranks of the middle class. Slowly they were becoming a new force in



⚡ American impressionist Mary Cassatt painted this mural of women picking apples (in entirely unsuitable clothing) for the Women's Building at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. Titled *Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge or Science*, it stood the story of Eve and her famous apple on its head. According to the Bible, the fruit was the source of forbidden knowledge: when it was eaten by Eve, who shared it with Adam, the result was humankind's original sin. But Cassatt's mural suggested that the place of women in society was changing. No longer bound by cultural conventions against the dangers of educated women, a new generation of well-schooled females was to be celebrated for its achievements in science, the arts, and the professions.

urban America, replacing the ministers and gentlemen freeholders of an earlier day as community leaders.

Higher Education for Women >> Before the Civil War women could attend only three private colleges. After the war they had new ones all their own, including Smith (1871), Wellesley (1875), and Bryn Mawr (1885). Such all-women schools, with their mostly female faculties and administrators, deepened an emerging sense of membership in a special community of women. Many land-grant colleges, chartered to serve all people, also admitted women. By 1910 some 40 percent of college students were women, almost double the 1870 figure. Only one college in five refused to accept women.

Potent myths of gender continued to plague women in college. As Dr. Edward Clarke of the Harvard Medical School told thousands of students in *Sex in Education* (1873), the rigors of a college education could lead the “weaker sex” to physical or mental collapse, infertility, and early death. Women’s colleges therefore included a program of physical activity to keep students healthy. Many offered an array of courses in “domestic science”—cooking, sewing, and other such skills—to counter the claim that higher education would be of no value to women.

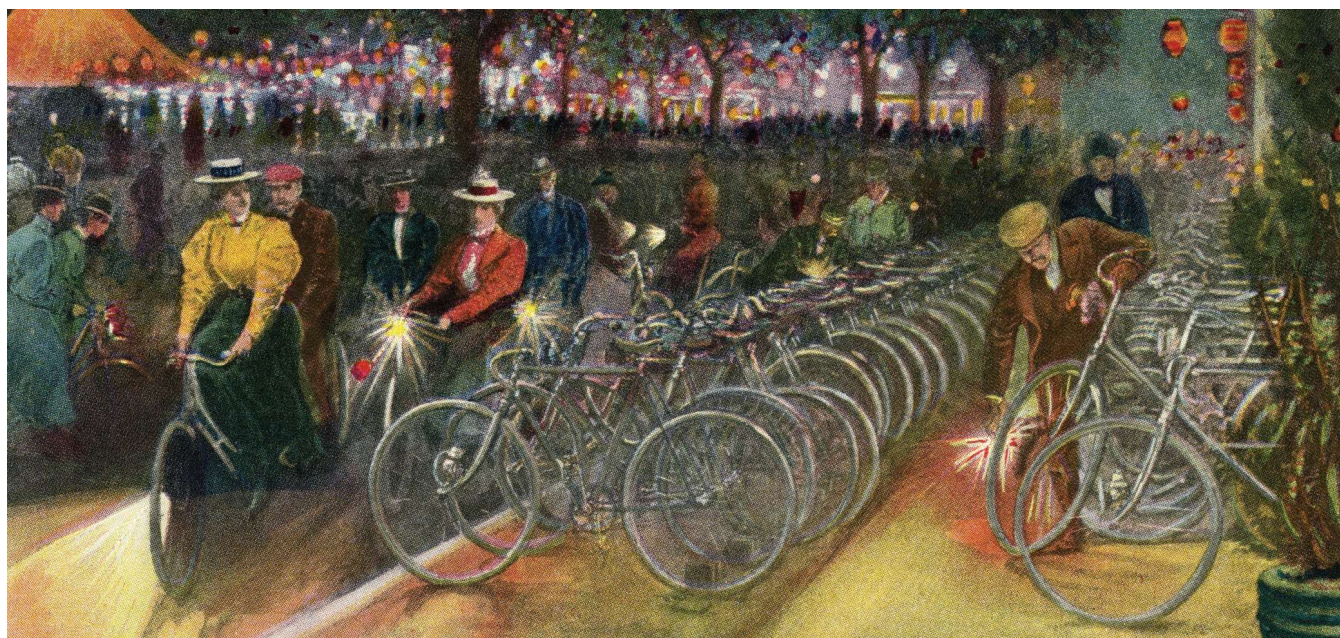
College students, together with office workers and female athletes, became role models for ambitious young women. These “new women,” impatient with custom, cast off Victorian restrictions. Fewer of them married, and more—perhaps 25 percent—were self-supporting. They shed their corsets and bustles and donned lighter,

