THE GROWTH OF CITIES AND AMERICAN CULTURE, 1865–1900

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

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

In 1893, the city of Chicago hosted the World’s Columbian Exposition. Over 12 million people traveled to the White City, as Chicago’s fairgrounds and gleaming white buildings were popularly called. They went to see the progress of American civilization as represented by new industrial technologies and by the architects’ grand visions of an ideal urban environment. Outside the fairgrounds, the real city of Chicago had its own attractions and interest. In little more than half a century, the population of this midwestern city had grown to over one million. Its central business district was a marvel of modern urban structures, consisting of steel-framed skyscrapers, department stores, and theaters. Around this central hub lay a sprawling gridiron of workers’ housing near the city’s factories and warehouses, and a few miles beyond were tree-lined suburban retreats for the wealthier class. The entire urban complex was connected by a network of hundreds of miles of streetcars and railroads.

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

A Nation of Immigrants

In the last half of the 19th century, the U.S. population increased more than threefold, from about 23.2 million in 1850 to 76.2 million in 1900. A significant portion of the growth was fueled by the arrival in these years of some 16.2 million immigrants. An additional 8.8 million more arrived during the peak years of immigration, 1901–1910.

Growth of Immigration

In every era, the motives for emigrating from one country to another are a combination of “pushes” (negative factors from which people are fleeing) and “pulls” (positive attractions of the adopted country). The negative forces driving Europeans to emigrate in the late 19th century included (1) the poverty of displaced farmworkers driven from the land by the mechanization of farmwork, (2) overcrowding and joblessness in European cities as a result of a population boom, and (3) religious persecution, such as that of the Jews in Russia. Positive reasons for choosing to emigrate to the United States included this country’s reputation for political and religious freedom and the economic opportunities afforded by the settling of the Great Plains and the abundance of industrial jobs in U.S. cities. Furthermore, the introduction of large steamships and the relatively inexpensive one-way passage in the ships’ “steerage” made it possible for millions of poor Europeans to emigrate.

“Old” Immigrants and “New” Immigrants

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

New Immigrants. Beginning in the 1890s and continuing to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, there was a notable change in the national origins of most immigrants. The “new” immigrants came from southern and eastern Europe. They were Italians, Greeks, Croats, Slovaks, Poles, and Russians. Many were poor and illiterate peasants, who had left autocratic countries and therefore were unaccustomed to democratic traditions. Unlike the earlier groups of Protestant immigrants, the newcomers were largely Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish. On arrival, most new immigrants crowded into poor ethnic neighborhoods in New York, Chicago, and other major U.S. cities.
An estimated 25 percent of them were "birds of passage," young men contracted for unskilled factory, mining, and construction jobs, who would return to their native lands once they had saved a fair sum of money to bring back to their families.

Restricting Immigration

In the 1870s, when the French sculptor Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi began work on the Statue of Liberty, there were few legal restrictions on immigration to the United States. By 1886, however—the year that the great welcoming statue was placed on its pedestal in New York harbor—Congress had passed a number of new laws restricting immigration. First came the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, placing a ban on all new immigrants from China. Then came restrictions on the immigration of "undesirable" persons (those convicted of criminal acts or diagnosed as mentally incompetent). Another law in 1885 prohibited contract labor in order to protect American workers. Soon after the opening of Ellis Island as an immigration center in 1892, the new arrivals had to pass more rigorous medical and document examinations and pay an entry tax before being allowed into the United States.

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

By no means, however, did the anti-immigrant feelings and early restrictions stop the flow of newcomers. At the turn of the century, almost 15 percent of the U.S. population were immigrants. The Statue of Liberty remained a beacon of hope for the poor and the oppressed of southern and eastern Europe until the 1920s, when the Quota Acts almost closed Liberty's golden door (see Chapter 23).

Urbanization

Urbanization and industrialization developed simultaneously as two sides of the same coin. Cities provided both a central supply of labor for factories and also a principal market for factorymade goods. The shift in population from rural to urban became more obvious with each passing decade. By 1900 almost 40 percent of Americans lived in towns or cities, and by 1920, for the first time, more Americans lived in urban communities than in rural areas.

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

Changes in the Nature of Cities

Cities of the late 19th century underwent significant changes not only in their size but also in their internal structure and design.
Streetcar cities. A number of improvements in urban transportation made the growth of cities possible. In the walking cities of the pre-Civil War era, people had little choice but to live within walking distance of their shops or jobs. Such cities gave way to streetcar cities, in which people lived in residences many miles from their jobs and commuted to work on horse-drawn streetcars. By the 1890s, both horse-drawn cars and cable cars were being replaced by electric trolleys, elevated railroads, and subways, which could transport people to urban residences even farther from the city’s commercial center. The building of massive steel suspension bridges such as the Brooklyn Bridge (completed in 1883) also made possible longer commutes between residential neighborhoods and the center city.

