

America Moves to the City

1865–1900

What shall we do with our great cities?
 What will our great cities do with us . . . ?
 [T]he question . . . does not concern the city alone.
 The whole country is affected . . .
 by the condition of its great cities.

LYMAN ABBOTT, 1891

Born in the country, America moved to the city in the decades following the Civil War. By the year 1900, the United States' upsurging population nearly doubled from its level of some 40 million souls enumerated in the census of 1870. Yet in the very same period, the population of American cities *tripled*. By the end of the nineteenth century, four out of ten Americans were city dwellers, in striking contrast to the rustic population of stagecoach days.

This cityward drift affected not only the United States but the entire industrializing world. European peasants, pushed off the land in part by competition from cheap American foodstuffs, were pulled into cities—in both Europe and America—by the new lure of industrial jobs. A revolution in American agriculture thus fed the industrial and urban revolutions in Europe, as well as in the United States.

THE URBAN FRONTIER

The growth of American metropolises was spectacular. In 1860 no city in the United States could boast a million inhabitants; by 1890 New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia had vaulted past the million mark. By 1900 New York, with some 3.5 million people,

CHRONOLOGY

1859	Charles Darwin publishes <i>On the Origin of Species</i>
1862	Morrill Act provides public land for higher education
1863	World's first subway system opens in London
1866	American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) created
1869	Wyoming Territory grants women right to vote
1871	<i>Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly</i> published
1872	Metaphysical Club meets in Cambridge, Massachusetts
1873	Comstock Law
1874	Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) organized; Chautauqua education movement launched; Impressionist artists debut in Paris
1876	Johns Hopkins University graduate school established
1879	Henry George publishes <i>Progress and Poverty</i> ; Dumbbell tenement introduced; Mary Baker Eddy establishes Christian Science; Salvation Army begins work in America
1881	Booker T. Washington becomes head of Tuskegee Institute; American Red Cross founded; Barnum and Bailey first join to stage "Greatest Show on Earth"
1882	First immigration-restriction laws passed
1883	Brooklyn Bridge completed; Metropolitan Opera House built in New York
1884	Mark Twain publishes <i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>
1885	Louis Sullivan builds first skyscraper, in Chicago; Linotype invented
1886	Statue of Liberty erected in New York harbor
1887	American Protective Association (APA) formed; Hatch Act supplements Morrill Act
1888	Edward Bellamy publishes <i>Looking Backward</i> ; American all-star baseball team tours world
1889	Jane Addams founds Hull House in Chicago
1890	National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) formed
1891	Basketball invented
1893	Lillian Wald opens Henry Street Settlement in New York; Anti-Saloon League formed; World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago; New Zealand grants women right to vote
1897	Library of Congress opens
1898	Charlotte Perkins Gilman publishes <i>Women and Economics</i>
1899	Kate Chopin publishes <i>The Awakening</i>

CHRONOLOGY

1900	Theodore Dreiser publishes <i>Sister Carrie</i>
1907	Henry Adams privately publishes <i>The Education of Henry Adams</i>
1910	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded

was the second-largest city in the world, outranked only by London. Throughout the world, cities were exploding. London, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, Moscow, Mexico City, Calcutta, and Shanghai all doubled or tripled in size between 1850 and 1900. The population of Buenos Aires multiplied by more than ten.

American cities grew both up and out. The cloud-brushing skyscraper allowed more people and workplaces to be packed onto a parcel of land. Appearing first as a ten-story building in Chicago in 1885, the skyscraper was made usable by the perfecting of the electric elevator. An opinionated Chicago architect, Louis Sullivan (1856–1924), contributed formidably to the further development of the skyscraper with his famous principle that “form follows function.” Nesting loftily above city streets in the new steel-skeleton high-rises that Sullivan helped to make popular, many Americans were becoming modern cliff dwellers.

Americans were also becoming commuters, carted daily between home and job on the mass-transit lines that radiated out from central cities to surrounding suburbs. Electric trolleys, powered by wagging antennae from overhead wires, propelled city limits explosively outward. By the end of the century, the nation’s first subway opened in Boston; London had led the way by building a subway as early as 1863. The compact and communal “walking city,” its boundaries fixed by the limits of leg-power, gave way to the immense and impersonal megalopolis, carved into distinctly different districts for business, industry, and residential neighborhoods—which were in turn segregated by race, ethnicity, and social class.

Rural life could not compete with the siren song of the city. Industrial jobs, above all, drew people off farms in America as well as abroad and into factory centers. But the urban lifestyle also held powerful attractions. The predawn milking of cows had little appeal when compared with the late-night glitter of city lights, particularly alluring to young adults yearning for independence. Electricity, indoor plumbing, and telephones—whose numbers leapt from some 50,000 in 1880 to over 1 million in 1900—all made life in the big city more enticing. Engineering marvels like the skyscraper and New York’s awesome Brooklyn Bridge, a harplike suspension span dedicated in 1883, further added to the seductive glamour of the gleaming cities.

Cavernous department stores such as Macy’s in New York and Marshall Field’s in Chicago attracted urban middle-class shoppers and provided urban working-class jobs, many of them for women. The bustling emporiums also heralded a dawning era of consumerism and accentuated widening class divisions. When Carrie Meeber, novelist Theodore Dreiser’s fictional heroine in *Sister Carrie* (1900), escapes from rural boredom to Chicago just before the turn of the century, it is the spectacle of the

city’s dazzling department stores that awakens her fateful yearning for a richer, more elegant way of life—for entry into the privileged urban middle class, whose existence she had scarcely imagined in the rustic countryside.

The move to the city introduced Americans to new ways of living. Country dwellers produced little household waste. Domestic animals or scavenging pigs ate food scraps on the farm. Rural women mended and darned worn clothing rather than discard it. Household products were sold in bulk at the local store, without wrapping. Mail-order houses such as Sears and Montgomery Ward, which increasingly displaced the rural “general store” in the late nineteenth century, at first did not list trash barrels or garbage cans in their catalogues. In the city, however, goods came in throwaway bottles, boxes, bags, and cans. Apartment houses had no adjoining barnyards where residents might toss garbage to the hogs. Cheap ready-to-wear clothing and swiftly changing fashions pushed old suits and dresses out of the closet and onto the trash heap. Waste disposal, in short, was an issue new to the urban age. And the mountains of waste that urbanites generated further testified to a cultural shift away from the virtues of thrift to the conveniences of consumerism.

The jagged skyline of America’s perpendicular civilization could not fully conceal the canker sores of a feverish growth. Criminals flourished like lice in the teeming asphalt jungles. Sanitary facilities could not keep pace with the mushrooming population explosion. Impure water, uncollected garbage, unwashed bodies, and droppings from draft animals enveloped many cities in a satanic stench. Baltimore was described as smelling like a billion polecats.

The cities were monuments of contradiction. They represented “humanity compressed,” remarked one observer, “the best and the worst combined, in a strangely composite community.” They harbored merchant princes and miserable paupers, stately banks and sooty factories, green-grassed suburbs and treeless ghettos, towering skyscrapers and stinking tenements. The glaring contrasts that assaulted the eye in New York reminded one visitor of “a lady in ball costume, with diamonds in her ears, and her toes out at the boots.”

