

Ch. 4

Who Built America?

Working People and the Nation's History

THIRD EDITION

Volume Two
Since 1877

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4

Change and Continuity in Daily Life 1900-1914



The Workplace Transformed

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Scientific Management
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"Fordism"
White-Collar and Women's Work

Inequality in Everyday Life

New Standards of Living
Wiring a Nation

Toward a Consumer Culture

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Conclusion: A New Era Dawns, Old Inequalities Persist

IN JANUARY 1912, the Procter and Gamble Company (P&G) announced to the readers of the *Ladies' Home Journal* "An Absolutely New Product, A Scientific Discovery Which Will Affect Every Kitchen in America." The "new and heretofore unknown food" was Crisco, a solid vegetable shortening made from cottonseed oil. P&G hoped that the new shortening would replace the pork lard and beef tallow that had long dominated American cooking. If successful, Crisco would not only expand P&G's consumer products offerings, but also assure the company greater control over the market for cottonseed oil, a key raw material in the manufacture of its most famous brand-name product, Ivory Soap. After patenting Crisco in 1910, P&G launched it with the most elaborate and expensive marketing campaign ever seen. The company tested a variety of promotion plans, analyzed the shortening market, sent full-size free samples to every grocer in the United States, and advertised the new product in newspapers and magazines.

Crisco exemplified many of the dramatic changes in America's economy and everyday life at the turn of the century. "Science" and "progressive reform" would dominate the rhetoric of consumer culture. Giant (often global) corporations such as P&G would reorganize factories around new principles of "continuous-process" or "flow" production. Everything from cars and cigarettes to soap and shortening would be produced in massive operations in which abundant and reasonably priced raw materials were a precondition of success. To move these vast quantities of products into the hands and households of millions of Americans, the manufacturers would pioneer new methods of distribution — brand names, advertising, national sales forces, chain stores — to convince people that they "needed" these goods.

Fashion Sense

This illustration from a 1910 *McClure's Magazine* showed young women employees leaving a New York department store at the end of the workday. Retail sales jobs were more attractive to young women than factory labor was, but wages were usually low and the work was tedious. Wladyslaw T. Benda, *McClure's Magazine*, October 1910—American Social History Project.

able transformation in ways in which American factories produced goods and places in which Americans worked. Increasingly, Americans labored in giant factories organized around assembly lines and structured by techniques of mass production and scientific management. Of course, what employers viewed as a miracle of efficiency and productivity, workers often experienced as a deadening and oppressive regime of surveillance and control.

Some employers recognized that such conditions could as easily produce labor strife as packaged goods, and they attempted to soften the new industrial regime with such benefits as lunchrooms and housing—what came to be called “welfare capitalism.” Henry Ford astutely recognized another flaw in the new mass production system: the workers could not afford to buy the goods that they were producing in vast numbers. He began to offer higher wages as a way to both reduce worker turnover and marry mass production and mass consumption. Less often noticed than the “Fordist” regime of mass production and consumption was the way in which industrialization transformed and greatly expanded the world of work for the middle class and for women, not just for industrial workers.

Mass Production Long before 1913—the year Henry Ford created the first assembly line to manufacture automobiles—other industrialists were isolating the elements and applying the principles of mass production. Manufacturers developed interchangeable parts in making firearms, millers moved grain on conveyor belts, and slaughterhouses set up “disassembly lines” that reduced whole animals to packaged meat. All shared one fundamental idea: mass production would set up systems that would enable materials to flow through the workplace in a continuous process, from the arrival of raw materials at the entrance of the building to the dispatch of finished goods at the exit.

Small flour mills had run a continuous process since the eighteenth century, and soon afterward, the metalworking industries applied some of its principles. During the 1880s, inventors developed new machinery to pack meat, brew beer, and can vegetables. Using conveyer systems, rollers, and gravity slides, these machines automatically sent materials through the production process in a continuous stream. The first automatic canning line opened in 1883, soldering cans at the rate of fifty a minute. Heinz pickles, Campbell’s soup, and Borden’s milk were among the first products canned in this way. Other companies soon used similar machines to manufacture a variety of products, including soap, cigarettes, matches, and breakfast cereals.

For workers, high-speed machinery brought unremitting and repetitious work. In some industries, the continuous process and the introduction of electric lights meant that factories could operate around the clock. In



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A Disassembly Line

As shown here, workers at the Swift and Company meatpacking plant in Chicago performed specialized, repetitive tasks based on many of the same principles that Henry Ford used in the automobile assembly line. Brown Brothers.

1908, the Homestead works of U.S. Steel ran two shifts: a day shift of ten and a half hours and a night shift of thirteen and a half hours. "The men are too tired to take an active part in family life; they are usually ready after smoking a pipe to go to bed," wrote one observer.

The new factories employed huge workforces. The McCormick plant in Chicago had 15,000 workers in 1916; Ford's Highland Park plant employed 16,000. These immense plants had their own railroad terminals, water supplies, energy sources, telephone networks, fire departments, and security forces. As a result, they often operated completely independently of the municipalities and companies that supplied goods and services to households and small businesses.

Of course, some consumer goods were created without mass production. Thousands of small factories and tenement sweatshops manufactured ready-made clothing. Small "batch work" firms produced jewelry, furniture, and other items. But even small factories produced unprecedented quantities of consumer products by relying increasingly on the division of labor.

Scientific Management Despite differences in production methods, nearly all workers experienced new kinds of discipline and control. Time clocks, first patented in 1889, carried an unambiguous message: workers must submit to the machine's—and the boss's—account of their arrival and departure times. Employers continued to perfect the techniques of

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Baking a Better Apple Pie

As the principles of scientific management came to play a more significant role in the workplace, some reformers sought to apply standardization and routine to aspects of daily life. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the kitchen. The domestic science movement (or "home economics," as it was later called) attempted to standardize routines and recipes, thereby relieving housewives of the anxieties of inexact cooking and bringing the supposed benefits of efficiency into the home. Fannie Merritt Farmer was a leader in the movement for scientific cooking, helping to entrench the notion of exact measures and procedures designed to produce a uniform product. The following two recipes for apple pie demonstrate the difference between Farmer's precisely measured approach and an earlier, inexact set of instructions.

Starting from Scratch:

Catherine Beecher's Apple Pie

Pare your apples, and cut them from the core. Line your dishes with paste, and put in the apple; cover and bake until the fruit is tender. Then take them from the oven, remove the upper crust, and put in sugar and nutmeg, cinnamon or rose water to your taste; a bit of sweet butter improves them. Also, to put in a little orange peel before they are baked, makes a pleasant variety. Common apple pies are very good to stew, sweeten, and flavor the apple before they are put into the oven. Many prefer the seasoning baked in. All apple pies are much nicer if the apple is grated and then seasoned.

Catherine Beecher, *Domestic Receipt Book* (1846).

Apple Pie by the Book:

Fannie Farmer's Recipe

- 4 or 5 sour apples
- 1/4 teaspoon grated nutmeg
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1/3 cup sugar
- Few gratings lemon rind
- 1 teaspoon butter

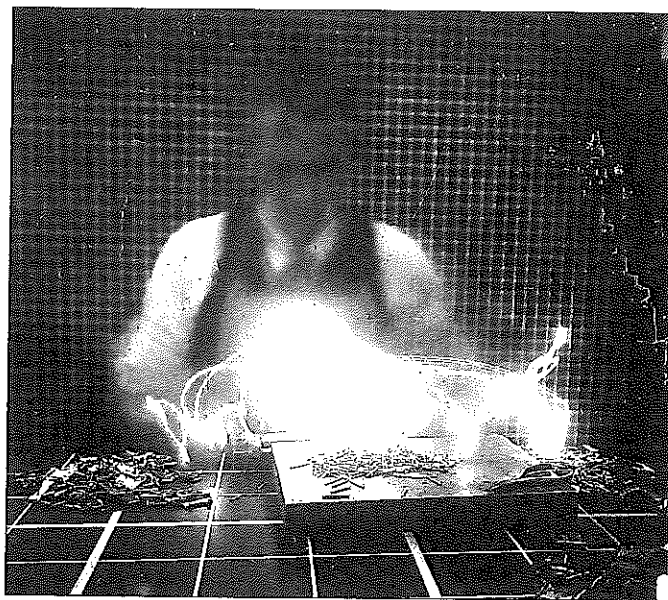
Line pie plate with paste. Pare, core, and cut the apples into eighths, put row around plate one-half inch from edge, and work towards the centre until plate is covered; then pile on remainder. Mix sugar, nutmeg, salt, lemon juice, and grated rind, and sprinkle over apples. Dot over with butter. Wet edges of under crust, cover with upper crust, and press edges together. Bake forty to forty-five minutes in moderate oven. A very good pie may be made without butter, lemon juice, and grated rind. Cinnamon may be substituted for nutmeg. Evaporated apples may be used in place of fresh fruit. If used, they should be soaked overnight in cold water.

Fannie Merritt Farmer, *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book* (1905).

"scientific management," also called "Taylorism," after Frederick Winslow Taylor, who pioneered the movement. Taylor insisted there was "one best way" to perform every job and that way could be scientifically determined, planned by managers and taught to workers. In his quest for maximum efficiency, Taylor analyzed how workers performed their jobs, broke the jobs down into steps, and timed workers with a stopwatch. He then set standards for each task, paying a high piece rate for high output and a lower one for substandard results. In 1911, Taylor published *The Principles of Scientific Management*, and Taylorism became all the rage—except among workers.

Taylorism and mass production went hand in hand. Although efficiency theories were applied to work in many fields—including education and housework—Taylor's program was best suited to large-scale, mechanized production processes. The new system separated manual from mental labor, unskilled from skilled tasks. It broke skilled work into smaller steps that could be done by low-paid semi-skilled or unskilled workers. Taylorites divided the work of a shoemaker, for instance, into forty tasks. Unlike the shoemaker, semiskilled workers knew only how to operate a single machine, but they did not learn to set it up, repair it, or operate similar equipment. Lacking any generalized knowledge of production, these workers had less bargaining power than did the skilled shoemakers they replaced. This strategy not only increased employers' control over the labor force, but also improved their production and profits.

Workers understood this managerial strategy, and they equated Taylorism with diminished autonomy, close supervision, regimentation, and pressure to produce. Some less-skilled workers, new to industrial work, took the new jobs eagerly. But between 1909 and 1913, unskilled immigrant workers in industrial towns throughout the East and Midwest—including Lawrence, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; and Paterson, New Jersey—went on strike against wage cuts, unsafe conditions, and the dehumanizing work patterns required by scientific management and the new mass production methods. For skilled workers, scientific management meant the loss of craft control and the routinization of labor. In 1912, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) came out against Taylor's time-study methods. "We don't want to work as fast as we are able to," one machinist declared in 1914. "We want to work as fast as we think it's comfortable for us to work."