more comfortable clothing, such as “shirtwaist” blouses (styled after men’s shirts) and lower-heeled shoes. And they showed that women could move beyond the domestic sphere of home and family.

A Culture of Consumption >> The city spawned a new material culture built on consumption. As standards of living rose, American industries began providing “ready-made” clothing to replace garments that had once been made at home. Similarly, food and furniture were mass-produced in greater quantities. The city became a giant market for these goods, the place where new patterns of mass consumption took hold. Radiating outward to rural areas, this urban consumer culture helped to level American society. Increasingly, city businesses sold the same goods to farmer and clerk, rich and poor, native-born and immigrant.

Well-made, inexpensive merchandise in standard sizes and shapes found outlets in new palaces of consumption known as “department stores,” so called because they displayed their goods in separate sections or departments. Unlike the small exclusive shops of Europe, department stores were palatial, public, and filled with inviting displays of furniture, housewares, and clothing.

The French writer Émile Zola claimed that department stores “democratized luxury.” Anyone could enter free of charge, handle the most elegant and expensive goods, and buy whatever was affordable. When consumers found goods too pricey, department stores pioneered layaway plans with deferred payments. The department store also educated people by showing them



^ “Wheelman clubs” formed in many cities, to take advantage of the popularity of bicycling as a leisure-time activity. This illustration of cyclists returning from a ride along Manhattan’s Riverside Drive in 1897 indicates that women eagerly undertook the sport, though debates raged over its suitability for them. In 1893 the *New York Times* pronounced the use of “bicycles by the weaker sex” a question that had been “decisively settled in the affirmative.”

what “proper” families owned and the correct names for such things as women’s wear and parlor furniture.

“Chain stores” (a term coined in America) spread the culture of consumption without frills. They catered to the working class, who could not afford department stores, and operated on a cash-and-carry basis. Owners kept their costs down by buying in volume to fill the small stores in growing neighborhood chains. Founded in 1859, the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (later to become A&P supermarkets) was the first of the chain stores. By 1876 its 76 branch stores had added groceries to the original line of teas.

Far from department and chain stores, rural Americans joined the community of consumers by mail. In 1872 Aaron Montgomery Ward sent his first price sheet to farmers from a livery stable loft in Chicago. Ward avoided the intermediaries and promised savings of 40 percent on fans, needles, trunks, harnesses, and scores of other goods available to city dwellers. By 1884 his catalog boasted 10,000 items, each illustrated by a lavish woodcut. Similarly, Richard W. Sears and Alvah C. Roe-buck built a \$500 million mail-order business by 1907. Schoolrooms that had no encyclopedia used a Montgomery Ward or Sears catalog instead. When asked the source of the Ten Commandments, one farm boy replied that they came from Sears, Roebuck. Countrywide mass consumption was producing a mass material culture.

Leisure >> As mechanization gradually reduced the number of hours on the job, factory workers found themselves with more free time. So did the middle class, with free weekends, evenings, and vacations. A new, stricter division between work and play developed in the more disciplined society of industrial America. City dwellers turned this new leisure time into a consumer item that often reflected differences in class, gender, and ethnicity.

Sports, for example, had been a traditional form of recreation for the rich. They continued to play polo, golf, and the newly imported English game of tennis. Croquet appealed to the middle class more than did polo, golf, and tennis. It required less skill and special equipment. Perhaps as important, it could be enjoyed in mixed company, like the new craze of bicycling. Bicycles evolved from unstable contraptions with large front wheels into “safety” bikes with equal-sized wheels, a dropped middle bar, pneumatic tires, and coaster brakes. On Sunday afternoons city parks became crowded with cyclists, at least those wealthy enough to pay the \$100 price tag on such bicycles. Women rode the new safety bikes, too, although social convention prohibited them from riding alone. But cycling broke down conventions too. It required looser garments, freeing women from corsets. And lady cyclists demonstrated that they were hardly too fragile for physical exertion.

