

DOCUMENT 19.9

"Sanitary Precaution," c. 1914

Although progressives' interest in public health and sanitation was often motivated by a sincere desire to prevent the spread of disease, these concerns were often closely linked to racial and ethnic anxieties. Immigration opponents, for example, argued that certain immigrant groups, by virtue of an inherent disposition toward uncleanness, posed a direct threat to public health. The cartoon here suggests a similar link between African American servants and the spread of disease.



Atlanta Journal-Constitution Historic Online Archives

Interpret the Evidence

1. What role does Frances Willard suggest women should play in controlling the behavior of men (Document 19.5)? What light does Willard's memoir shed on the role of motherhood in shaping progressive values?
2. What connection does the abstinence poster make between disease and vice (Document 19.6)? What do you make of the absence of a direct moral argument against promiscuity in the poster?
3. Why was eugenics so attractive to many progressive reformers (see Document 19.7)?
4. Who benefited and who lost from immigration restriction laws (Document 19.8), temperance laws, and antiprostitution laws?
5. What racial assumptions lie behind the cartoon on health threats (Document 19.9)?

Put It in Context

- How did the progressives' emphasis on disease reflect their larger vision of American society at the turn of the twentieth century?
- How did progressives' understanding of the sources of disease shape the kinds of "cures" they proposed for America's ills?

background photo: page 617, Library of Congress