The Science of Repetition

The small lights attached to this worker's arms and hands enabled efficiency experts to track his movements. The resulting "cyclegraph," a photograph taken by an open-shutter still camera and invented by time-and-motion specialist Frank Gilbreth, was then studied in an attempt to eliminate useless movement and turn mass-production work into a rigid arrangement of "efficient" motions. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

“More Work for Mother?": Scientific Management at Home

While production workers resisted scientific management, middle-class women's magazine writers and editors such as Christine Frederick proposed that women embrace such notions of efficiency and impose them on themselves. Frederick, a major proponent of the new housekeeping, was consulting household editor for *Ladies' Home Journal* from 1912 to 1919 and the author of numerous books and pamphlets on scientific management in the home.

We have had plenty of *invention* for the household, but the great need is now for more science of management, and, above all, for more efficient thinking and analyzing. For in the home, as everywhere else, efficiency *must start in the mind of the directing spirit of the establishment*. Thousands of men are *inefficient*, but are *made* efficient by submitting to the direction of efficient men who stand over them. It is the great misfortune of women as homemakers that each one of them must stand alone as the directing head of a separate establishment, without any trained, efficient mind to guide and direct them. They must apply what efficiency they have or can learn, alone; while men in office and shop can not only be under the guidance of efficient foremen and overseers, but they have in addition the social stimulus of working among other men in competition.

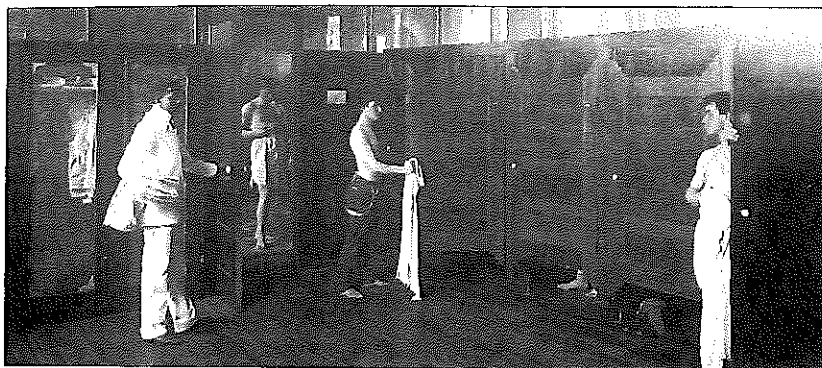
It is therefore *immensely, terribly important* that women get themselves in connection with modern efficiency science, and, most important of all, bring *themselves up to a really efficient attitude of mind*.

Christine Frederick, “New Housekeeping,” *Ladies' Home Journal*, September 13, October 20, November 19, and December 16, 1912. Reprinted in *The New Housekeeping. Efficiency Studies in House Management* (Garden City and New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926), 3–22, 181–203.

Welfare Capitalism Taylorism provided the most important new managerial strategy of the early twentieth century, but employers also had other tricks up their sleeves. Haunted by the specter of bitter labor strife, some innovating employers responded by offering incentives to secure greater productivity, higher profits, workers' loyalty, and to discourage unionization. A few large capitalists, such as the Pittsburgh food processor H. J. Heinz, provided lunchrooms, showers, and company-owned housing in an effort to “humanize the business system” and “end the spirit of enmity between capital and labor.” Various companies offered a panoply of other programs aimed at promoting workers' “welfare”: savings clubs, English classes, company picnics, in-house magazines, and on-site nurses. Many businesses limited these benefits to skilled workers, however.

Some companies provided more direct monetary benefits, profit-sharing plans, pensions, and the opportunity to buy a home. They often introduced these plans—intended to persuade workers to remain loyal to the company and give them a stake in their community—when strikes were brewing and made them available only to workers who took the boss's side.

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Amenities

The male employees' bathroom at the National Cash Register (NCR) Company in Dayton, Ohio, in 1900. The facility was part of NCR's extensive welfare program, which also included clubs, sports teams, and landscaping of the company grounds. Courtesy NCR.

Companies frequently promoted themselves as families, modeled on small-town entrepreneurs who prided themselves on their ability to call every employee by name. The "family" of employees sometimes consisted of real families. In New Hampshire's huge Amoskeag Mills, as in California and Colorado agriculture, people often got jobs through family ties, and relatives substituted for one another on the job. When workers knew of an opening, they would bring in their relatives, even after companies established formal employment offices. Working alongside a brother in a factory or picking crops in the same field with a father or daughter sometimes made harsh working conditions easier to bear. But there was also a downside: all working in the same place made families more vulnerable to poverty when employers cut wages, laid off workers, or shut down factories.

Many companies included "Americanization" in their welfare programs—classes that were intended to teach immigrant workers English and acculturate them to American ways. These company programs were part of a broader Americanization movement supported by social workers, civic groups, and government agencies. Some emphasized English and civics and encouraged immigrants to apply for citizenship. Others had a harder edge, emphasizing obedience, discouraging radicalism, and stressing the need to break with Old World customs.

Employers' special interest in Americanization stemmed from two beliefs: that the instruction would help them retain experienced workers in a time of severe labor shortages and that it would instill positive attitudes and values in their workforce. After inaugurating English language classes in 1911 with help from the YMCA, International Harvester took over the program a year later and revised it to stress safety, shop discipline, and welfare work. Lesson One began: "I hear the whistle. I must hurry." As one company spokesman explained, every immigrant employee should simultaneously "learn to speak English correctly and also have impressed upon him the rules he should follow while in and around the works."

“Amoskeag Did All This to Keep Harmony . . .”

The Amoskeag Corporation in Manchester, New Hampshire, operated the world's largest textile mill, employing some 14,000 workers including Joseph Debski who began working at Amoskeag in 1910 when he was fourteen years old. Like a number of large companies during this period, Amoskeag ran a series of welfare programs for workers and their families. In this excerpt Debski describes one company benefit.

The Amoskeag had a textile club; anybody over eighteen who worked there could belong to it. It had a reading room, canteen, billiard and pool tables, and card tables; and they used to have dances, probably once a month in the wintertime. They had a golf course with a clubhouse; and in 1927 they took over the Intervale Country Club. . . . Then they had the Amoskeag Textile Field, which was a baseball field.

There was a general fund to operate things like a Christmas party for employees' children. They'd take all the equipment out of the garage—it was all bare floor—and prepare it for fifteen to twenty-five hundred children from five to fifteen, free of charge. They would try to take the hard cases, people who probably couldn't afford a good Christmas party of their own.

The textile club had an annual meeting at the Jolliet Hall . . . and there'd be fifteen hundred to two thousand people there. They'd have a big dinner and entertainment. We had committees on bowling, athletics, photography. . . . They had about twenty different committees. . . .

Amoskeag did all this to keep harmony amongst its employees. The board of directors established the textile club. . . . During the strike of 1922, the textile club functioned the most because people didn't have anywhere else to go. They would go play cards, play pool. They didn't draw any lines and say people couldn't come in because of the strike. . . . The club kept going . . . until the mid-thirties. . . . It was when the mill was shut down [in 1936] that everything was demolished.

Tamara K. Hareven and Randolph Lagenbach, *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory-City* (1978).

Of course, many immigrants welcomed the opportunity to learn English, become citizens, and share more fully in American life. Ethnic community leaders often encouraged newcomers to participate in such programs. Many workers also appreciated the fact that company-provided benefits improved their work and home environments. Others, however, viewed the welfare programs as an invasion of their privacy and a poor substitute for higher wages.

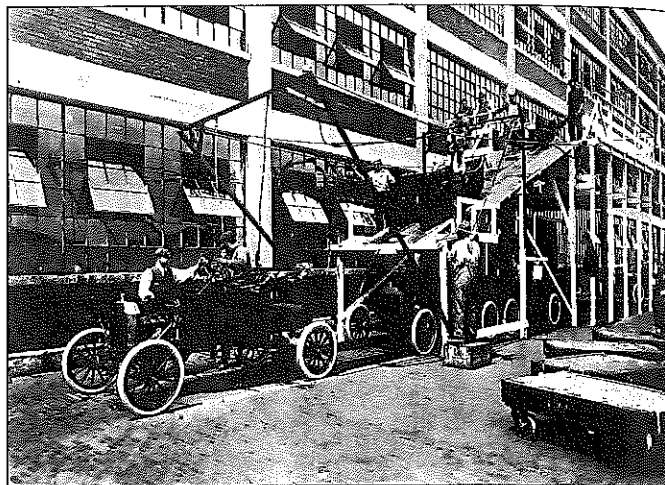
“Fordism” Henry Ford proved as much a master of these new techniques of rationalized and mechanized production and welfare capitalism as of innovative automobile production. He also understood that increased production required increased consumption, which in turn required that

factory workers be paid well enough to buy what they produced. Therefore, he offered high wages and a high standard of living as the reward for monotonous, repetitive, and alienating labor on the assembly line. This combination of mass production and mass consumption of standardized products has come to be known as Fordism.

Automobiles had been built in America since the 1890s, but only the rich could afford these early models. Henry Ford, a machinist and engineer born on a Michigan farm during the Civil War, was manufacturing medium-price automobiles in 1908 when he introduced his Model T. A simple, low-cost car that could travel even over unpaved roads intended for horses and wagons, the Model T was an instant success. Ford's company grew rapidly, thanks to his constant innovation of the manufacturing processes. By 1914, the Ford Motor Company turned out 250,000 Model Ts a year. When production was finally halted in 1927, 15 million Model Ts had been made.

Unlike previous cars, Ford designed the Model T as a standardized product for a mass market. "I will build a motor car for the great multitude," he declared. Ford saw the creation of a complicated product for a mass market as a personal mission. "The way to make automobiles," he explained, "is to make one automobile just like another . . . to make them come through the factory alike—just like one pin is like another pin." For twelve years, he only sold black Model Ts. Having just one model lowered costs and allowed his engineers to scrutinize every phase of the production process.

As in many other industries, mechanization was the key to mass production, and technological innovation was central to success. To produce the Model T, Ford built a state-of-the-art plant for 16,000 workers in Highland Park, Michigan, on the edge of Detroit. The Ford production method centered on the assembly line. Early on, Ford had positioned machines according to their sequence in the production process so that workers hand carried identical parts from one machine workstation to the next. In 1913, Ford's engineers began experimenting with the gravity slides, endless chains, and conveyor belts that were used in the continuous-process production of flour, beer, and other products. Rather than assigning workers numerous tasks on stationary objects, the engineers trained each worker to perform a few simple operations on parts that passed before him. The crowning achievement of their new system was the final assembly of the



Making Model Ts

The Ford assembly line in Highland Park, Michigan, was a prime example of continuous-process production. In this photo, taken in 1913, automobile bodies are secured to chassis. Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.

car by means of a continuous moving chain, to which the car frames were attached. The new continuous-process design reduced assembly time for a Model T from twelve and a half man-hours to less than two.