Mass transportation had the effect of segregating urban workers by income. The upper and middle classes moved to streetcar suburbs to escape the pollution, poverty, and crime of the city. The exodus of higher-income residents left older sections of the city to the working poor, many of whom were immigrants.

Skyscrapers. As cities expanded outward, they also soared upward, since increasing land values in the central business district dictated the construction of taller and taller buildings. In 1885, William Le Baron Jenny built the ten-story Home Insurance Company Building in Chicago—the first true skyscraper with a steel skeleton. Structures of this size were made possible by such innovations as the Otis elevator and the central steam-heating system with radiators in every room. By 1900 steel-framed skyscrapers for offices of industry and commerce had replaced church spires as the dominant feature of American urban skylines.

Ethnic neighborhoods. As the more affluent citizens deserted residences near the business district, the poor moved into them. To increase their profits, landlords divided up inner-city housing into small, windowless rooms. The resulting slums and tenement apartments could cram over 4,000 people into one city block. In an attempt to correct unlivable conditions, New York City passed a law in 1879 that required each bedroom to have a window. The cheapest way for landlords to respond to the law was to build the so-called dumbbell tenements, with ventilation shafts in the center of the building to provide windows for each room. However, overcrowding and filth in new tenements continued to promote the spread of deadly diseases, such as cholera, typhoid, and tuberculosis.

In their crowded tenement quarters, different immigrant groups created distinct ethnic neighborhoods where each group could maintain its own language, culture, church or temple, and social club. Many groups even supported their own newspapers and schools. While often crowded, unhealthy, and crime ridden, these neighborhoods (sometimes called “ghettos”) often served as springboards for ambitious and hardworking immigrants and their children to achieve their version of the American dream.

Residential suburbs. In contrast to social and residential patterns in the United States, in Europe the wealthiest people today live, as in the past, near the business districts of modern cities, while lower-income people live in the outlying areas. There is a historical explanation for U.S. divergence from this pattern. During the 19th century, upper- and middle-class Americans decided that the best way to escape the problems of the city was to move out to the suburbs. The factors that promoted suburban growth included: (1) abundant land available at low cost, (2) inexpensive transportation by rail, (3) low-cost construction methods such as the wooden, balloon-frame house, (4) ethnic and racial prejudice, and (5) an American fondness for grass, privacy, and detached individual houses.

In the late 1860s, the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted designed a suburban community with graceful curved roads and open spaces—“a village in the park.” By 1900, suburbs had grown up around every major U.S. city, and a single-family dwelling surrounded by an ornamental lawn soon became the American ideal of comfortable living. Thus began the world’s first suburban nation.

Private city versus public city. At first, city residents tried to carry on life in large cities much as they had in small villages. They did not expect a lot of public services from municipal governments, and as a result, American cities could not deal effectively with the build-up of waste, pollution, disease, crime, and other hazards. Only slowly did advocates for healthier and more beautiful cities convince citizens and city governments of the need for water purification, sewerage systems, waste disposal, street lighting, police departments, and zoning laws to regulate urban development.

Boss and Machine Politics

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

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

**Awakening of Reform**

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

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

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

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

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

**Religion and society.** All religions found the need to adapt to the stresses and challenges of modern urban living. Roman Catholics gained enormous numbers from the influx of new immigrants. Catholic leaders such as Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore inspired the devoted support of old and new immigrants alike by defending the Knights of Labor and the cause of organized labor. Among Protestants, Dwight Moody and his Moody Bible Institute (founded in Chicago in 1889) would help generations of urban evangelists to adapt traditional Christianity to city life. The Salvation Army, imported from England in 1879, provided the basic necessities of life for the homeless and the poor, while also preaching the Christian gospel.

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

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

The cause of woman's suffrage, launched at Seneca Falls in 1848, was vigorously carried forward by a number of middle-class women. In 1890, two of the pioneer feminists of the 1840s, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony of New York, helped found the National American Woman's Suffrage Association to secure the vote for women. A western state, Wyoming, was the first to grant full suffrage to women, in 1869. By 1900, some states allowed women to vote in local elections, and most allowed women to own and control property after marriage.