Worst of all were the human pigsties known as

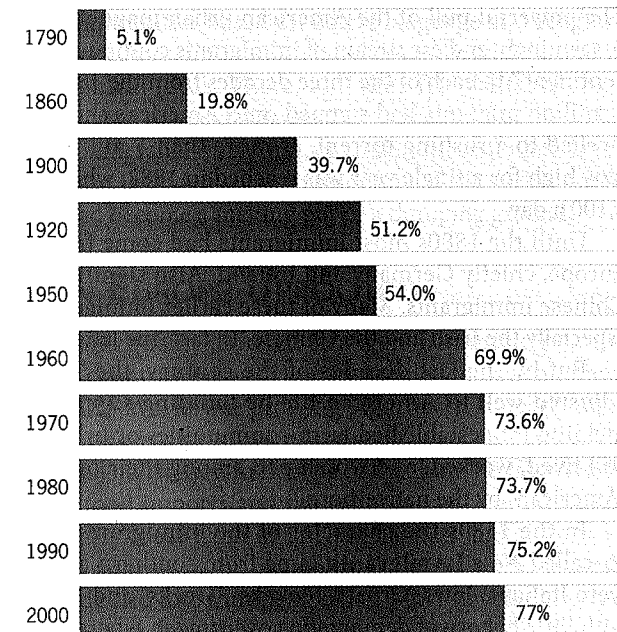


FIGURE 25.1 The Shift to the American City

This chart shows the percentage of total population living in locales with a population of twenty-five hundred or more. Note the slowing of the cityward trend from 1970 on.

slums. They seemed to grow ever more crowded, more filthy, and more rat-infested, especially after the perfection in 1879 of the “dumbbell” tenement. So named because of the outline of its floor plan, the dumbbell was usually seven or eight stories high, with shallow, sunless, and ill-smelling air shafts providing minimal ventilation. Several families were sardined onto each floor of the barracks-like structures, and they shared a malodorous toilet in the hall. In these fetid warrens, conspicuously in New York’s “Lung Block,” hundreds of unfortunate urbanites coughed away their lives. “Flophouses” abounded where the half-starved and unemployed might sleep for a few cents on verminous mattresses. Small wonder that slum dwellers strove mightily to escape their wretched surroundings—as many of them did. The slums remained foul places, inhabited by successive waves of newcomers. To a remarkable degree, hard-working people moved up and out of them.

Cities were dangerous for everyone. In 1871 two-thirds of downtown Chicago burned in a raging fire that left ninety thousand people homeless and destroyed more than fifteen thousand buildings. Closely packed wooden structures fed the insatiable flames, prompting Chicago and other wary cities to require stone and iron buildings downtown. The wealthiest began to leave the risky cities behind and head for semirural suburbs. These leafy “bedroom communities” eventually ringed the brick-and-concrete cities with a greenbelt of affluence.

THE NEW IMMIGRATION

The powerful pull of the American urban magnet was felt even in faraway Europe. A seemingly endless stream of immigrants continued to pour in from the old “mother continent.” In each of the three decades from the 1850s through the 1870s, more than 2 million migrants had stepped onto America’s shores. By the 1880s the stream had swelled to a rushing torrent, as more than 5 million cascaded into the country. A new high for a single year was reached in 1882, when 788,992 arrived—or more than 2,100 a day.

Until the 1880s most immigrants had come from the British Isles and western Europe, chiefly Germany and Ireland. Also significant were the more than 300,000 Chinese immigrants. Many of these earlier immigrants had faced virulent nativism, especially the Irish and the Chinese. In fact, the latter were legally excluded in 1882.

But by the last decades of the century, the “old” European immigrants had adjusted well to American life by building supportive ethnic organizations and melding into established farm communities or urban craft unions. Although many still lived, worked, and worshiped among their own, they were largely accepted as “American” by the native-born.

In the 1880s the character of the immigrant stream changed drastically. The so-called **New Immigrants** came from southern and eastern Europe. Among them were Italians, Jews, Croats, Slovaks, Greeks, and Poles. They came from countries with little history of democratic government, where people had grown accustomed to cringing before despotism and where opportunities for advancement were few. These new peoples totaled only 19 percent of the inpouring immigrants in the 1880s, but by the first decade of the twentieth century, they constituted an astonishing 66 percent of the total inflow. They hived together in cities like New York and Chicago, where the “Little Italys” and “Little Polands” soon claimed more inhabitants than many of the largest cities of the same nationality in the Old World.

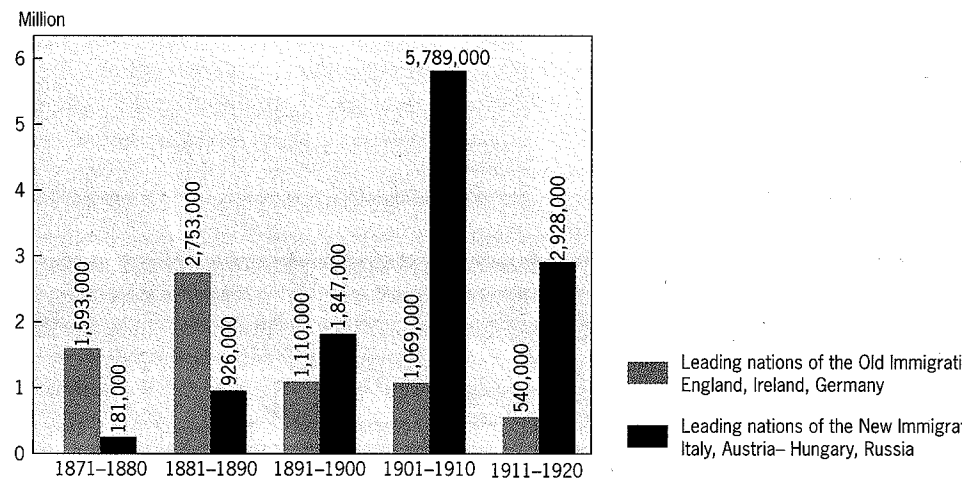


FIGURE 25.2 Old and New Immigration (by decade)

In the 1880s the sources of immigration to the United States shifted from the British Isles and western Europe to southern and eastern Europe. A century later the old “mother continent” of Europe would account for only 10 percent of immigrants to America.

Largely illiterate and impoverished, many immigrants at first were content to live within these tightly bound communities based on native language and religion. There they worshiped in Orthodox or Roman Catholic churches or synagogues and in some cases nourished radical political ideas. There, too, they felt sheltered from Americans who revived old nativist fears that had plagued Old Immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s—fears that these New Immigrants would not, or could not, assimilate to life in their new land. The skeptics, who included some immigrants of the earlier wave, began asking whether the nation had become a melting pot or a dumping ground.

SOUTHERN EUROPE UPROOTED

Why were these bright-shawled and quaint-jacketed strangers hammering on the gates? In part they left their native countries because Europe seemed to have no room for them. The population of the Old World was growing vigorously. It nearly doubled in the century after 1800, thanks in part to abundant supplies of fish and grain from America and to the widespread cultivation in Europe of that humble New World transplant, the potato. American food imports and the galloping pace of European industrialization shook the peasantry loose from its ancient habitats and customary occupations, creating a vast, footloose army of the unemployed. Europeans by the millions drained out of the countryside and into European cities. Most stayed there, but some kept moving and left Europe altogether. About 60 million Europeans abandoned the Old Continent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More than half of them moved to the United States, while their compatriots spread out across the globe to South America, Canada, Africa, and Australia. Masses of people were already in motion in Europe before they felt the tug of the American magnet. This European diaspora, dominated by immigration to the United States, was, in many ways, simply a by-product of the urbanization of Europe.



Mulberry Street on New York City's Lower East Side, ca. 1900 Population densities in early-twentieth-century American cities were among the highest in the world. Mulberry Street, shown in this photo, was at the heart of New York's "Little Italy" neighborhood.