Although Ford did not acknowledge the influence of Taylorism, his new organization followed its general principles. Separating mental from manual labor and using time studies to plan work were becoming standard practice in many industrial enterprises. Ford went further and applied those principles and the technology of continuous materials handling to a highly complex product. Company after company soon adopted "Fordist" methods. The assembly line transformed the very nature of manufacturing by addressing in a new fashion the old problem of increasing the work pace. Instead of quotas, piecework wages, or foremen who set the pace of production, the machinery itself determined the pace of work.

Fordism meant enormous savings for companies but exhausting, nerve-racking, and alienating labor for workers. Though it alleviated some heavy lifting, the assembly line drained workers. "The weight of a tack," one worker noted, "is insignificant, but if you have to drive eight tacks in every Ford cushion that goes by your station within a certain time, and know that if you fail to do it you are going to tie up the entire platform, and you continue to do this for four years, you are going to break under the strain." Monotony and boredom were severe; as another employee put it, "a man checks his brain and his freedom at the door when he goes to work at Ford's."

Worker discontent increased dramatically, and extraordinarily high worker turnover threatened Ford, like most other employers. With little chance for advancement and few ties to their employers, semiskilled and unskilled workers often quit if they disliked the boss, wanted a vacation, or saw a better opportunity elsewhere. This mobility cost employers money because they constantly had to hire and train new workers. At Ford, the problem was extreme. In 1913, the year the assembly line was developed, Ford had to hire 52,000 workers to maintain a workforce of 13,600. His worries mounted as a number of unions, including the radical Industrial Workers of the World, began organizing in the plants.

To keep out unions and reduce turnover, Ford announced a dramatic scheme, the Five-Dollar Day, in 1914. He reduced the workday from nine hours to eight and offered a profit-sharing plan that brought wages up to a full five dollars a day — double the prevailing pay of laborers and semi-skilled workers in Detroit. Job seekers rioted at the doors to the Highland Park plant. But the wage policy had some catches. Ford fired workers who did not produce. Those who did produce could get the full profit-sharing payment only if they met certain standards both at work and at home. Ford set up a "sociological department" to investigate workers' home lives and administer the plan.



After 1914, Henry Ford tied the profit-sharing payments to his Americanization program. He believed that immigrants had to “be taught American ways, the English language, and the right way to live.” The program encouraged immigrant workers to move out of ethnic neighborhoods and discouraged them from taking in new immigrant boarders. As at International Harvester, lessons at the Ford English School concerned safety, shop discipline, personal hygiene, and the company’s welfare programs, as well as Henry Ford’s personal benevolence. The company even taught racism to immigrants; according to one Ford text, black Americans “came from Africa where they lived like other animals in the jungle. White men brought them to America and made them civilized.” But despite such statements, the company actually hired more black workers than did other auto manufacturers.

Ford argued that high wages and a forty-hour week would increase consumer demand and bind workers more securely to their jobs, creating both disciplined workers and mass consumers. He believed that mass production would lead nowhere if the masses—the workers—could not afford to buy what they produced. Indeed, Ford made it possible. The price of a Model T—\$950 in 1909—dropped to \$290 by 1924, boosting sales and allowing Ford to thrive.

White-Collar and Women’s Work While many observers focused on the obvious transformation of the work world of the male industrial laborer—

Out of the Melting Pot and into . . .

These 1916 graduates of the Ford English School are shown at the finale of commencement exercises. The graduation included a ritual of citizenship in which the graduates, wearing traditional national costumes, disembarked from an immigrant ship and disappeared into a gigantic melting pot (center of photo). Their teachers then vociferously stirred the pot with ladles, and the graduates finally emerged dressed in “American” clothes and waving flags. Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village.



The Hurry Habit

This 1914 cartoon, which appeared in *Life* magazine, commented on the increasingly frenetic nature of middle-class life in the early twentieth century. M. Fenderson, *Life*, November 1914—American Social History Project.

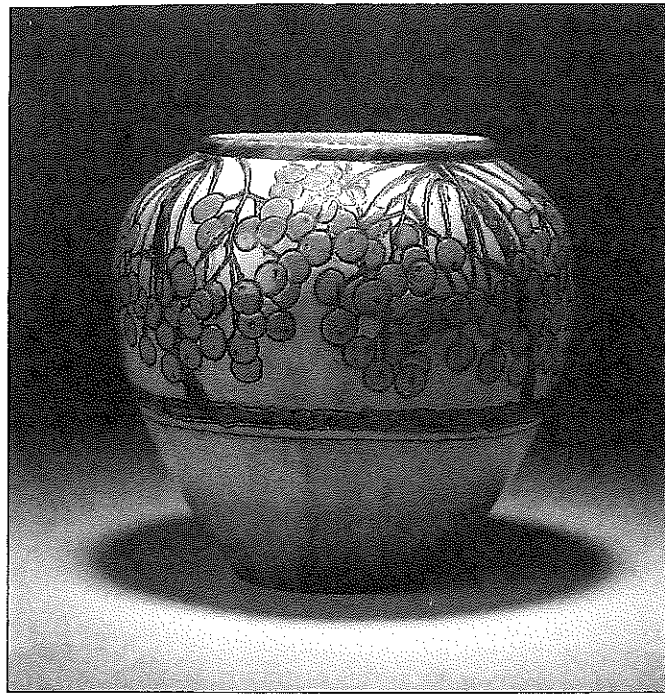
held professional positions as teachers, doctors, and ministers in their own communities.

Above all, corporations expanded opportunities for people who could sell products and maintain records. At the lowest levels, new entrants to the middle class functioned as clerks. At the highest levels, white-collar workers directed and controlled corporate expansion. Before the turn of the century, many middle-class men had aspired to entrepreneurial independence and had viewed their employee status as temporary. Those views changed as large firms grew and gained control over vital sectors of the economy. Men in salaried jobs ranging from mail boy to chief executive officer now began to think in terms of lifelong employment with corporations.

While most clerical and sales jobs offered workers a lifetime of low-paying, regimented labor, some traveling positions offered opportunities for financial advancement to men who were willing (or eager) to forgo the comforts of a home life and able to adjust to life on the road. Salesmen were central to the developing mass-distribution system. Between 1880 and 1920, the number of commercial travelers increased at least sixfold. With good English and an attractive personality, a small-town boy or an immigrant's

exemplified by the Ford assembly-line worker—white-collar work and women's work were undergoing equally important changes. The growth of the middle class was as much a by-product of industrialization and mass production factories as was the burgeoning working class.

This explosion of white-collar work—clean work—expanded the white middle class, which had been quite small for most of the nineteenth century. More than factory work, the new jobs required good English-language skills and a willingness to behave according to company rules. Some children of immigrants took such jobs, which their parents could never get, while others followed the older generation to the factories. Immigrants' daughters often entered the white-collar world before their brothers could. Employers barred black Americans from virtually all the new white-collar jobs, although some



Arts and Crafts for the Working Woman

A popular interest in art pottery emerged at the turn of the century, growing out of middle-class women's interest in employment outside the home and a design reform impulse known as the Arts and Crafts movement. The latter, founded by the English poet, artist, socialist, and reformer William Morris, believed that hand-made objects were the answer to the proliferation of low-quality mass-produced goods. The Newcomb Pottery was established in 1894 by Newcomb College (Tulane University's women's college) as part of the school's ambitious program of vocational training for young women artists. Harriet C. Joor, *Chinaberries Vase*, 1902-03, Newcomb Pottery—New Orleans Museum of Art: Gift of Newcomb College, Pierce Butler, Dean, 38.29.

son might dream of expense accounts, good clothes, automobiles, and relative independence from the boss.

A few women worked as commercial travelers for smaller firms, but most companies would not hire women to travel. Instead, women dominated the lowest clerical positions, typing and stenography pools, large bookkeeping staffs, and telephone switchboards. These women generally earned more than other women who worked for wages, but employers subjected them to rigid discrimination and segregation. Bosses defined jobs according to gender: the mail room for men, the telephone switchboard for women. Gender segregation went well beyond job categories; for instance, men and women entered the Metropolitan Life building through different doors and used separate stairways, hallways, and elevators.

Many women found work in department stores, where a few could move up to well-paying jobs as buyers, but most were stuck in tedious and low-paying positions as retail saleswomen. Compared with laundries and factories, stores offered full-time employees steady work without seasonal layoffs. But this security was supported by the insecurity of many part-time workers, who worked only during special sales and heavy seasons, and at a lower pay scale. These women earned very little, but store owners argued that their wages were appropriate because women who worked part time needed only to supplement their families' income. In fact, most part-time saleswomen eked out a meager living for years, hoping to be hired as part

TABLE 4.1 Women's Labor Force Participation Rates

Women's participation in the paid workforce grew steadily before World War II, but the most dramatic increases were among married women.

Gibson Girls

In the 1890s, Charles Dana Gibson's magazine illustrations of fashionable young women gained wide popularity. The physical type that he portrayed became the standard of beauty, a romantic ideal that suggested a new independence while also celebrating the privileges and glamour of elite society. Charles Dana Gibson, *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1895—American Social History Project.

**The Expansion of the Female Labor Force, 1900–1940**

Year	Percentage of All Women Working	Percentage of Married Women Working
1900	20.6%	5.6%
1920	23.7	9.0
1930	24.8	11.7
1940	25.8	15.6

of the regular staff. Even saleswomen on regular staff were paid roughly half the wages their male counterparts received in departments such as sporting goods and appliances.

Despite discrimination in the workplace, more and more women worked for wages, feeding growing corporate demands for clerical workers to cope with mountains of paperwork and retailers' demands for saleswomen and stock clerks to serve crowds of new customers. The shift from home production to factory and the abolition of child labor also drew increasing numbers of women into manufacturing. As the idea of women

working for pay became more acceptable, the prevailing attitude that married women belonged at home faded, and an increasing proportion of wives joined the workforce. In 1890, just under 5 percent of married women worked for wages; thirty years later, twice as many did so. Altogether, the female labor force more than quadrupled between 1880 and 1930 (Table 4.1).

Women's participation in the workforce varied by ethnic and racial group as well as marital status. Unmarried Polish women in Buffalo, New York, often took jobs in factories or as domestic servants, while their counterparts from southern Italy preferred to take in piecework or do seasonal farm labor. Many married African American women worked for wages; few married immigrant women did so. Industrial homework—the piecework manufacture of clothing, artificial flowers, or costume jewelry—enabled women to earn money at home while maintaining family life. In 1902, about 25,000 to 30,000 women did piecework at home in New York City.

Domestic service remained the foremost occupation for single white women in the North

"She Didn't Fire Me — I Fired Myself": Beulah Nelson Protests

African American women were twice as likely as white women to pursue paid employment, but they were more constrained in their choice of occupations. Nonetheless, the shortage of servants gave them some leverage in their jobs. The prospect of migration lent new resolve to black domestic workers as they confronted difficult employers, as revealed in Beulah Nelson's account, told to historian Elizabeth Clark-Lewis.