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

Moralists thought of cities as a breeding ground for vice, obscenity, and prostitution. Anthony Comstock of New York formed the Society for the Suppression of Vice to be the watchdog of American morals. He and his followers persuaded Congress in 1873 to pass the “Comstock Law,” which prohibited the mailing or transportation of obscene and lewd material and photographs.

**Intellectual and Cultural Movements**

The change from an agricultural to an industrial economy and from rural to urban living profoundly affected all areas of American life and culture: education, the arts, even sports.

**Changes in Education**

The growing complexity of modern life, along with the intellectual influence of Darwin’s theory of evolution, raised challenging questions about what schools and universities should teach.

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

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

**Higher education.** The number of U.S. colleges increased in the late 1800s largely as a result of: (1) land grant colleges established under the Morrill acts of 1862 and 1890, (2) universities founded by wealthy philanthropists—the University of Chicago by John D. Rockefeller, for example, and (3) the founding of new colleges for women, such as Smith, Bryn Mawr, and Mount Holyoke. By 1900, 71 percent of the colleges admitted women, who represented more than one-third of the attending students.

There were also significant changes in the college curriculum. Soon after becoming president of Harvard in 1869, Charles W. Eliot reduced the number of required courses and introduced electives (courses chosen by students) to accommodate the teaching of modern languages and the sciences: physics, chemistry, biology, and geology. Johns Hopkins University was founded in Baltimore in 1876 as the first American institution to specialize in advanced graduate studies. Following the model of German universities, Johns Hopkins emphasized research and free inquiry. As a result of such innovations in curriculum, the United States produced its first generation of scholars who could compete with the intellectual achievements of Europeans. At the same time, however, there was a trend in another direction as life at many colleges became dominated by social activities, fraternities, and intercollegiate sports.

**Social sciences and the professions.** The application of the scientific method and the theory of evolution to human affairs revolutionized the social sciences in the late 19th century. The new social sciences included behavioral psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science. Richard T. Ely of Johns Hopkins attacked laissez-faire economic thought as dogmatic and outdated and used economics to study labor unions, trusts, and other existing economic institutions not only to understand them but to suggest remedies for economic problems of the day. Evolutionary theory influenced leading sociologists (Lester F. Ward), political scientists (Woodrow Wilson), and historians (Frederick Jackson Turner) to study the dynamic process of actual human behavior instead of logical abstractions. In the legal profession, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., taught that the law should evolve with the times in response to changing needs and not remain restricted by legal precedents and judicial decisions of the past. Clarence Darrow, a famous lawyer, argued that criminal behavior could be caused by a person’s environment of poverty, neglect, and abuse. Other professions—doctors, educators, and social workers—also began applying scientific theory and methodology to their work.

The leading black intellectual of his day, W. E. B. Du Bois, was the first African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard. Du Bois used the new statistical methods of sociology to study crime in an urban neighborhood. As an activist, he advocated full equal rights for blacks, integrated schools, and equal access to higher education for the “talented tenth” of African American youth.

Although fewer than 5 percent of Americans attended college before 1900, the new trends in education and the professions would have a significant impact on progressive legislation and liberal reforms in the next century.
Literature and the Arts

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

Realism and naturalism. Many of the popular works of literature of the post-Civil War years were romantic novels that depicted ideal heroes and heroines. The first break with this genteel literary tradition came with regionalist writers like Bret Harte, who depicted life in the rough mining camps of the West. Mark Twain (the pen name for Samuel L. Clemens) became the first great realist author. His classic work, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), revealed the greed, violence, and racism in American society. Another leading realist, William Dean Howells, seriously considered the problems of industrialization and unequal wealth in the novels *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890).

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

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

Born in Massachusetts, James McNeill Whistler became an American expatriate when he sailed to Europe at the age of 21 and spent most of his life in Paris and London. His most famous painting, *Arrangement in Grey and Black* (popularly known as "Whistler's Mother"), hangs in the Louvre. This study of color, rather than subject matter, influenced the development of modern art. A distinguished portrait painter, Mary Cassatt, also spent much of her life in France where she learned the techniques of impressionism, especially in her use of pastel colors. As the 19th century drew to a close, a group of social realists known as the "Ashcan School" painted scenes of everyday life in poor urban neighborhoods. Upsetting to realists and romanticists alike were the abstract, nonrepresentational paintings exhibited in the Armory Show in New York City in 1913. Art of this kind would be rejected by most Americans until the 1950s when it finally achieved recognition and respect among collectors of fine art.