"America fever" proved highly contagious in Europe. The United States was often painted as a land of fabulous opportunity in the "America letters" sent by friends and relatives already transplanted—letters that were soiled by the hands of many readers. "We eat here every day," wrote one jubilant Pole, "what we get only for Easter in our [native] country." The land of the free was also blessed with freedom from military conscription and institutionalized religious persecution.

Profit-seeking Americans trumpeted throughout Europe the attractions of the new promised land. Industrialists wanted low-wage labor, railroads wanted buyers for their land grants, states wanted more population, and steamship lines wanted more human cargo for their holds. In fact, the ease and cheapness of steam-powered shipping greatly accelerated the transoceanic surge.

As the century lengthened, savage persecutions of minorities in Europe drove many shattered souls to American shores. In the 1880s the Russians turned violently upon their own Jews, chiefly in the Polish areas. Tens of thousands of these battered refugees, survivors of centuries of harassment as hated outcasts, fled their burning homes. They made their way to the seaboard cities of the Atlantic Coast, notably New York. Jews had experienced city life in Europe—a circumstance that made them virtually unique among the New Immigrants. Many of them brought their urban skills of

tailoring or shopkeeping to American cities. Destitute and devout, eastern European Jews were frequently given a frosty reception not only by old-stock Americans but also by those German Jews who had arrived decades earlier and prospered in the United States, some as garment manufacturers who now employed their coreligionists as cheap labor.

Many of the immigrants never intended to become Americans in any case. A large number of them were single men who worked in the United States for several months or years and then returned home with their hard-earned roll of American dollars. Some 25 percent of the nearly 20 million people who arrived between 1820 and 1900 were "birds of passage" who eventually returned to their country of origin. For them the attraction of the American magnet was never strong.

Even those who stayed in America struggled heroically to preserve their traditional culture. Catholics expanded their parochial-school systems, and Jews established Hebrew schools. Foreign-language newspapers abounded. Yiddish theaters, kosher-food stores, Polish parishes, Greek restaurants, and Italian social clubs all attested to the desire to keep old ways alive. Yet time took its toll on these efforts to conserve the customs of the Old World in the New. The children of the immigrants grew up speaking fluent English, sometimes mocking the broken grammar of their parents. They often rejected the Old Country manners of their mothers and fathers in their desire to plunge headlong into the mainstream of American life.

REACTIONS TO THE NEW IMMIGRATION

America's government system, nurtured in wide-open spaces, was ill-suited to the cement forests of the great cities. Beyond minimal checking to weed out criminals and the insane, the federal government did virtually nothing to ease the assimilation of immigrants into American society. State governments, usually dominated by rural representatives, did even less. City governments, overwhelmed by the sheer scale of rampant urban growth, proved woefully inadequate to the task. By default, the business of ministering to the immigrants' needs fell to the unofficial "governments" of the urban political machines, led by "bosses" like New York's notorious Boss Tweed.

Taking care of the immigrants was big business indeed. Trading jobs and services for votes, a powerful boss might claim the loyalty of thousands of followers. In return for their support at the polls, the boss provided jobs on the city's payroll, found housing for new arrivals, tided over the needy with gifts of food and clothing, patched up minor scrapes with the law, and helped get schools, parks, and hospitals built in immigrant neighborhoods. Reformers gagged at this cynical exploitation of the immigrant vote, but the political boss gave valuable assistance that was forthcoming from no other source.

Mary Antin (1881–1949), who came to America from Russian Poland in 1894 when thirteen years of age, later wrote in The Promised Land (1912),

"So at last I was going to America! Really, really going, at last! The boundaries burst. The arch of heaven soared. A million suns shone out for every star. The winds rushed in from outer space, roaring in my ears, 'America! America!'"

The nation's social conscience, slumbering since the antislavery crusade, gradually awakened to the plight of the cities, and especially their immigrant masses. Prominent in this awakening were several Protestant clergymen, who sought to apply the lessons of Christianity to the slums and factories. Noteworthy among them was Walter Rauschenbusch, who in 1886 became pastor of a German Baptist church in New York City. Also conspicuous was Washington Gladden, who took over a Congregational church in Columbus, Ohio, in 1882. Preaching the "social gospel," they both insisted that the churches tackle the burning social issues of the day. The Sermon on the Mount, they declared, was the science of society, and many social gospelers predicted that socialism would be the logical outcome of Christianity. These "Christian socialists" did much to prick callous middle-class consciences, thus preparing the path for the progressive reform movement after the turn of the century.

One middle-class woman who was deeply dedicated to uplifting the urban masses was Jane Addams (1860–1935). Born into a prosperous Illinois family, Addams was one of the first generation of college-educated women. Upon her graduation she sought other outlets for her large talents than could be found in teaching or charitable volunteer work, then the only permissible occupations for a young woman of her social class. Inspired by a visit to England, she acquired the decaying Hull mansion in Chicago in 1889. There she established Hull House, the most prominent (though not the first) American settlement house.

Soft-spoken but tenacious, Addams became a kind of urban American saint in the eyes of many admirers. The philosopher William James told her, "You utter instinctively the truth we others vainly seek." She was a broad-gauge reformer who courageously condemned war as well as poverty, and she eventually won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. But her pacifism also earned her the enmity of some Americans, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, who choked on her antiwar views and expelled her from membership in their august organization.

Located in a poor immigrant neighborhood of Greeks, Italians, Russians, and Germans, Hull House offered instruction in English, counseling to help newcomers cope with American big-city life, child-care services for working mothers, and cultural activities for neighborhood residents. Following Jane Addams's lead, women founded **settlement houses** in other cities as well. Conspicuous among the houses was Lillian Wald's Henry Street Settlement in New York, which opened its doors in 1893.

The settlement houses became centers of women's activism and of social reform. The women of Hull House successfully lobbied in 1893 for an Illinois antisweatshop law that protected women workers and prohibited child labor. They were led in this case by the black-clad Florence Kelley, a guerrilla warrior in the urban jungle. Armed with the insights of socialism and endowed with the voice of an actress, Kelley was a lifelong battler for the welfare of women, children, blacks, and consumers. She later moved to the Henry Street Settlement in New York and served for three decades as general secretary of the National Consumers League. The pioneering work of Addams, Wald, and Kelley helped blaze the trail that many women—and some men—later followed into careers in urban reform and the new profession of social work. For these female reformers, and for many other women, the city offered a new kind of frontier opportunity.

More than a million women joined the work force in the single decade of the 1890s. Strict social codes prescribed which women might work and what jobs they might hold. Because employment for wives and mothers was considered taboo, the vast majority of working women were single. Their jobs depended on their race, ethnicity,

and class. Black women had few opportunities beyond domestic service. White-collar jobs as social workers, secretaries, department store clerks, and telephone operators were largely reserved for native-born women. Immigrant women tended to cluster in particular industries, as Jewish women did in the garment trades. Although hours were often long, pay low, and advancement limited, a job still bought workingwomen some economic and social independence. After contributing a large share of their earnings to their families, many women still had enough money in their pocketbooks to enter a new urban world of sociability—excursions to amusement parks with friends on days off, Saturday night dances with the "fellas."