Before I left, a lady, who was named Miss Addie, and a member of my mother's church—my people all were sanctified—stayed home to have a baby. . . . And I worked [there] . . . three days. Why? Mama sent me, and they was paying a quarter a week! Now, you had to cook the breakfast, you wait on all of them, all the children, and get them ready for school. . . . Fix their lunch and everything. Then you wash up all the dishes. Then you had to go make up all the beds and pick up all the things behind all the children, and then after that you had to go out behind the house, honey, and pick the garden. And pick what kind of vegetables you got to have. You got to wash them and cook them. And they had three meals a day. They would eat they breakfast, and then twelve o'clock they had to have a big dinner. And then they had supper later in the evening.

But they didn't want no nigger to put they hand on their bread. Understand me good now. I set the table up and put the food on the table. But the bread be the last thing. Never bring the bread in until after they say the grace, so the bread would be seeping hot. I wait just as good until they said the grace, and I wouldn't move because I would have had to pick up the bread out of the pan, and I still would have to take knife or fork to lift it to put in the plate to take to the table, and I know she didn't want me to touch it. Right? Well, if she didn't want me to touch it, if I couldn't touch it, I wasn't going to try not to touch it to carry it to the table to give it to them. She said to me, "How long are you going to wait before you bring that bread in here?" I said, "I'm not even going to bring it in there." I said, "You put it in there. You cook it, you don't want me to touch it. If you don't want me to touch it, you don't need me to bring it in there." . . . And that's when she got mad, arguing with me so. She jumped up from table and she said to me, "Beulah, you fired." But she didn't fire me—I fired myself, 'cause I intended to do what I did. . . . I said, "No, if that's the way it's to be—not me!" I said, "For what? Six days a week for twenty-five cents? Not me!" You see, I didn't have to do it—I was leaving.

Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domesticity in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940* (1994), 65-66.

and for married black women in the South. In 1910, more than 2.5 million women—more than one-third of the female workforce—were servants. African American women who worked as domestics in the South generally lived in their own homes, while northern maids lived in their employers' attics and basements. They found domestic service both physically and

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The MASSES



The Return from Toil.

The Return from Toil

John Sloan's cover illustration for the radical magazine *The Masses* presented working women in a new way. *The Masses* often portrayed women as the victims of oppressive working and labor conditions. Here, however, the magazine's artist broke away from the standard sentimental or wretched stereotypes, instead showing working women as strong, independent, and exuberant individuals. John Sloan, *The Masses*, July 1913—Tamiment Institute Library, New York University.

psychologically taxing, involving intimate surveillance by an ever-present employer. Women with other choices abandoned this work in droves; one former servant reported how she happily left behind the “degrading sense of servility.”

Even the most desirable of women's jobs had serious drawbacks, reflecting women's second-class position in the labor market. Nursing, a preserve of native-stock Americans, stood at the top of the female job hierarchy. During their apprenticeship in hospital schools, student nurses provided cheap labor. After graduation, most of these women went into private nursing, caring for patients at home or in hospitals and charging a fee for their service. Nurses took pride in their skills, knowledge, and independence, but patients' families viewed nurses as subordinates. Some of their work was disconcertingly similar to that of domestic servants.

Whatever their field—nursing, teaching, domestic service, garment and textile manufacturing, retail sales, or clerical

work—women held jobs that usually paid less and carried less prestige than equivalent male positions. With no women in positions of power in either companies or unions, women workers faced widespread sexual harassment. Antonia Bergeron remembered that the bosses at the Amoskeag Company “were very fresh. The boss would chase the girls and slap their behinds, give them kicks in the rear end.”

Inequality in Everyday Life

The inequalities of the workplace were mirrored in everyday life. Mass production, urbanization, and new technologies brought new products and services to both rich and poor in the decades after the depression of the 1890s. But not surprisingly, rich and poor did not have equal access to the glittering new goods and services. Although the nation's population became more urbanized, few urban working people had central heating or telephones, and electric lights became a familiar feature in their workplaces, changing many aspects of their jobs, but not in their homes.

New Standards of Living By the turn of the century, manufacturers mass-produced food products, cleaning supplies, and other grocery store

items and promoted them to workers on billboards and streetcar placards and to the middle classes in magazine advertisements. Quaker and Pillsbury now sold prepackaged oats and flour to people who had once been accustomed to scooping them from grocers' barrels. Heinz and Campbell's supplied prepared sauces and soups, while Procter and Gamble offered a variety of brands and grades of factory-made soap—products that had once been made at home. Manufacturers promoted the convenience, cleanliness, and style of throwaway packaging and disposable goods. But they also brought a growing mountain of trash as older habits of reuse and recycling gradually died away.

Only the rich could afford some of these packaged goods. Franco-American, for example, advertised its canned vichyssoise in yachting magazines. But as the firms that put food in cans exploited the economies of mass production, prices began to drop, and these luxuries became more affordable.

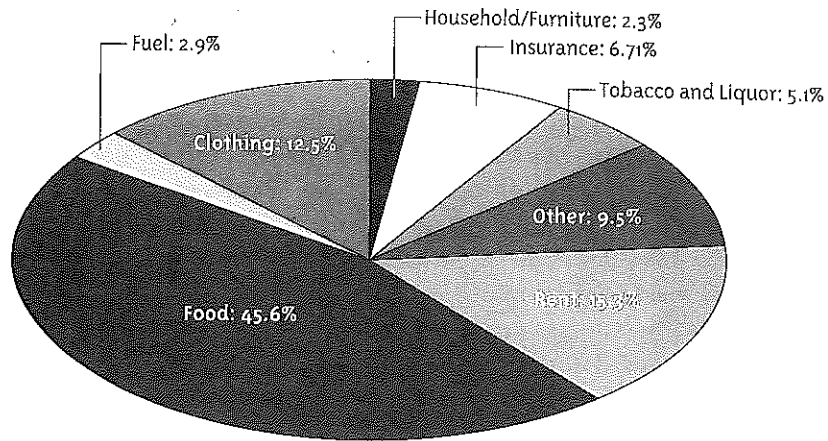
Still, there was a huge gap between the lifestyles of the rich and the poor. By the turn of the century, the urban upper classes generally had electricity, natural gas, telephones, central heating, and indoor plumbing. Meanwhile, tenement dwellers fueled their kitchen stoves with scavenged scraps of coal and wood, lit kerosene lamps, and drew water from hydrants located in courtyards near overflowing privies. A new tenement building might include a bathroom and possibly even hot water, but most housing built for workers had no heating or lighting systems.

Within the working class, the levels of comfort enjoyed by skilled and unskilled workers also differed widely. An unskilled worker cobbled together a life for his family on an average of \$10 a week. They could barely afford to rent a dilapidated two-room apartment with no running water; buy food, crude furniture, and some ready-made clothing; and purchase the most minimal private insurance—a necessity for workers unprotected by any form of government insurance. A survey done in 1910 concluded that if an unskilled steelworker worked the standard shift—twelve hours a day, 365 days a year—he still could not earn enough to support a family of five (Figure 4.1).

Skilled workers' families, in contrast, lived in relative comfort on an average of \$20 a week. The additional income enabled them to rent or buy one- or two-family houses far away from the smoke and stench of the mill and the bright lights of the central city. They shared neighborhoods with families headed by small businessmen and low-level white-collar workers, an occupational group that grew as corporations expanded their managerial ranks. They could eat a varied, healthy diet and take comfort and pride in decent housing and furniture. If they conserved their money, they could afford pianos and hand-operated washing machines and even accumulate some savings.

FIGURE 4.1 The Bottom Line: Family Budgets in Homestead

Standards of living were rising in the early twentieth century. But unskilled workers, many of them immigrants, still spent about half of their meager incomes on food and had very little left over for recreation or the other pleasures of life. This chart is based on family budgets collected in 1908 from twenty-nine Slavic families in the steelmaking community of Homestead, Pennsylvania.



Indoor plumbing—like household appliances—indicated higher status. Wealthy homes had indoor plumbing for much of the nineteenth century, but middle-class plumbing systems remained rudimentary until the mass production of pipes and fittings. In Muncie, Indiana, in 1890, no more than two dozen houses had complete bathrooms, and only one family in six or eight had even a hydrant in the yard or a faucet in the kitchen. Even eighteen years later, a study of working families in New York found that although many used indoor toilets, few had full bathrooms.

Plumbing was a godsend to women in all working-class families. Those without this convenience had to carry chamber pots and heavy buckets to and from tenement courtyards, streams, wells, and privies and had to heat washwater on wood- and coal-burning stoves. Leonard Covello's mother cried at the party welcoming her to the United States in 1896, but she smiled through her tears when her husband's landlady, Carmela Accurso, showed her how to bring water into the kitchen with the turn of a handle. "Courage! You'll get used to it here," insisted Accurso. "See. Isn't it wonderful how the water comes out."

Plumbing, gas, and electricity—whether at home or at the commercial laundries that working people patronized when they had no sinks—also enabled higher standards of personal cleanliness. As these conveniences eliminated the work of making fires, cleaning lamps, and hauling wood, coal, and water, people began to keep their bodies, clothes, and houses considerably cleaner. But "labor-saving devices" did not necessarily reduce the amount of time women spent on chores; rather, the innovations simply encouraged them to conform to higher standards of housekeeping.

Residents noticed new levels of cleanliness on city streets, where automobiles and electric streetcars replaced horses and reduced horse droppings. And the new theory that disease was caused by germs—popularized in newspapers and magazines and by home economists in colleges, high



schools, and settlement houses—raised public awareness of the dangers of thoughtless disposal of sewage and garbage.

Wiring a Nation Electricity created a new landscape of light across the country in the turn-of-the-century decades. Thomas A. Edison had produced his first electric lamp in 1879; even more important, he created a delivery system for generating and transmitting the new form of energy. By 1890, Edison's company manufactured more than one million light bulbs a year. Merchants and city officials used them in shop windows, streetlights, and theater marquees, all of which were electrified during the 1880s. By 1900, advertising signs flashed changing words in blinking lights; New York's Madison Square displayed a forty-five-foot electric pickle promoting Heinz products.