Architecture. In the 1870s, Henry Hobson Richardson changed the direction of American architecture. His designs, based on the Romanesque style of massive stone walls and rounded arches, gave a gravity and stateliness to functional commercial buildings. Louis Sullivan of Chicago went a step further by rejecting historic styles in his quest for a suitable style for the tall, steel-framed office buildings of the 1880s and 1890s. Sullivan's buildings achieved a much-admired aesthetic unity, in which the form of a building flowed from its function—a hallmark of the Chicago School of architecture. Frank Lloyd Wright, an employee of Sullivan's in the 1890s, developed an "organic" style of architecture that was in harmony with its natural surroundings. Wright's vision is exemplified in his Prairie houses. Wright became the most famous American architect of the 20th century. Other architects, such as Daniel H. Burnham, who revived classical Greek and Roman architecture in his designs for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, continued to explore both historical and modern styles in their buildings.

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

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

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

Entertaining the urban masses became a major business in the late 19th century. Even newspapers became less a medium of objective information and more of a mass medium for amusing millions of readers.

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

Mass-circulation magazines also became increasingly popular and numerous in the 1880s and 1890s. Advertising revenues and new printing technologies made it possible for the Ladies’ Home Journal and other popular magazines to sell for as little as 10 cents a copy.

Amusements. In addition to urbanization, other factors also promoted the growth of leisure-time activities: (1) a gradual reduction in the hours people worked, (2) improved transportation, (3) promotional billboards and advertising, and (4) the decline of restrictive Puritan and Victorian values that discouraged “wasting” time on play. Based on numbers alone, the most popular form of recreation in the late 19th century (despite the temperance movement), was drinking and talking at the corner saloon. Legitimate theaters for the performance of comedies and dramas flourished in most large cities, but vaudeville with its variety of acts had more appeal for the urban masses. The circus became the “Greatest Show on Earth” in the 1880s through the showmanship of Phineas T. Barnum and James A. Bailey. Also immensely popular was the Wild West show brought to urban audiences by William F. Cody (“Buffalo Bill”) and headlining such personalities as Sitting Bull and the markswoman Annie Oakley.

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

Spectator sports. Enthusiasm for professionally organized spectator sports (baseball, football, basketball, and boxing) had its origins in the late 19th century. The most famous athlete of the era was the heavyweight boxer John L. Sullivan. Professional boxing bouts drew mostly male spectators from both the upper and lower classes to cheer and wager on their favorite pugilist. Baseball, while it recalled a rural past of green fields and fences, was very much an urban game that demanded the teamwork needed for an industrial age. Owners organized teams into leagues, much as trusts of the day were organized. In 1909, when President William Howard Taft started the tradition of throwing out the first ball of the season, the national pastime was already a well-established part of American popular culture. Basketball was invented in 1891 at Springfield College, in Massachusetts. In only a few years, high schools and colleges across the nation had teams. The first professional basketball league was organized in 1898. The first intercollegiate football game was played by two New Jersey colleges, Rutgers and Princeton, in 1869. Football remained a college sport for decades and did not become a commercial enterprise of professional league teams until the 1920s.

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

Amateur sports. The value of playing sports as healthy exercise for the body gained acceptance by the middle and upper classes in the late 19th century. Women were considered unfit for most competitive sports, but they too engaged in such recreational activities as croquet and bicycling. Participation in golf and tennis grew, but was often limited to members of athletic clubs, which kept out most of the working class. The very rich could separate themselves from lower-income people by pursuing the expensive sports of polo and yachting. While Jews and Catholics were kept out of some private clubs, the most severely discriminated against were African Americans, who were prevented by Jim Crow laws from joining whites-only clubs and from playing on all-white big-league baseball teams until the late 1940s.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: MELTING POT OR CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

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

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

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

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

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

### KEY NAMES, EVENTS, AND TERMS

- **Columbian Exposition**
- **"old" immigrants**
- **"new" immigrants**
- **Statue of Liberty**
- **Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)**
- **Ellis Island**
- **contract labor law**
- **American Protective Association**
- **urbanization**
- **streetcar cities**
- **mass transportation**
- **skyscrapers**
- **ethnic neighborhoods**
- **ghettos**
- **tenements**
- **suburbs**
- **Frederic Law Olmsted**
- **political machine**
- **party boss**
- **Henry George, *Progress and Poverty***
- **Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward***
- **settlement house**
- **Jane Addams**
- **Social Gospel movement**
- **Walter Rauschenbusch**
- **Dwight Moody**
- **Salvation Army**
- **Mary Baker Eddy**
- **National American Women's Suffrage Association**
- **Women's Christian Temperance Union**
- **Frances E. Willard**
- **Antisaloon League**
- **Carry A. Nation**
- **Anthony Comstock**