NARROWING THE WELCOME MAT

Antiforeignism, or "nativism," earlier touched off by the Irish and German arrivals in the 1840s and 1850s, bared its ugly face in the 1880s with fresh ferocity. The New Immigrants had come for much the same reasons as the Old—to escape the poverty and squalor of Europe and to seek new opportunities in America. But "nativists" viewed the eastern and southern Europeans as culturally and religiously exotic hordes and often gave them a rude reception. The newest newcomers aroused widespread alarm. Their high birthrate, common among people with a low standard of living and sufficient youth and vigor to pull up stakes, raised worries that the original Anglo-Saxon stock would soon be outbred and outvoted. Still more horrifying was the prospect that it would be mongrelized by a mixture of "inferior" southern European blood and that the fairer Anglo-Saxon types would disappear. One New England writer cried out in anguish,

*O Liberty, white Goddess! is it well
To leave the gates unguarded?*

Native-born Americans voiced additional fears. They blamed the immigrants for the degradation of urban government. Some trade unionists assailed the alien arrivals for their willingness to work for "starvation" wages that seemed to them like princely sums and for importing in their intellectual baggage such seemingly dangerous doctrines as socialism, communism, and anarchism. Many business leaders, who had welcomed the flood of cheap manual labor, began to fear that they had embraced a Frankenstein's monster.

Antiforeign organizations, reminiscent of the "Know-Nothings" of antebellum days, were now revived in a different guise. Notorious among them was the American Protective Association (APA), which was created in 1887 and soon claimed a million members. In pursuing its nativist goals, the APA urged voting against Roman Catholic candidates for office and sponsored the publication of lustful fantasies about runaway nuns.

Organized labor was quick to throw its growing weight behind the move to choke off the rising tide of foreigners. Frequently used as strikebreakers, the wage-depressing immigrants were hard to unionize because of the language barrier. Labor leaders argued, not illogically, that if American industry was entitled to protection from foreign goods, American workers were entitled to protection from foreign laborers.

Congress finally nailed up partial bars against the inpouring immigrants. The first restrictive law, passed in 1882, banged the gate shut in the faces of paupers, criminals, and convicts, all of whom had to be returned at the expense of the greedy or careless

shipper. Congress further responded to pained outcries from organized labor when in 1885 it prohibited the importation of foreign workers under contract—usually for substandard wages.

In addition to the first federal restrictions on immigration, the year 1882 brought forth a law to bar completely one ethnic group—the Chinese. Hitherto America, at least officially, had embraced the oppressed and underprivileged of all races and creeds. Hereafter the gates would be padlocked against defective undesirables—plus the Chinese.

In later years other federal laws lengthened the list of undesirables to include the insane, polygamists, prostitutes, alcoholics, anarchists, and people carrying contagious diseases. A proposed literacy test, long a favorite of nativists because it favored the Old Immigrants over the New, met vigorous opposition. It was not enacted until 1917, after three presidents had vetoed it on the grounds that literacy was more a measure of opportunity than of intelligence.

In 1886 the Statue of Liberty arose in New York harbor, a gift from the people of France. On its base were inscribed the words of Emma Lazarus:

*Give me your tired, your poor
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*

To many nativists, those noble words described only too accurately the “scum” washed up by the New Immigrant tides. Yet the uprooted immigrants, unlike “natives” lucky enough to have had parents who caught an earlier ship, became American citizens the hard way. They stepped off the boat, many of them full-grown and well muscled, ready to put their shoulders to the nation’s industrial wheels. The Republic owes much to these latecomers—for their brawn, their brains, their courage, and the yeasty diversity they brought to American society.

CHURCHES CONFRONT THE URBAN CHALLENGE

The swelling size and changing character of the urban population posed sharp challenges to American churches, which, like other national institutions, had grown up in the country. Protestant churches, in particular, suffered heavily from the shift to the city, where many of their traditional doctrines and pastoral approaches seemed irrelevant. Some of the larger houses of worship, with their stained-glass windows and thundering pipe organs, were tending to become merely sacred diversions or amusements. Reflecting the wealth of their prosperous parishioners, many of the old-line churches were distressingly slow to raise their voices against social and economic vices. John D. Rockefeller was a pillar of the Baptist Church, J. Pierpont Morgan of the Episcopal Church. Trinity Episcopal Church in New York actually owned some of the city’s worst slum property. Cynics remarked that the Episcopal Church had become “the Republican party at prayer.” Some religious leaders began to worry that in the age-old struggle between God and the Devil, the Wicked One was registering dismaying gains. The mounting emphasis was on materialism; too many devotees worshiped at the altar of avarice. Money was the accepted measure of achievement, and the new gospel of wealth proclaimed that God caused the righteous to prosper.

Into this spreading moral vacuum stepped a new generation of **liberal Protestants**. With roots in the Unitarian revolt against orthodox Calvinism, liberal ideas came into the mainstream of American Protestantism between 1875 and 1925, despite frequent and bitter controversies with fundamentalists. Entrenched in the leadership and seminaries of the dominant denominations, liberal Protestants adapted religious ideas to modern culture, attempting to reconcile Christianity with new scientific and economic doctrines. They rejected biblical literalism, urging Christians to view biblical stories as models for Christian behavior rather than as dogma. They stressed the ethical teachings of the Bible and allied themselves with the reform-oriented “social gospel” movement and urban revivalists like Dwight Lyman Moody, a former shoe salesman who captivated audiences with his message of forgiveness. Their optimistic trust in community fellowship and their focus on earthly salvation and personal growth attracted many followers. They helped Protestant Americans reconcile their religious faith with modern, cosmopolitan ways of thinking.

Simultaneously, the Roman Catholic and Jewish faiths were gaining enormous strength from the New Immigration. By 1900 Roman Catholics had become the largest single denomination, numbering nearly 9 million communicants. Cardinal James Gibbons (1834–1921), an urban Catholic leader devoted to American unity, was immensely popular with Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. Acquainted with every president from Johnson to Harding, he employed his liberal sympathies to assist the American labor movement.

By 1890 the variety-loving Americans could choose from 150 religious denominations, 2 of them brand-new. One was the band-playing Salvation Army, whose soldiers without swords invaded America from England in 1879 and established a beachhead on the country’s street corners. Appealing frankly to the down-and-outers, the boldly named Salvation Army did much practical good, especially with free soup.

The other important new faith was the Church of Christ, Scientist (Christian Science), founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879 after she had suffered much ill health. Preaching that the true practice of Christianity heals sickness, she set forth her views in a book entitled *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1875), which sold an amazing 400,000 copies before her death. A fertile field for converts was found in America’s hurried, nerve-racked, and urbanized civilization, to which Eddy held out the hope of relief from discords and diseases through prayer as taught by Christian Science. By the time she died in 1910, she had founded an influential church that embraced several hundred thousand devoted worshippers.

Urbanites also participated in a new kind of religious-affiliated organization, the Young Men’s and Women’s Christian Associations. The YMCA and the YWCA, established in the United States before the Civil War, grew by leaps and bounds. Combining physical and other kinds of education with religious instruction, the “Y’s” appeared in virtually every major American city by the end of the nineteenth century.

DARWIN DISRUPTS THE CHURCHES

The old-time religion received many blows from modern trends, including a booming sale of books on comparative religion and on historical criticism as applied to the Bible. Most unsettling of all were the writings of the English naturalist Charles Darwin. In lucid prose he set forth the sensational theory that higher forms of life had

slowly evolved from lower forms, through a process of random biological mutation and adaptation.

Though not the first scientist to propose an evolutionary hypothesis, Darwin broke new ground with his idea of “natural selection.” Nature, in his view, blindly selected organisms for survival or death based on random, inheritable variations that they happened to possess. Some traits conferred advantages in the struggle for life, and hence better odds of passing them along to offspring. By providing a material explanation for the evolutionary process, Darwin’s theory explicitly rejected the “dogma of special creations,” which ascribed the design of each fixed species to divine agency.