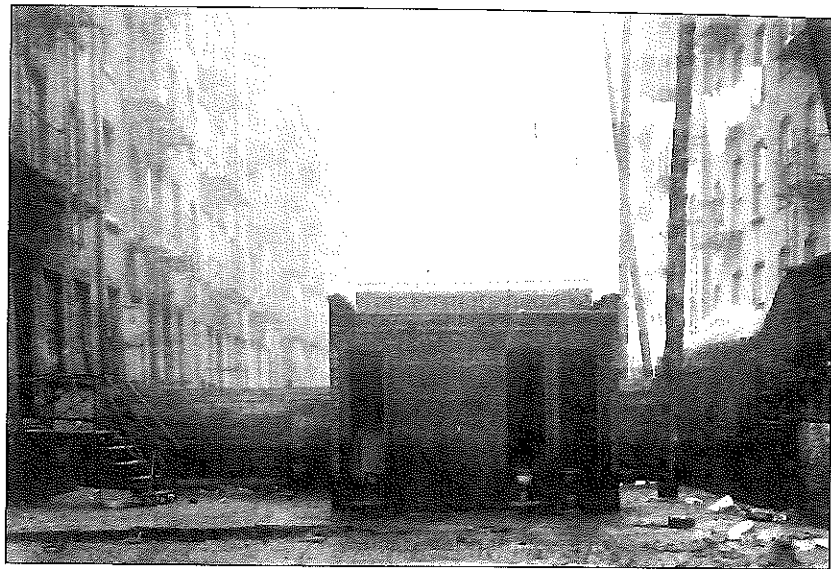
Factories and businesses installed electric lighting in the workplace between 1880 and 1900. In 1893, the Columbia Mills Company of Columbia, South Carolina, became the first textile mill to run on electricity. By 1919, electricity supplied about half of the power used by U.S. factories. Electric light did not flicker or heat up rooms, as did gas lighting. It reduced the danger of fire and made for a less polluted work environment. But workers did not welcome some other changes that electricity brought; for example, it made round-the-clock shifts much more common, and it reduced the number of mechanical breakdowns, which had given workers a much appreciated respite while belts were replaced. "That ruined our playhouse when they got power," one worker recalled.

Cottages for the Working Man

Some workers lived in employer-sponsored cottages located near their industrial employment. These houses were often similar to Daniel Cumming's residence at 1015 Olive Street in Chicago, the middle of the three worker's cottages shown here: one to one-and-a-half stories high with front facing gable roofs and decorative trim. Entrepreneurs and builders combined to supply inexpensive housing, but workers made significant sacrifices to move into the ranks of homeowners. In some cities, immigrants purchased homes at a rate equal to or greater than that of native-born residents. DN-0008602, *Chicago Daily News* negatives collection, Chicago Historical Society.

Privies

Toilet facilities, such as this backyard outhouse, remained minimal in some immigrant urban neighborhoods. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



Many workers relied on electricity to get them to their jobs. Electric streetcars—first used in Richmond, Virginia, in 1887—caught on quickly because they were faster, cheaper, and cleaner than horse-drawn cars. Within three years, 15 percent of urban transit was electric-powered, and that figure rose to 94 percent by 1902. Between 1890 and 1902, the amount of track operated by electric railways almost tripled, and the number of

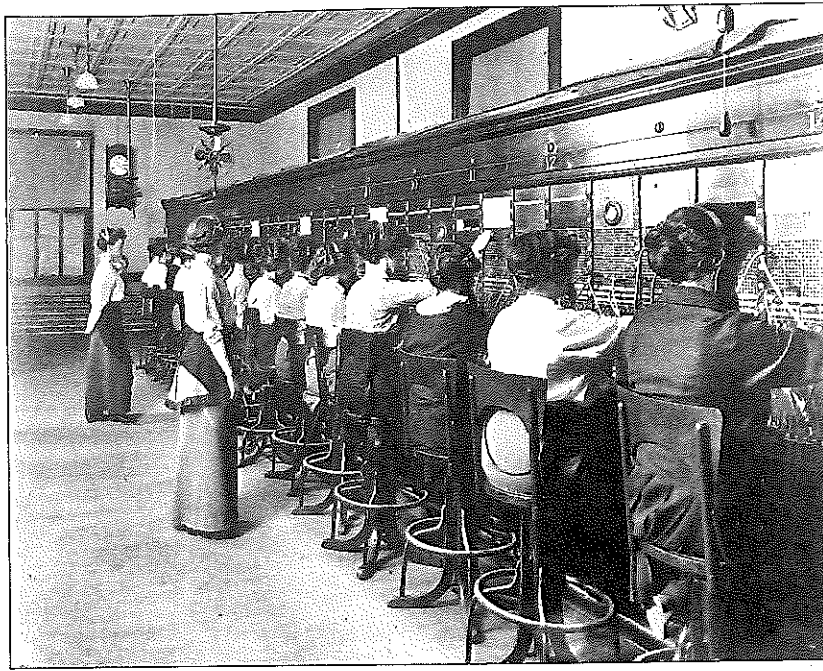
Electricity Comes to Wabash, Indiana

Shortly after Edison developed the incandescent electric light, small towns across the country hired companies to demonstrate electricity to their citizens. In Wabash, Indiana, a local reporter described the scene as four 3,000-candle arc lights were turned on, making Wabash one of the first U.S. cities wholly lit by electric light.

Ringling of the Court House bell announced the exhibition. The city presented a gloomy uninviting appearance. Suddenly from the towering dome of the Court House burst forth a flood of light which, under ordinary circumstances would have caused a shout of rejoicing from the thousands who had been crowding and jostling each other in the deep darkness of the evening. No shout, however, or token of joy disturbed the deep silence which suddenly enveloped the onlookers.

People stood overwhelmed with awe, as if in the presence of the supernatural. The strange weird light exceeded in power only by the sun, rendered the square as light as midday. . . . Men fell on their knees, groans were uttered at the sight, and many were dumb with amazement.

Wabash Plain Dealer, Feb. 7, 14, 21, 28; April 9, 1880, cited in David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (1990), 3.



Telephone Operators

The work of telephone operators, such as these women at the New England Telephone Company switchboard in 1915, resembled industrial labor. Closely watched by supervisors, who monitored their speed and enforced rigid work rules, switchboard operators handled up to six hundred calls an hour. Print Department, Boston Public Library.

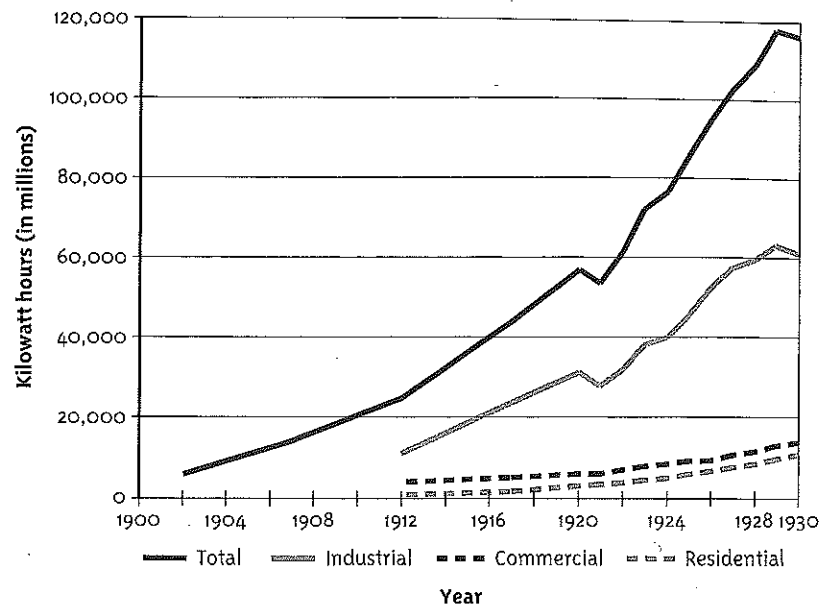
passengers they carried more than doubled. Electric streetcars offered inexpensive rides all over American cities, giving workers new mobility and creating “streetcar suburbs,” residential districts that were separated from industrial centers.

Consumers could not just decide to buy electricity; it had to be made available by private companies and public utilities, which generally served industry and business first. Until 1910, the utilities saw only the wealthy as potential customers. But power companies soon realized that domestic demand, which was high at night, could balance the industrial load, which peaked during the day. After 1918, nationwide home electrification—only 10 percent in 1910—proceeded rapidly, reaching 70 percent by 1930. Initially, however, most homes used only a few electric lights, and few homes had electric toasters, irons, fans, or other appliances (Figure 4.2).

Working people only belatedly benefited from the telephone wires that crisscrossed the urban sky. The telephone—first shown at the Centennial Exposition in 1876 by Alexander Graham Bell—had become a common tool of business during the 1880s and 1890s. In 1891, the New York and New Jersey Telephone Company had more than five times as many commercial customers as residential ones. Phones would remain too expensive for most urban workers for several decades. Families who needed to call a doctor or a druggist might ask to use the phone of a friendly grocer.

FIGURE 4.2 Uses of Electric Energy, 1902–1930

Use of electricity grew at an incredible clip—almost twenty-fold—between 1900 and 1930. Although industries were by far the heaviest consumers, urban residential use grew at the fastest rate after 1912.



Toward a Consumer Culture

Inequality also marked and shaped the emerging consumer culture. Nationally advertised brands became ubiquitous, as did chain stores. But the rural and urban poor could not afford most of the new products, and the chain stores tended to shy away from working-class districts. Working people did benefit from increased leisure time, and immigrants flocked to moving pictures, with their nickel admission fees and their silent stories that required no knowledge of English. But many Americans lacked access even to the cheap amusements they could afford. Amusement parks did not welcome African Americans, and farm folk lived too far from the bright lights of the city to benefit from urban forms of recreation. The new commercial culture also brought with it class-based cultural conflicts. Middle-class arbiters of morality tried to regulate disorderly amusements and direct working-class audiences into “uplifting” forms of recreation.

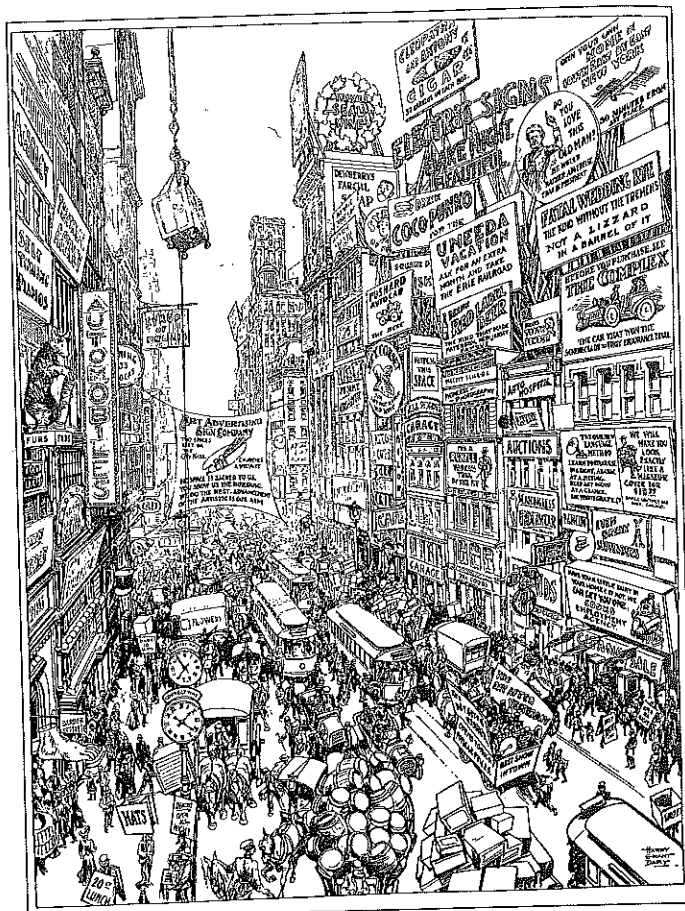
Marketing to the Masses As Americans became consumers, linked to the complex distribution network of a national market, their long-standing relationships with local craftspeople and storekeepers weakened. Customers now got information about products not from the people who made or sold them, but from persuasive advertisements. They purchased the mass-produced goods from stores that were conceived on principles similar to those of mass production. These new patterns were by no means universal or complete by the time the United States entered World War I, but they had

taken a firm hold on the American way of life.