Organized spectator sports attracted crowds from every walk of life. Baseball overshadowed all others. For city dwellers with dull work, cramped quarters,

and isolated lives, baseball offered the chance to join thousands of others for an exciting outdoor spectacle. The first professional teams appeared in 1869, and slowly the game evolved. Umpires began to call balls and strikes, the overhand replaced the underhand pitch, and fielders put on gloves. Teams from eight cities formed the National League of Professional Baseball Clubs in 1876, followed by the American League in 1901. League players were distinctly working class. At first, teams featured some black players. When African Americans were barred in the 1880s, black professionals formed their own team, the Cuban Giants of Long Island, New York, looking to play anyone they could and taking the name “Cuban” (rather than “Negro”) in hopes of being able to play white teams, too.

Horse racing, bicycle tournaments, and other sports of speed and violence helped to break the monotony, frustration, and routine of the industrial city. Perhaps the most violent sport of all, bare-knuckled prizefighting, was illegal in some states, but in others, it gave young men from the streets the chance to stand out from the crowd, win some cash, and prove their masculinity. In 1869, without pads or helmets, Rutgers beat Princeton in the first intercollegiate football match. College football soon attracted crowds of 50,000 or more.

Arts and Entertainment >> Other forms of city entertainment also divided along lines of class. For the wealthy and middle class there were symphonies, operas, and theater. Highbrow productions of Shakespearean plays catered to the aspirations of American upper classes for culture and European refinement. Popular melodramas gave middle-class audiences the chance to ignore the ambiguities of modern life, booing villains and cheering heroes. By 1900 people were bringing their entertainment home, snapping up some 3 million new phonograph recordings a year.

Workingmen found a haven from the drudgery of factory, mill, and mine in the saloon. It was an all-male preserve—a workingman’s club—where one could drink and talk free from Victorian finger-wagging. Young workingwomen found escape alone or with dates at vaudeville shows, dance halls, and the new amusement parks with their mechanical “thrill rides.” In the all-black gaming houses and honky-tonks of St. Louis and New Orleans, the syncopated rhythms of African American composer Scott Joplin’s “Maple Leaf Rag” (1899) and other ragtime tunes heralded the coming of jazz.

As much as any form of entertainment, the traveling circus embodied the changes of the new urban, industrial world. Moving outward from their city bases, circuses rode the new rail system across the country (after the first transcontinental tour in 1869) and, with the advent of steamships, crisscrossed the globe. The mammoth New York-based Barnum & Bailey Circus carried dozens of gilded show wagons, scores of animals, tons of equipment, and hundreds



^ This lithograph is from an 1894 poster for the Barnum & Bailey Circus. It depicts a menagerie tent in which exotic animals are displayed side by side with “Strange and Savage Tribes,” thus collapsing the boundaries between animals and human beings. Much smaller than the big top, menagerie tents allowed Euro-American patrons to examine animals and humans up close. The Barnum show presented its first “ethnological congress” of “native” peoples in 1886, as the United States began its drive for empire abroad. The human specimens were meant to give Americans a glimpse of foreign cultures and to be instructive. “Even the best informed and most intellectual had something to learn,” boasted a circus route book.

of performers, work hands, and animal tenders to the faraway capitals of Europe and Asia. At home the shows drew patrons from every class, ethnicity, and race, sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands. Circus workers erected huge “big top” tents with the factory-like precision of modern industry. And, like the city itself, circuses both supported and subverted social conventions. When owners reassured customers that their scantily clad dancers came from respectable families or their muscular lady acrobats prized the Victorian values of motherhood and domesticity, they winked slyly because they knew that the very appearance of these women, let alone their talents, defied the Victorian ideal of dainty and demure femininity.

✓ REVIEW

How did city culture shape national culture?