Darwin’s radical ideas evoked the wrath of scientists and laymen alike. Many zoologists, like Harvard’s Louis Agassiz, held fast to the old doctrine of “special creations.” By 1875, however, the majority of scientists in America and elsewhere had embraced the theory of organic evolution, though not all endorsed natural selection as its agent. Many preferred an alternative mechanism proposed earlier by the French biologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who argued that traits acquired during the course of an individual’s life could shape the future genetic development of a species. Lamarckians briefly tamed the unsettling Darwinian view of chance mutation and competitive inheritance, but Darwin’s version would become scientific orthodoxy by the 1920s.

Clergymen and theologians responded to Darwin’s theory in several ways. At first most believers joined scientists in rejecting his ideas outright. After 1875, by which time most natural scientists had embraced evolution, the religious community split into two camps. A conservative minority stood firmly behind the Scripture as the infallible Word of God, and they condemned what they thought was the “bestial hypothesis” of the Darwinians. Their rejection of scientific consensus spawned a muscular view of biblical authority that eventually gave rise to fundamentalism in the twentieth century.

Most religious thinkers parted company with the conservatives and flatly refused to accept the Bible in its entirety as either history or science. These “accommodationists” feared that hostility toward evolution would alienate educated believers. Over time an increasing number of liberal thinkers were able to reconcile Darwinism with Christianity. They heralded the revolutionary theory as a newer and grander revelation of the ways of the Almighty. As one commentator observed,

*Some call it Evolution,
And others call it God.*

Darwinism undoubtedly did much to loosen religious moorings and to promote skepticism among the gospel-glutted. While the liberal efforts at compromise did succeed in keeping many Americans in the pews, those compromises also tended to relegate religious teaching to matters of personal faith, private conduct, and family life. As science began to explain more of the external world, commentators on nature and society increasingly refrained from adding religious perspectives to the discussion.

THE LUST FOR LEARNING

Public education continued its upward climb. The ideal of tax-supported elementary schools, adopted on a nationwide basis before the Civil War, was still gathering strength. Americans were accepting the truism that a free government cannot function successfully if the people are shackled by ignorance. Beginning about 1870, more and

more states were making at least a grade-school education compulsory, and this gain, incidentally, helped check the frightful abuses of child labor.

Spectacular indeed was the spread of high schools, especially by the 1880s and 1890s. Before the Civil War, private academies at the secondary level were common, and tax-supported high schools were rare, numbering only a few hundred. But the concept that a high-school education, as well as a grade-school education, was the birthright of every citizen was now gaining impressive support. By 1900 there were some six thousand high schools. In addition, free textbooks were being provided in increasing quantities by the taxpayers of the states during the last two decades of the century.

Other trends were noteworthy. Teacher-training schools, then called “normal schools,” experienced a striking expansion after the Civil War. In 1860 there were only twelve of them, in 1910 over three hundred. Kindergartens, earlier borrowed from Germany, also began to gain strong support. The New Immigration in the 1880s and 1890s brought vast new strength to private Catholic parochial schools, which were fast becoming a major pillar of the nation’s educational structure.

Public schools, though showering benefits on children, excluded millions of adults. This deficiency was partially remedied by the Chautauqua movement, a successor to the lyceums, which was launched in 1874 on the shores of Lake Chautauqua, in New York. The organizers achieved gratifying success through nationwide public lectures, often held in tents and featuring well-known speakers, including the witty Mark Twain. In addition, there were extensive Chautauqua courses of home study, for which 100,000 people enrolled in 1892 alone.

Crowded cities, despite their cancers, generally provided better educational facilities than the old one-room, one-teacher red schoolhouse. The success of the public schools is confirmed by the falling of the illiteracy rate from 20 percent in 1870 to 10.7 percent in 1900. Americans were developing a profound faith, often misplaced, in formal education as the sovereign remedy for their ills.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND EDUCATION FOR BLACK PEOPLE

War-torn and impoverished, the South lagged far behind other regions in public education, and African Americans suffered most severely. A staggering 44 percent of nonwhites were illiterate in 1900. Some help came from northern philanthropists, but the foremost champion of black education was an ex-slave, Booker T. Washington, who had slept under a board sidewalk to save pennies for his schooling. Called in 1881 to head the black normal and industrial school at Tuskegee, Alabama, he began with forty students in a tumbledown shanty. Undaunted, he taught black students useful trades so that they could gain self-respect and economic security. Washington’s self-help approach to solving the nation’s racial problems was labeled “accommodationist” because it stopped short of directly challenging white supremacy. Recognizing the depths of southern white racism, Washington avoided the issue of *social* equality. Instead he grudgingly acquiesced in segregation in return for the right to develop—however modestly and painstakingly—the economic and educational resources of the black community. Economic independence would ultimately be the ticket, Washington believed, to black political and civil rights.

Washington’s commitment to training young blacks in agriculture and the trades guided the curriculum at **Tuskegee Institute** and made it an ideal place for slave-born

George Washington Carver to teach and research. After Carver joined the faculty in 1896, he became an internationally famous agricultural chemist who provided a much-needed boost to the southern economy by discovering hundreds of new uses for the lowly peanut (shampoo, axle grease), sweet potato (vinegar), and soybean (paint).

Other black leaders, notably Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, assailed Booker T. Washington as an "Uncle Tom" who was condemning their race to manual labor and perpetual inferiority. Born in Massachusetts, Du Bois was a mixture of African, French, Dutch, and Indian blood ("Thank God, no Anglo-Saxon," he would add). After a determined struggle, he earned a Ph.D. at Harvard, the first of his race to achieve that goal. ("The honor, I assure you, was Harvard's," he said.) He demanded complete equality for blacks, social as well as economic, and helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. Rejecting Washington's gradualism and separatism, he argued that the "talented tenth" of the black community should be given full and immediate access to the mainstream of American life. An exceptionally skilled historian, sociologist, and poet, he died as a self-exile in Africa in 1963, at the age of ninety-five. Many of Du Bois's differences with Washington reflected the contrasting life experiences of southern and northern blacks.

THE HALLOWED HALLS OF IVY

Colleges and universities also shot up like lusty young saplings in the decades after the Civil War. A college education increasingly seemed indispensable in the scramble for the golden apple of success. Even women and African Americans were finding new opportunities for higher education. Women's colleges such as Vassar were gaining ground, and universities open to both genders were blossoming, notably in the Midwest. By 1880 every third college graduate was a woman. By the turn of the century, the black institutes and academies planted during Reconstruction had blossomed into a crop of southern black colleges. Howard University in Washington, D.C., Hampton Institute in Virginia, Atlanta University, and numerous others nurtured higher education for blacks until the civil rights movement of the 1960s made widespread attendance at white institutions possible.

The truly phenomenal growth of higher education owed much to the Morrill Act of 1862. This enlightened law provided a generous grant of public lands to the states for support of education. **Land-grant colleges**, most of which became state universities, in turn bound themselves to provide certain services, such as military training. The Hatch Act of 1887, extending the Morrill Act, provided federal funds for the establishment of agricultural experiment stations in connection with the land-grant colleges. These two pieces of legislation spawned over a hundred colleges and universities, including such institutions as the University of California (1868), Ohio State University (1870), and Texas A&M (1876).