Advertised brand names gave manufacturers power over wholesalers and storekeepers. Before the 1880s, for example, wholesalers who distributed soap bought it from the manufacturer that offered the best price. But after 1881, when Procter and Gamble accidentally produced a floating soap and started pitching it to the nation, people began to ask for Ivory. Because the product could be obtained only from Procter and Gamble, wholesalers had to buy from that company. Manufacturers that created successful brands and convinced people to trust their advertising rather than the grocer's opinion had other advantages, too. They could charge more for their products and avoid competition and price fluctuations.

The most advanced advertising agencies and the biggest companies conducted sophisticated marketing campaigns that coordinated advertising with market research and other kinds of promotion, such as free samples. By 1911, the large Heinz sales force could coordinate twenty-five thousand store displays with the firm's monthly magazine advertisements. New marketing campaigns took advantage of and contributed to major developments in the advertising media. Newspapers and magazines had published commercial messages for centuries, usually in separate sections full of small, closely packed ads. But the newest periodicals, designed to highlight full-page ads, functioned literally as advertising media and depended on advertising, not subscriptions, for their revenues. Similarly, billboards had been used for many years, but advances in lithographic techniques now enabled the reproduction of huge color images. After 1890, national and regional firms could post thousands of signs at the same time, offering advertisers systematic control over billboards and streetcar placards across the country. And Heinz's pickle in New York and other electric signs kept ads in view around the clock.

Even the foreign-language press came to depend on national advertising. *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* promoted few American brands in 1905,



Picturesque America

Harry Grant Dart's illustration in a 1909 issue of *Life* magazine portrayed the increasingly aggressive and intrusive character of advertising in turn-of-the-century America. Harry Grant Dart, *Life*, 1909—Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

but in less than a decade, brand advertisements were eclipsing ads by Italian undertakers and dentists and by local merchants selling pasta, olive oil, cheese, and wine. In the Yiddish press, the National Biscuit Company advertised Uneeda Biscuits next to ads for Coca-Cola, Vaseline, Heinz, and Colgate.

Manufacturers were now segmenting their markets by income, producing different versions of a product for different segments. Arbuckle Brothers packaged Yuban coffee for wealthy urbanites and Ariosa for rural and poor city people. The Edison Company offered a range of phonographs in 1910, from the \$200 Amberola, with sapphire needle and oak or mahogany cabinet, to a bare-bones model for \$12.50.

Similarly, Procter and Gamble realized that to sell Crisco, it needed to accommodate ethnic cooking preferences. To Jews, it pointed out that Crisco was kosher and provided a substitute for nonkosher lard in cooking all-American apple pie. P&G received a New York rabbi's endorsement declaring that "the Hebrew Race had been waiting 4,000 years for Crisco." But in making their appeals to cooks who were accustomed to using chicken fat or olive oil in their recipes, even P&G's clever marketers failed to anticipate some opportunities, as when the Yup'ik and Inupiaq women of Alaska adopted Crisco for use in a berry confection called akutaq, which was traditionally made from caribou fat or seal oil.

In the new century, new kinds of retailing challenged the face-to-face personal relationships that went along with retail credit and delivery. Small merchants felt the competition of new kinds of stores—big city department stores, mail-order houses, and chain stores such as Woolworth's and the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P)—which differed from traditional retailing not only in size, but also in distribution principles and techniques. Mass merchandising was based on the idea of turnover: moving goods into and out of the store as quickly as possible. Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward honed the principle of turnover to a fine edge. These big Chicago mail-order houses offered a wider range of products than any other stores, and they offered a boon to farmers in remote areas. Montgomery Ward was selling about twenty-four thousand different items in the early 1890s, when Richard Sears and Alvah C. Roebuck began to expand their watch business. By 1900, Sears had surpassed Montgomery Ward, and in 1906, still doing only mail-order business, Sears moved to a forty-acre tract where merchandise was carried, as in mass production, by gravity chutes and conveyer belts. Two thousand employees opened and processed more than nine hundred sacks of mail every day. Sears owned or held a major interest in sixteen manufacturing plants, and it used those facilities to produce its own line of goods.

Chain stores had entered the grocery trade well before 1890, but they remained small until around 1912. In that year, the A&P introduced



"economy stores," small operations that did not offer credit and delivery and could be run by two people. By 1915, A&P had twenty-two hundred stores. Consumers were shopping in tobacco, newsstand, variety, and drug chain stores by 1914. A few chains also ran clothing stores, piano stores, bookstores, and lumber yards. Some, like Sears, owned manufacturing plants; others offered low prices on nationally advertised brand merchandise. Local merchants viewed the chains, like the mail-order houses, as a serious threat to their business. And for consumers with cash to spend, the appeal was real; the new retailers offered lower prices and often a better selection. But many industrial workers who lived from paycheck to paycheck remained with the local merchants. They paid higher prices, but the local stores offered credit, and they knew the owners as neighbors or members of the same ethnic group. Moreover, chain stores tended to stay away from working-class neighborhoods. Even as late as the 1920s, two-thirds of Chicago's A&P and National Tea stores were in more affluent neighborhoods.

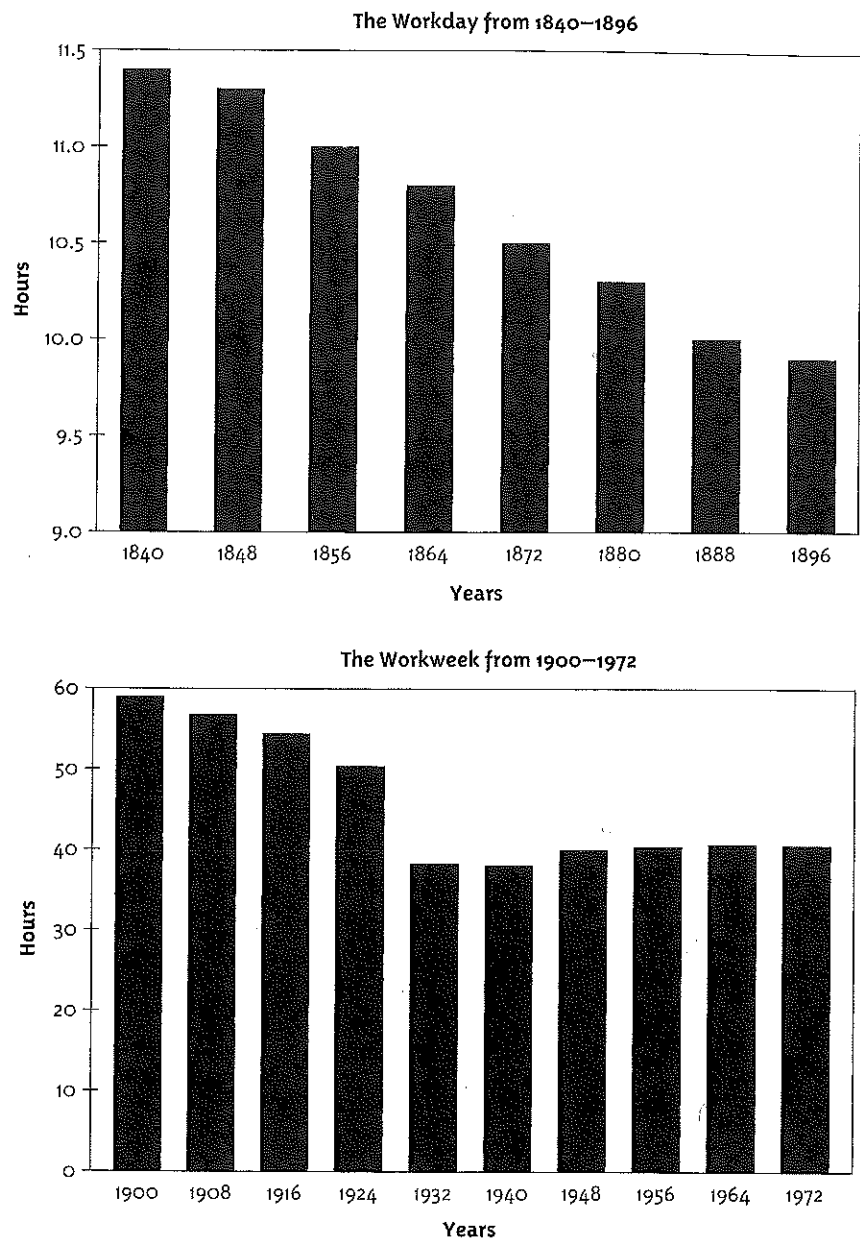
Leisure Time and Public Recreation Consumer culture of the early twentieth century rested on a new concept: leisure. Free time, an idea that would have mystified most farmers and artisans of a hundred years before, emerged as more people became wage earners, owing employers a certain number of hours a day or week and no more. Eight- and nine-hour days became widespread, the result of decades of dedicated union activity, new technologies, rationalized production, and protective legislation (Figure 4.3).

Like so much else in American life, leisure activities became commercialized. Home-made and local entertainment gave way to dance halls, vaudeville acts that toured the nation, and eventually moving-picture films. Boxing, baseball, and other sports became big business. Designed for profit and engineered by experts in the developing entertainment industry, these diversions turned individuals into audience members. But for all the excitement, there was also a loss, as highly talented paid performers replaced amateurs who had sung, danced, and played music in their homes and neighborhoods.

Public meeting places attracted young people seeking to escape big-city tenements, which offered no place to hold parties and precious little privacy. By the 1910s, greater New York had more than five hundred dance halls. "The town is dance mad," wailed a reformer. Dancing had long been popular in working-class neighborhoods. Workers in cities all over the country had danced not only at weddings and other family celebrations, but also at parties sponsored by unions and fraternal lodges, held in rented halls usually located next door to saloons. As time passed, hall owners opened their ballrooms to the public and made dancing a commercial activity.

FIGURE 4.3 Counting the Hours: The Workday and the Workweek, 1840–1972

As these two graphs indicate, the shorter-hour workweek emerged gradually and, except for the 1930s depression, evenly over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Until 1940, the trend continued steadily downward.