Industrialization ignited the growth of cities not just in the United States but all over the world. Great Britain, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, became the world’s first country with over half its people living in towns and cities by 1851. Fifty years later London’s population had more than doubled, from 2.7 million to 6.6 million. By 1914, on the eve of the First World War, eight of every ten Britons lived in cities, as did six of ten Germans and nearly five of ten French.

Just as European immigrants poured into cities across the United States, newcomers from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East flowed into South America, Australia, and the Caribbean. Before 1900 two of every three emigrating Italians booked passage not for the United States but for Brazil or Argentina. Chinese immigrants harvested sugar cane in Cuba, built railroads and opened restaurants in Peru, and launched businesses in Trinidad. By 1920 São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil, was exploding

with Asian immigrants, and Brazil boasted the world's largest Japanese population outside Japan.

The hubbub, the overcrowding, and the corruption of cities like Boss Plunkitt's Manhattan were reflected elsewhere in the world. Before the arrival of mass transit, British urban workers were forced to live within walking distance of factories, in dingy row houses beset by the overflow from privies and garbage in the streets. A deadly cholera epidemic in 1848 spurred a campaign to install iron pipes and drains to provide running water and sewers throughout major cities. About the same time, Paris underwent a radical renovation in which workers tore down the city's medieval fortress walls, widened major streets into boulevards, and set aside land for green parks. Borrowing innovations from the United States, Europeans adopted horse-drawn streetcars and, later, electric trolleys. With an intracity transportation network in place, the old "walking cities" of Europe, like those in the United States, added suburbs, partially easing the crush of earlier crowding.

The world over, industrial cities transformed both the urban landscape and the daily lives of city dwellers. Critics damned the city's crime and corruption; defenders celebrated its vibrancy and diversity. No matter how they felt, Americans had to search for ways to make that new industrial order work.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The modern city was the product of industrialization, lying at the center of the new integrated systems of transportation, communications, manufacturing, marketing, and finance.

- Fed by a great global migration of laborers, cities began to grow and to assume their modern shape of ringed residential patterns around central business districts and strict divisions among different classes, races, and ethnic groups.
- The challenge for the political system was to find within its democratic traditions a way to bring order out of the seeming chaos of unchecked urban growth.
- The urban boss and the urban political machine met the needs of cities for centralized authority but at a terrible cost in corruption, while social settlement houses, the Salvation Army, and the Social Gospel churches represented only a start at coping with the problems of poverty and urban blight.
- As cities grew, the middle-class code of behavior—called Victorianism by historians—spread, teaching the values of sobriety, hard work, self-control, and modesty. Such traits served the needs of the new industrial society for efficiency and order and the middle-class need for protection against the turbulence of city life.

- Yet for all the emphasis on skills, discipline, and order, the vibrancy of city culture remained attractive. It drew millions in search of education, entertainment, and opportunity, and it radiated outward to almost every corner of the country.

Additional Reading

The best treatment of the rise of cities is Howard B. Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society* (rev. ed., 1981). John Stilgoe, *Borderland: The Origins of the American Suburb, 1820–1929* (1988), chronicles the growth of suburban America. William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991), looks at Chicago as part of the ecological landscape. In *Boss Cox's Cincinnati: Urban Politics in the Progressive Era* (1968), Zane Miller reassesses the urban political machine; and Paul Boyer explores efforts at controlling city life in *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (1978). John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (1990); and Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988), investigate the emerging urban culture. To understand traveling circuses as conduits for cultural exchanges, see Janet M. Davis's *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (2002).

Marcus Lee Hanson's classic *The Atlantic Migration, 1607–1860* (1940) began the shift in immigration history away from the national and toward a global perspective. For richly detailed comparative examinations of the immigrant experience, see Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (1990); and Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (1993). Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (1990), probes the lives and labor of immigrant women, with particular attention to the shaping effect of Old World Jewish culture. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, ed., *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics* (1990), places American immigration in its international context. In *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865–1905* (2006), Rebecca Edwards revises the traditional portrait of the "Gilded Age," the period extending roughly from 1860 to 1900, by emphasizing the anxieties and optimism of ordinary people, many of them city dwellers, in what she regards as the birth of modern America. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002) explores the contradictions of Victorian thinking about contraception, abortion, pornography, and free speech.

Significant Events