Private philanthropy richly supplemented government grants to higher education. Many of the new industrial millionaires, developing tender social consciences, donated immense fortunes to educational enterprises. A philanthropist was cynically described as "one who steals privately and gives publicly." In the twenty years from 1878 to 1898, these money barons gave away about \$150 million. Noteworthy among the new private universities of high quality were Cornell (1865) and Leland Stanford Junior (1891), the latter founded in memory of the deceased fifteen-year-old only

child of a builder of the Central Pacific Railroad. The University of Chicago, opened in 1892, speedily forged into a front-rank position, owing largely to the lubricant of John D. Rockefeller's oil millions. Rockefeller died at ninety-seven, after having given some \$550 million for philanthropic purposes.

Significant also was the sharp increase in professional and technical schools, where modern laboratories were replacing the solo experiments performed by instructors in front of their classes. Towering among the specialized institutions was Johns Hopkins University, opened in 1876, which maintained the nation's first high-grade graduate school. Several generations of American scholars, repelled by snobbish English cousins and attracted by painstaking Continental methods, had attended German universities. Johns Hopkins ably carried on the Germanic tradition of profusely footnoted tomes. Reputable scholars no longer had to go abroad for a gilt-edged graduate degree. Dr. Woodrow Wilson, among others, received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins.

THE MARCH OF THE MIND

Homegrown influences shaped the modern American university as much as German models. Antebellum colleges had stressed the "unity of truth," or the idea that knowledge and morality existed in a single system. Religious instruction in moral philosophy and natural theology served as pillars of the old classical curriculum. In the wake of the Darwinian challenge, when religion and science seemed less compatible, university reformers struggled to reconcile scientific education and religion to preserve the unity of moral and intellectual purpose. When that effort faltered, university educators abandoned moral instruction and divorced "facts" from "values."

Other pressures also helped doom the traditional curriculum. The new industrialization brought insistent demands for "practical" courses and specialized vocational training in the sciences. The elective system, where students selected courses, was gaining popularity. Reformers also emphasized fields of concentration to prepare students for entry into a profession. Specialization, not synthesis, became the primary goal of a university education. The reform spirit received a powerful boost in the 1870s when Dr. Charles W. Eliot, a vigorous young chemist, became president of Harvard College and embarked upon a lengthy career of educational statesmanship. As a sign of the secularizing times, Eliot changed Harvard's motto from *Christo et Ecclesiae* (For Christ and Church) to *Veritas* (Truth).

Medical schools and medical science after the Civil War were prospering. Despite the enormous sale of patent medicines and so-called Indian remedies—"good for man or beast"—the new scientific gains were reflected in improved public health. Revolutionary discoveries abroad, such as those of the French scientist Louis Pasteur and the English physician Joseph Lister, left their imprint on America.* The popularity of heavy whiskers waned as the century ended; such hairy adornments were now coming to be regarded as germ traps. As a result of new health-promoting precautions, including campaigns against public spitting, life expectancy at birth was measurably increased.

One of America's most brilliant intellectuals, the slight and sickly William James (1842-1910), served for thirty-five years on the Harvard faculty. Through his numerous writings, he made a deep mark on many fields. His *Principles of Psychology*

*From Pasteur came the word *pasteurize*; from Lister came *Listerine*.

(1890) helped to establish the modern discipline of behavioral psychology. In *The Will to Believe* (1897) and *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), he explored the philosophy and psychology of religion. In his most famous work, *Pragmatism* (1907), he pronounced America's greatest contribution to the history of philosophy the concept of **pragmatism**—that the truth of an idea was to be tested, above all, by its practical consequences.

THE APPEAL OF THE PRESS

Books continued to be a major source of edification and enjoyment, for both juveniles and adults. Best sellers of the 1880s were generally old favorites like *David Copperfield* and *Ivanhoe*.

Well-stocked public libraries—the poor person's university—were making encouraging progress, especially in Boston and New York. The magnificent Library of Congress building, which opened its doors in 1897, provided thirteen acres of floor space in the largest and costliest edifice of its kind in the world. A new era was inaugurated by the generous gifts of Andrew Carnegie. This openhanded Scotsman, book-starved in his youth, contributed \$60 million for the construction of nearly 1700 public libraries all over the country, with an additional 750 scattered around the English-speaking world from Great Britain to New Zealand. By 1900 there were about nine thousand free circulating libraries in America, each with at least three hundred books. Roaring newspaper presses, spurred by the invention of the Linotype in 1885, more than kept pace with the demands of a word-hungry public. But the heavy investment in machinery and plant was accompanied by a growing fear of offending advertisers and subscribers. Bare-knuckle editorials were, to an increasing degree, being supplanted by feature articles and noncontroversial syndicated material. The day of slashing journalistic giants like Horace Greeley was passing.

Sensationalism, at the same time, was capturing the public taste. The semiliterate immigrants, combined with strap-hanging urban commuters, created a profitable market for news that was simply and punchily written. Sex, scandal, and other human-interest stories burst into the headlines, as a vulgarization of the press accompanied the growth of circulation. Critics now complained in vain of these “presstitutes.”

Two new journalistic tycoons emerged. Joseph Pulitzer, Hungarian-born and near-blind, was a leader in the techniques of sensationalism in St. Louis and especially with the *New York World*. His use of colored comic supplements featuring the “Yellow Kid” gave the name **yellow journalism** to his lurid sheets. A close and ruthless competitor was the youthful William Randolph Hearst, who had been expelled from Harvard College for a crude prank. Able to draw on his California father's mining millions, he ultimately built a powerful chain of newspapers, beginning with the *San Francisco Examiner* in 1887.

Unfortunately, the overall influence of Pulitzer and Hearst was not altogether wholesome. Although both championed many worthy causes, both prostituted the press in their struggle for increased circulation; both “stooped, snooped, and scooped to conquer.” Their flair for scandal and sensational rumor was happily somewhat offset by the introduction of syndicated material and by the strengthening of the news-gathering Associated Press, which had been founded in the 1840s.

APOSTLES OF REFORM

Magazines partially satisfied the public appetite for good reading, notably old standbys like *Harper's*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Scribner's Monthly*. Possibly the most influential journal of all was the liberal and highly intellectual *New York Nation*, which was read largely by professors, preachers, and publicists as “the weekly Day of Judgment.” Launched in 1865 by the Irish-born Edwin L. Godkin, a merciless critic, it crusaded militantly for civil-service reform, honesty in government, and a moderate tariff. The *Nation* attained only a modest circulation—about ten thousand in the nineteenth century—but Godkin believed that if he could reach the right ten thousand leaders, his ideas through them might reach tens of millions.

Another journalist-author, Henry George, was an original thinker who left an enduring mark. Poor in formal schooling, he was rich in idealism and in the milk of human kindness. After seeing poverty at its worst in India and land-grabbing at its greediest in California, he took pen in hand. His classic treatise *Progress and Poverty* undertook to solve “the great enigma of our times”—“the association of progress with poverty.” According to George, the pressure of a growing population on a fixed supply of land unjustifiably pushed up property values, showering unearned profits on owners of land. A single 100 percent tax on those windfall profits would eliminate unfair inequalities and stimulate economic growth.

George soon became a most controversial figure. His single-tax idea was so horrifying to the propertied classes that his manuscript was rejected by numerous publishers. Finally brought out in 1879, the book gradually broke into the best-seller lists and ultimately sold some 3 million copies. George also lectured widely in America and Britain, where he left an indelible mark on English Fabian socialism. George's proposals resounded for decades. As late as 1903, a young female follower applied for a patent for “The Landlord's Game,” which bore a striking resemblance to Parker Brothers' later Monopoly, released in 1935. In the earlier game, the point was not to amass property, but to expose the unfair advantage enjoyed by the landlord and to show “how the single tax would discourage speculation.”