Dance halls ranged from the respectable to the tawdry. The ones that featured and welcomed female prostitutes and homosexual men were often located in poor areas where residents had little power to object to what went on in neighboring establishments. Gay men and their culture were highly visible in the urban sexual underworld and were more publicly and fully

Coney Island Dance Halls

Coney Island offered eight large dance halls, each with a distinctive culture and customer as catalogued by Beatrice Stevenson for the Women's Municipal League. Reformers often targeted dance halls as a corrupting force for immigrant and working-class women.

At the largest and most exclusive, Saturday night sees an enormous crowd of elaborately dressed girls and men of good appearance and grooming. At other places girls are more plainly dressed, wear shirt-waists and street hats, and at still others the girls are of coarse appearance and are flashily dressed. The forms of dancing and behavior vary at the three grades of halls; in the most fashionable there is a good deal of promiscuous intercourse, flirting and picking up of acquaintances, but the dancing itself is usually proper and conventional; in the most Bohemian, behavior is free and pronouncedly bad forms of dancing are seen.

Beatrice L. Stevenson, "Working Girls' Life at Coney Island," *Yearbook of the Women's Municipal League*, Nov. 1911, p. 19. Cited in Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (1986, p. 126).

integrated into working-class culture than into that of the middle class. But the mainstays of the dance halls were young working women, who were expected to contribute most of the little they earned to their families. They stretched their pennies by allowing young men to "treat" them to an evening's food, drink, and entertainment in return for female companionship and the possibility of sexual experimentation. These young working women pioneered a new mixed-sex realm of leisure; previously, women's



Watch Your Steps

Aware of dancing's popularity, many urban reform organizations arranged alternatives to commercial dance halls. The People's Institute organized this dance on New York's Lower East Side, in a setting in which young men and women's behavior could be supervised. People's Institute Papers—General Research Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.



Summer in the City
Bathers enjoyed the Coney Island surf in 1903. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

entertainment had been restricted largely to family outings or activities meant for women only. Dance halls and amusement parks offered young people a place to meet and enjoy each other's company unsupervised. Seeking excitement and independence, young immigrant women and men established the norms of modern romantic companionship.

Commercial amusement parks, which developed during the late 1890s, also featured dancing. By 1919, at least fifteen hundred parks took their place alongside vaudeville shows, movies, and professional sports events, offering diversion to people who were not wealthy. Amusement parks used technology to manufacture pleasure, and they encouraged people to spend money on transitory enjoyment. By 1910, every

major city had at least one park that could be reached by trolley. They featured picnic groves, dance halls, skating rinks, pony and boat rides, a penny arcade, a carousel, a Ferris wheel, a roller coaster, and perhaps other rides in addition to nightly entertainment such as fireworks, band concerts, or musical shows. Elaborately decorated and highly mechanized, amusement parks like the Chutes in San Francisco, Pittsburgh's Kennywood Park, Boston's Revere Beach, and Denver's Manhattan Beach offered release from the dullness of the workaday world. "It is just like what I see when I dream of heaven," one young woman exclaimed on her first visit to Brooklyn's Coney Island. The Tunnel of Love had distinctly sexual overtones: "Will she throw her arms around your neck and yell?" advertisements asked.

Coney Island hotels, beaches, and boardwalks catered to a range of pocketbooks; one 1899 guidebook claimed that the area was "divided equally amongst the rich and the poor." Luna Park, a fantasy land of minarets, turrets, and 250,000 electric lights, had a relatively high admission price and was aimed at the respectable middle class. Steeplechase Park, with its fun houses, circuslike sideshows, and rougher rides, attracted working-class youths.

Many individuals crossed class and even race lines in seeking their pleasure—a practice called "slumming." Some frequented bars where prostitutes or gay men spent time and money. On the whole, however, most entertainment was tame enough for the average American, wealthy or not.

The Coney Island guidebook urged guests of the luxury hotels to spend some time at "the great resort for the crowds." People who could not afford Luna Park on a regular basis went as an occasional treat. The park welcomed immigrants if they could afford it; many viewed the diverse crowds as part of the draw. But the amusement parks did not welcome everyone; they generally barred African Americans.

Entertainment for the Masses An outing to an amusement park was an occasional treat, but plenty of everyday entertainment was also available—and at popular prices. Immigrant neighborhoods featured live theater, from participatory, hiss-the-villain melodrama to Shakespeare. By the 1890s, vaudeville competed with other forms of live entertainment by offering something for everybody: shapely women for the men, romantic singers for the women, slapstick comedians for the boys, animal acts for young children. Vaudeville ran almost nonstop—six days a week, from around noon to near midnight—at popular prices, based on the same principle of turnover that was used by department stores. "If I were to sell an orchestra chair for twenty-five cents, four times a day, it would be just as lucrative to me as if sold once for a dollar," declared Benjamin Franklin Keith, the most famous vaudeville impresario.

Over the next decades, nationwide vaudeville circuits emerged, controlled by booking syndicates that promoted big stars. To attract the largest possible audience, vaudeville promoters sought respectability; they sold no liquor, excluded prostitutes, and controlled smoking and drinking. They admitted women free on "Ladies Night" and sometimes courted them with gifts of coal, hams, dress patterns, and bonnets. To attract men, the master of ceremonies announced sports scores, and the boxers John L. Sullivan and Jack Johnson performed song-and-dance routines, told jokes, and sparred onstage. By 1910, more than half the vaudeville audience was middle class, and about one-third of all tickets were sold to women.

Performers at the big vaudeville houses spoke in English, which limited the immigrant audience. But they did feature ethnically oriented acts. Singers, acrobats, and comedians were listed on the program as "Irish," "German," "colored," "Hebrew," or "blackface" acts, each with its typical routine, jokes, and costumes. Many African Americans performed in vaudeville, but in both northern and southern cities, black audience members sat in a segregated balcony that was accessible only from a separate entrance in the alley. Middle-class black Americans refused to patronize vaudeville houses, but they still endured segregation—illegally, in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles—in the first-class playhouses they attended.

Vaudeville houses had shown "magic lantern" slide shows before the invention of the movies, and after that invention, they started to include

"Blaybt er Lign Toyt im Hol" ("He Lies Dead in the Hall")

The "new" immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century added to the diversity of American culture by bringing with them the cultural forms and practices of their homelands. Drawing on the Yiddish language and musical traditions of Eastern Europe, Jewish immigrants created expressive musical shows in Lower East Side bars and theaters. This Yiddish song "Di Nyu Yorker Trern" ("New York Tears"), written earlier but first published in 1910, comments on the difficulties and tragedies of immigrant life in urban America.

New York bubbles like a pot
 There's constant tumult and hubbub
 You see a lot of people rushing around and
 Often you see people's tears.
 Misfortunes happen here at every step
 And yet this hell is called Freeland
 They put a family out on the street
 Because they can't pay the rent on time
 It rains, it pours, the tears flow
 And the poor things sit depressed and forlorn
 That's the New York tears
 Which can never stop
 A sob, a scream, a sigh and a woe
 That's what you hear all the time
 That's nothing new; wherever you go
 You see the New York tears
 Who hasn't heard of the murder
 That took place not long ago on Montgomery Street
 They found three people stabbed
 A man, a wife, and a mother-in-law in a pool of blood
 And there you hear a boy shot his friend
 Two children were playing with a pistol
 A boy of fourteen, what has he seen of life
 The second boy, still younger, aimed at him
 When he felt the shot
 He screams "mama" loudly
 And, running from the third floor
 He lies dead in the hall

Mark Slobin, *Tenement Songs: The Popular Music of the Jewish Immigrants* (1982).

one-reel films between live acts. Moving pictures had evolved quickly from the 1893 peep shows that one person viewed by looking into a hand-wound Kinetoscope. Within three years, large-screen projection cinema had been perfected, and vaudeville audiences could watch "the movies" as part of the show. By 1905, entrepreneurs were setting up small storefront theaters featuring continuous shows composed entirely of one-reel films. These "nickelodeons," so named because they cost only a nickel, succeeded instantly. By 1907, there were more than two thousand of them in the United States.



Three years later, about twenty-six million Americans were attending weekly shows at ten thousand nickelodeons.

At first, as the comedian Milton Berle later remembered, “the movies were something for the lower classes and immigrants. Nice people didn’t go to the ‘flickers.’” Low admission prices that even children could afford soon made the movies the rage in workers’ districts. Silent movies crossed many barriers of language and culture. “It doesn’t matter whether a man is from Kamchutka or Stamboul,” wrote one movie theater manager, “he can understand pictures.” Many early films featured immigrant life, and immigrant producers built the early filmmaking industry. For much of the audience, silent films offered the first sustained contact with mainstream American culture.

Just before World War I, entrepreneurs began to build larger theaters. Equipped with carpets, ushers, and other marks of refinement, these movie halls showed new, longer feature films to the middle classes. Like vaudeville promoters, the most successful theater owners organized nationwide syndicates and circuits. Marcus Loew, who offered combination film and vaudeville shows, owned more than a hundred theaters throughout the United States and Canada.

Entrepreneurial energy also went into sports promotion. Although baseball had been played for decades, it took off as a spectator sport after the turn of the century, as clubs built stadiums along trolley, subway, and railroad lines. But the game was played everywhere, in all kinds of neighborhoods. Sandlot baseball diamonds were sometimes the only open spaces in the smoky, dirty, crowded inner cities. Hard-hitting, slick-fielding sons of immigrants worked their way up from neighborhood pickup games to local semipro teams and even the major leagues. As working people jammed the

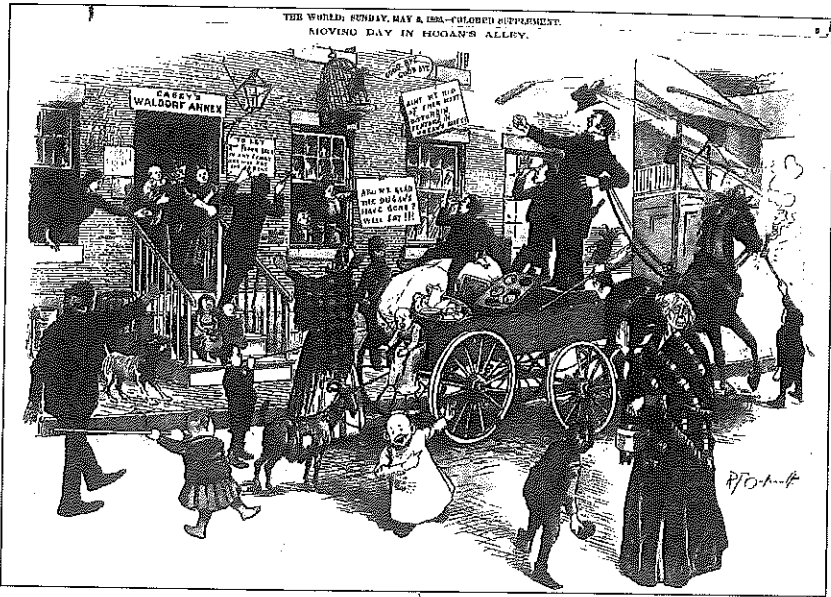
The Line at the Ticket Office

This illustration from the reform magazine *Outlook* depicted a scene outside of a moving-picture show in a New York immigrant neighborhood.

Wladyslaw T. Benda, *Outlook* (June 24, 1911)—American Social History Project.

Moving Day in Hogan's Alley

Richard F. Outcault's color comic, first appearing in the *New York World* in 1896, lovingly portrayed the immigrant, working-class urban neighborhood as energetic and comically chaotic. *Hogan's Alley* (also known as "The Yellow Kid," named after the strange, hairless child in a yellow dress who appeared in each installment) instituted the serialized color comic strip as one of the many features in the new mass-circulation newspapers. Like the movies, newspapers now gained a broad audience by offering a range of features designed to please every taste. Richard F. Outcault, *New York World*, May 3, 1896—Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



bleachers to see these men, immigrants began to feel that they were part of mainstream American society.

African Americans, however, were again excluded. In the 1880s, as many as two dozen African Americans played professional baseball, but by the turn of the century, the major leagues had a firm whites-only policy. In 1901, Baltimore Orioles manager John McGraw tried (unsuccessfully) to circumvent the color line by claiming that a black second baseman named Charles Grant was actually a Cherokee Indian, "Chief Tokohama." Despite their talents, black players like Grant could play only on all-black traveling clubs such as the Philadelphia Giants.

Uplifting the Masses The new commercial culture of spectator sports, dance halls, vaudeville theaters, movies, and amusement parks challenged the middle-class ideals and values of thrift, sobriety, moderation, and order. Unlike saloons, these recreations mixed the sexes, providing new arenas for courting; they promised excitement, romance, and adventure and supplanted older, community-organized amusements. An easy escape from the daily stresses of industrial life, these entertainments especially attracted young people, who made them the foundation for a new kind of working-class youth culture.

Commercial entertainment was exuberant, sensual, and irreverent. Genteel reformers considered it exploitative and dangerous. "Looping the loop amid shrieks of stimulated terror or dancing in disorderly saloon halls are perhaps natural reactions to a day spent in noisy factories," one critic

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"The Most Important and Fruitful Discovery . . ."

Literacy was not just for English-speaking workers; for Oscar Ameringer, who spoke and read only German when he first immigrated to the United States, the opportunity to read books in his native language opened up a whole new world. In this selection from his autobiography, Ameringer describes his discovery of American history books, translated into German, at the local public library.

The most important and fruitful discovery I made in the winter of 1887–88 was the public library of Cincinnati, Ohio. I stumbled on the place by sheer accident. . . . The place looked good. It was warm and comfortable. In one of the large rooms of the ground floor people were reading newspapers and other periodicals, some of them in German, and all this was free. So I made myself at home. . . .

I discovered that the Cincinnati Public Library harbored the very place I hankered for. It was the history room up on the third floor, and there I settled down. The few others who patronized it occasionally were bespectacled young men who tended strictly to their own business, never spoke, and usually walked on tiptoe. There was the regular librarian, an elderly maiden lady who was always too busy crocheting to disturb the tranquility of the room. My particular method of reading history was to extract a large volume from the bookshelves, lay it on the table, spread my elbow-cradled face between hands and if there were illustrations, look at the illustrations. If there were no illustrations, I would snooze over the English text. . . .

One day when I passed too close to the elderly maiden lady, she looked up from her crocheting and asked me . . . "If you are so fond of history, would you mind if I selected a course of reading for you? I have noticed your reading is rather indiscriminate. You rarely selected the same book a second time."

I was caught. From now on, it was either read history or keep out.

The first book she handed me was a life of Tom Jefferson. It was written by a [18]48 revolutionist. . . . I should add that this life of Tom Jefferson was printed in German, thereby closing my last avenue of escape from reading it. I didn't snooze over that book. On the contrary, it kept me so wide awake that when "lights out" sounded that night I was still reading, and next morning was first on deck in the history room. This Tom Jefferson was a man after my own heart! His whole crowd belonged to my league. These fellows had no more respect for high priests, princes, kings, and hand-me-down authority than I had. They were rebels from the word go. They . . . had dissolved the unholy partnership between church and state. Declared that one man was as good as the next one and maybe a darned sight better.

Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken: The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer* (1983).

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Philanthropists and reformers also tried to lure the "lower orders" to enjoy nature in the parks, away from the debauchery of back alleys, brothels, gaming dens, and saloons. Frederick Law Olmsted, the most influential landscape architect of the nineteenth century, declared that his major work, Central Park in Manhattan, "exercises a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence upon the most unfortunate and lawless classes of the city." Many working people seized the opportunity to get outside. Those who were newly arrived from the countryside or desperate to escape crowded tenements used public parks extensively and with great respect. Unions and fraternal organizations sponsored gatherings in parks. Families spent whole Sundays there, bringing a meal or two along as picnics. Before Adriana Valenti and her family would go to Central Park, she remembered, her mother "would make us all sit on the chair and we all had high shoes at the time—and she would see that they were all buttoned, and if we looked presentable."

But philanthropists and middle-class Americans sometimes differed over the use of parks by working people. In Worcester, Massachusetts, middle-class spokespeople constantly complained about the "unsavory and idle appearance" of the working people who relaxed on the city common. Similar complaints inspired Manhattan's park commissioner to license rental chair businesses in city parks in 1901. After a major public protest and much newspaper publicity, however, free park seats reappeared, and 20,000 people rallied to celebrate victory.

Middle-class people more often entertained themselves at home, considering it the appropriate thing to do. There, they conducted their private lives in quiet, orderly neighborhoods far from the noise and overcrowding of rough-and-tumble working-class districts. They had room to socialize and money to patronize restaurants or private clubs instead of public saloons. In African American communities, too, the people who cared about respectability stayed away from working-class dance halls such as "Funky Butt Hall" in New Orleans; they did their socializing at church-sponsored suppers, fairs, concerts, and excursions, where drinking and often dancing were forbidden.

Conclusion: A New Era Dawns, Old Inequalities Persist

The changes that swept the United States at the turn of the century were evident in the landscape in New York, Pittsburgh, Denver, San Francisco, and other major cities. Public architecture celebrated the dynamic power of urban America. Travelers entered major cities through magnificent new railroad stations built of granite and steel, with vast train sheds and high-ceilinged waiting rooms. Nearby tall office buildings, made possible by new construction techniques, housed the headquarters of large corporations, proclaiming their

Sunday Afternoon in Union Square

At the turn of the century, a group of painters, later termed the Ashcan School, was inspired by the city's diverse population and popular institutions. In particular, John Sloan recorded and celebrated the ways in which New Yorkers dealt with living in a new, heterogeneous environment populated by strangers. In this 1912 painting, for example, he showed how public spaces such as city parks offered people opportunities to watch and assess one another. John Sloan, 1912, oil on canvas, 16 1/4 × 32 inches — Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine. Bequest of George Otis Hamlin.



dominant position in the U.S. economy. Downtown department stores competed to present the most opulent displays and the greatest assortment of goods, while expensive restaurants, music halls, and nightclubs offered the middle and upper classes exciting and varied entertainment.

But in individual lives, new ways coexisted with old ones. People bought some new things but not others, and they put their new purchases next to their treasured keepsakes. Farmers ordered from the Sears catalogue but continued to barter eggs and butter for other goods sold by country storekeepers. Urban workers bought some goods from pushcarts and others from department stores. Yet the future was clear: young people insisted on new levels of convenience, leisure, and material comfort. The children of immigrants understood the “land of the dollar” better than their parents ever would. But before immigrants, workers, women, and African Americans could fully share in the bounty, they would have to overcome economic, social, and political barriers that limited their participation. Those inequities and barriers—low wages, dirty streets, unsafe working conditions, racial and gender discrimination—fueled the conflicts of the Progressive era and the decades that followed it.

The Years in Review

1876

- Alexander Graham Bell introduces the telephone at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

1879

- Thomas A. Edison produces the first electric lamp; by 1890, Edison manufactures more than one million light bulbs a year.

1881

- Procter and Gamble introduces Ivory soap, which becomes the model for nationally distributed brand-name merchandise.

1883

- The first automatic-line canning factory opens, soldering cans at the rate of fifty per minute.

1887

- The first urban electric streetcar system is installed in Richmond, Virginia, by Frank J. Sprague; by 1902, electricity will power 94 percent of all urban transit.

1889

- The first patent is granted for a time clock; many factories will adopt time clocks within the next five years.

1891

- Eighty thousand people, many of them working class, sign a petition to open the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Sundays.

1893

- Columbia Mills Company of Columbia, South Carolina, becomes the first textile mill to run on electricity.
- The first moving pictures are introduced. By 1910, twenty-six million Americans attend weekly shows at ten thousand nickelodeons.

1895

- Andrew Carnegie funds a museum, library, and music hall in Pittsburgh to provide high culture for the masses.

1903

- Luna Park, one of the first amusement parks, opens at Coney Island, New York, with spectacular rides and attractions.
- Wilbur and Orville Wright make the first sustained (852 feet in 59 seconds) manned flight in a gas-powered airplane at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

1905

- The first theater dedicated to moving pictures opens in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and charges customers five cents to watch *The Great Train Robbery*.

1906

- Americans hear the nation's first radio broadcast of a voice and music program.

- Sears, Roebuck expands its mail-order business, using manufacturing plants in which the company has a share to produce its own lines of goods.
- San Francisco sets up segregated schools for Japanese immigrants.

1907

- The YMCA offers English language and temperance lessons to immigrant workers.

1910

- White mobs attack African Americans in Boston, New York City, Cincinnati, Houston, and Norfolk after black boxer Jack Johnson's defeat of the "Great White Hope," James Jeffries.
- The United States becomes the world's foremost industrial power.

1911

- Frederick Winslow Taylor publishes *The Principles of Scientific Management*.

1912

- The American Federation of Labor voices opposition to scientific management.
- The S.S. *Titanic* sinks in the North Atlantic with 1,513 people aboard, including streetcar heir Harry Elkins Widener and copper heir Benjamin Guggenheim.
- Procter and Gamble markets Crisco shortening with an innovative advertising and marketing campaign.

1913

- Henry Ford creates the first assembly line to manufacture the Model T; by 1914, 250,000 low-cost Model Ts are produced each year.

1914

- Henry Ford introduces the Five-Dollar Day in an effort to reduce worker turnover and prevent unionization.

Additional Readings

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For more on the benefits of and social conflicts over increased time for leisure activities and the expansion of mass entertainment, see:

Judith A. Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills* (1991); Richard Butsch, ed., *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption* (1990); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (1994); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (1990); Francis G. Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City 1877–1919* (1984); Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890–1925* (1985); Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (1999); Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (1990); Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (1980); David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (1993); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (1986); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (1983); Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (1992); and Shane White and Graham J. White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from the Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (1998).