Edward Bellamy, a quiet Massachusetts Yankee, was another journalist-reformer of remarkable power. In 1888 he published a socialistic novel, *Looking Backward*, in which the hero, falling into a hypnotic sleep, awakens in the year 2000. He “looks backward” and finds that the social and economic injustices of 1887 have melted away under an idyllic government, which has nationalized big business to serve the public interest. To a nation already alarmed by the trust evil, the book had a magnetic appeal and sold over a million copies. Scores of Bellamy Clubs sprang up to discuss this mild utopian socialism, and they heavily influenced American reform movements near the end of the century.

POSTWAR WRITING

As literacy increased, so did book reading. Post-Civil War Americans devoured millions of “dime novels,” usually depicting the wilds of the woolly West. Paint-bedaubed Indians and quick-triggered gunmen like “Deadwood Dick” shot off vast quantities of powder, and virtue invariably triumphed. These lurid “paperbacks”

were frowned upon by parents, but goggle-eyed youths read them in haylofts or in schools behind the broad covers of geography books. The king of the dime novelists was Harlan F. Halsey, who made a fortune by dashing off about 650 novels, often one in a day.

General Lewis Wallace—lawyer, soldier, and author—was a colorful figure. Having fought with distinction in the Civil War, he sought to combat the prevailing wave of Darwinian skepticism with his novel *Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880). A phenomenal success, the book sold an estimated 2 million copies in many languages, including Arabic and Chinese, and later appeared on stage and screen. It was the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the anti-Darwinists, who found in it support for the Holy Scriptures.

An even more popular writer was Horatio Alger, a Puritan-reared New Englander, who in 1866 forsook the pulpit for the pen. “Holy Horatio” wrote more than a hundred volumes of juvenile fiction that sold over 100 million copies. His stock formula was that a poor boy, through a combination of virtue, honesty, hard work, and bravery, could achieve success, wealth, and honor—a kind of survival of the purest, especially nonsmokers, nondrinkers, nonswearers, and nonliars. Although accusations of sexual impropriety haunted Alger throughout his life, he implanted in his readers moral lessons and the conviction that there is always room at the top (especially if one is lucky enough to save the life of the boss’s daughter and marry her).

In poetry Walt Whitman was one of the few luminaries of yesteryear who remained active. Although shattered in health by service as a Civil War nurse, he brought out successive—and purified—revisions of his hardy perennial, *Leaves of Grass*. The assassination of Lincoln inspired him to write two of the most moving poems in American literature, “O Captain! My Captain!” and “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.”

The curious figure of Emily Dickinson, one of America’s most gifted lyric poets, did not emerge until 1886, when she died and her poems were discovered. A Massachusetts recluse, she wrote over a thousand short lyrics on scraps of paper. Only two were published during her lifetime, and those without her consent. As she wrote,

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong June
To an admiring bog!

LITERARY LANDMARKS

In novel writing the romantic sentimentality of a youthful era was giving way to a rugged realism that reflected more faithfully the materialism of an industrial society. American authors now turned increasingly to the coarse human comedy and drama of the world around them to find their subjects.

Two Missouri-born authors with deep connections to the South brought altogether new voices to the late-nineteenth-century literary scene. The daring feminist author Kate Chopin (1851–1904) wrote candidly about adultery, suicide, and women’s ambitions in *The Awakening* (1899). Largely ignored in her own day, Chopin was rediscovered by later readers, who cited her work as suggestive of the feminist yearnings that stirred beneath the surface of “respectability” in the Gilded Age.

Mustachioed Mark Twain (1835–1910) had leapt to fame with *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* (1867) and *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). He teamed up with Charles Dudley Warner in 1873 to write *The Gilded Age*. An acid satire on post-Civil War politicians and speculators, the book gave a name to an era. With his scanty formal schooling in frontier Missouri, Twain typified a new breed of American authors in revolt against the elegant refinements of the old New England school of writing. Christened Samuel Langhorne Clemens, he had served for a time as a Mississippi riverboat pilot and later took his pen name, Mark Twain, from the boatman’s cry that meant “two fathoms.” After a brief stint in the armed forces, Twain journeyed westward to California, a trip he described, with a mixture of truth and tall tales, in *Roughing It* (1872).

Many other books flowed from Twain’s busy pen. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) preceded *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), an American masterpiece that defied Twain’s own definition of a classic as “a book which people praise and don’t read.” His later years were soured by bankruptcy growing out of unwise investments, and he was forced to take to the lecture platform and amuse what he called “the damned human race.” A great tribute was paid to his self-tutored genius—and to American letters—when England’s Oxford University awarded him an honorary degree in 1907. Journalist, humorist, satirist, and foe of social injustice, he made his most enduring contribution in capturing frontier realism and humor in the authentic American dialect.

Another author who wrote out of the West and achieved at least temporary fame and fortune was Bret Harte (1836–1902). A foppishly dressed New Yorker, Harte struck it rich in California with gold-rush stories, especially “The Luck of Roaring Camp” and “The Outcasts of Poker Flat.” Catapulted suddenly into notoriety by those stories, he never again matched their excellence or their popularity. He lived out his final years in London as little more than a hack writer.

William Dean Howells (1837–1920), a printer’s son from Ohio, could boast of little schoolhouse education, but his busy pen carried him high into the literary circles of the East. In 1871 he became the editor in chief of the prestigious Boston-based *Atlantic Monthly* and was subsequently presented with honorary degrees from six universities, including Oxford. He wrote about ordinary people and about contemporary and sometimes controversial social themes. *A Modern Instance* (1882) deals with the once-taboo subject of divorce. *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) describes the trials of a newly rich paint manufacturer caught up in the caste system of Brahmin Boston. *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890) portrays the reformers, strikers, and socialists in Gilded Age New York.

Stephen Crane (1871–1900), the fourteenth son of a Methodist minister, also wrote about the seamy underside of life in urban, industrial America. His *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), a brutal tale about a poor prostitute driven to suicide, was too grim to find a publisher. Crane had to have it printed privately. He rose quickly to prominence with *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), the stirring story of a bloodied young Civil War recruit (“fresh fish”) under fire. Crane himself had never seen a battle and wrote entirely from printed Civil War records. He died of tuberculosis in 1900, when only twenty-nine.

Not all authors came from humble stock. The gifted Henry Adams (1838–1918)—son of Charles Francis Adams, grandson of John Quincy Adams, and great-grandson

of John Adams—turned unrivaled family connections into a prolific career as a historian, novelist, and critic. In his nine-volume *History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* (1889–1891), Adams defended his patrician heritage from posthumous attack. Alarmed by modern trends, Adams penned a paean to the bygone beauty and spiritual unity of the High Middle Ages in *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (1905). Similar anxieties about modernity resurfaced in his best-known work, *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907), an autobiographical account of his own failure to come to grips with the chaotic forces of twentieth-century life.

Henry James (1843–1916), brother of Harvard philosopher William James, was a New Yorker who turned from law to literature. Taking as his dominant theme the confrontation of innocent Americans with subtle Europeans, James penned a remarkable number of brilliant novels, including *Daisy Miller* (1879), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), and *The Wings of the Dove* (1902). His book *The Bostonians* (1886) was one of the first novels about the rising feminist movement. James frequently made women his central characters, exploring their inner reactions to complex situations with a deftness that marked him as a master of “psychological realism.” Long resident in England, he became a British subject shortly before his death.

Candid portrayals of contemporary life and social problems were the literary order of the day by the turn of the century. Jack London (1876–1916), famous as a nature writer in such books as *The Call of the Wild* (1903), turned to depicting a possible fascistic revolution in *The Iron Heel* (1907). Frank Norris (1870–1902), like London a Californian, wrote *The Octopus* (1901), an earthy saga of the stranglehold in which railroad and corrupt politicians held California wheat ranchers. A sequel, *The Pit* (1903), dealt with the making and breaking of speculators on the Chicago wheat exchange.

Two black writers, Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906) and Charles W. Chesnutt (1858–1932), brought another kind of realism to late-nineteenth-century literature. Dunbar through poetry—particularly his acclaimed *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1896)—and Chesnutt through fiction—short stories in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The Conjure Women* (1899)—embraced the use of black dialect and folklore, previously shunned by black authors, to capture the spontaneity and richness of southern black culture.

Conspicuous among the new “social novelists” rising in the literary firmament was Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945), a homely, gangling writer from Indiana. He burst upon the literary scene in 1900 with *Sister Carrie*, a graphically realistic narrative of a poor working girl in Chicago and New York. She becomes one man’s mistress, then elopes with another, and finally strikes out on her own to make a career on the stage. The fictional Carrie’s disregard for prevailing moral standards so offended Dreiser’s publisher that the book was soon withdrawn from circulation, though it later reemerged as an acclaimed American classic.

THE NEW MORALITY

Victoria Woodhull, who was real flesh and blood, also shook the pillars of conventional morality when she publicly proclaimed her belief in free love in 1871. Woodhull was a beautiful and eloquent divorcée, sometime stockbroker, and tireless feminist

propagandist. Together with her sister, Tennessee Claflin, she published a far-out periodical, *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly*. The sisters again shocked “respectable” society in 1872 when their journal struck a blow for the new morality by charging that Henry Ward Beecher, the most famous preacher of his day, had for years been carrying on an adulterous affair.

Pure-minded Americans sternly resisted these affronts to their moral principles. Their foremost champion was a portly crusader, Anthony Comstock, who made life-long war on the “immoral.” Armed after 1873 with a federal statute—the notorious “Comstock Law”—this self-appointed defender of sexual purity boasted that he had confiscated no fewer than 202,679 “obscene pictures and photos”; 4,185 “boxes of pills, powders, etc., used by abortionists”; and 26 “obscene pictures, framed on walls of saloons.” His proud claim was that he had driven at least fifteen people to suicide.

The antics of the Woodhull sisters and Comstock exposed to daylight the battle in late-nineteenth-century America over sexual attitudes and the place of women. Switchboards and typewriters in the booming cities became increasingly the tools of women’s independence. Young workingwomen headed to dance halls and nightclubs when the day was done, enjoying a new sense of freedom in the cities. This “new morality” began to be reflected in soaring divorce rates, the spreading practice of birth control, and increasingly frank discussion of sexual topics. By 1913, said one popular magazine, the chimes had struck “sex o’clock in America.”

FAMILIES AND WOMEN IN THE CITY

The new urban environment was hard on families. Paradoxically, the crowded cities were emotionally isolating places. Urban families had to go it alone, separated from clan, kin, and village. As families increasingly became the virtually exclusive arena for intimate companionship and for emotional and psychological satisfaction, they were subjected to unprecedented stress. Many families cracked under the strain. The urban era launched the era of divorce. From the late nineteenth century dates the beginning of the “divorce revolution” that transformed the United States’ social landscape in the twentieth century.

Urban life also dictated changes in work habits and even in family size. Not only fathers but mothers and even children as young as ten years old often worked, and usually in widely scattered locations. On the farm having many children meant having more hands to help with hoeing and harvesting; but in the city more children meant more mouths to feed, more crowding in sardine-tin tenements, and more human baggage to carry in the uphill struggle for social mobility. Not surprisingly, birthrates were still dropping and family size continued to shrink as the nineteenth century lengthened. Marriages were being delayed, and more couples learned the techniques of birth control. The decline in family size in fact affected rural Americans as well as urban dwellers, and old-stock “natives” as well as New Immigrants. Women were growing more independent in the urban environment, and in 1898 they heard the voice of a major feminist prophet, Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In that year the free-thinking and original-minded Gilman published *Women and Economics*, a classic of feminist literature. A distant relative of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Catharine Beecher, Gilman displayed the restless temperament and reforming zeal characteristic of the

PROHIBITING ALCOHOL AND PROMOTING REFORM

Alarming gains by Demon Rum spurred the temperance reformers to redoubled zeal. Especially obnoxious to them was the shutter-doored corner saloon, appropriately called “the poor man’s club.” The barroom helped keep both him and his family poor. Liquor consumption had increased during the nerve-racking days of the Civil War, and immigrant groups, accustomed to alcohol in the Old Country, were hostile to restraints. Whiskey-loving foreigners in Boston would rudely hiss temperance lecturers. Many tipplers charged, with some accuracy, that temperance reform amounted to a middle-class assault on working-class lifestyles.

The National Prohibition party, organized in 1869, polled a sprinkling of votes in some of the ensuing presidential elections. Among the favorite songs of these sober souls were “I’ll Marry No Man If He Drinks,” “Vote Down the Vile Traffic,” and “The Drunkard’s Doom.” Typical was this:

*Now, all young men, a warning take,
And shun the poisoned bowl;
’Twill lead you down to hell’s dark gate,
And ruin your own soul.*

Militant women entered the alcoholic arena, notably when the **Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)** was organized in 1874. The white ribbon was its symbol of purity; the saintly Frances E. Willard—also a champion of planned parenthood—was its leading spirit. Less saintly was the muscular and mentally deranged “Kansas Cyclone,” Carrie A. Nation, whose first husband had died of alcoholism. With her hatchet she boldly smashed saloon bottles and bars, and her “hatchetations” brought considerable disrepute to the prohibition movement because of the violence of her one-woman crusade.

But rum was now on the run. The potent Anti-Saloon League was formed in 1893, with its members singing “The Saloon Must Go” and “Vote for Cold Water, Boys.” Female supporters sang “The Lips That Touch Liquor Must Never Touch Mine.” State-wide prohibition, which had made surprising gains in Maine and elsewhere before the Civil War, was sweeping new states into the “dry” column. The great triumph—but only a temporary one—came in 1919, when the national prohibition amendment (Eighteenth) was attached to the Constitution.

Banners of other social crusaders were aloft. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) was created in 1866 after its founder had witnessed brutality to horses in Russia. The American Red Cross was launched in 1881, with the dynamic and diminutive five-foot-tall Clara Barton, the “angel” of Civil War battlefields, at the helm.

ARTISTIC TRIUMPHS

John Adams had anticipated that his generation’s preoccupation with nation building would allow art to flourish in the future, but the results long proved unspectacular. Portrait painting continued to appeal, as it had since the colonial era, but many of America’s finest painters made their living abroad. James Whistler (1834–1903) did

much of his work, including the celebrated portrait of his mother, in England. This eccentric and quarrelsome Massachusetts Yankee had earlier been dropped from West Point after failing chemistry. “Had silicon been a gas,” he later jested, “I would have been a major general.” Another gifted portrait painter, likewise self-exiled in England, was John Singer Sargent (1856–1925). His flattering but somewhat superficial likenesses of the British nobility were highly prized. Mary Cassatt, an American in exile in Paris, painted sensitive portrayals of women and children that earned her a place in the pantheon of the French impressionist painters whose work revolutionized the European art world after their 1874 debut.

Other brush wielders, no less talented, brightened the artistic horizon. Self-taught George Inness (1825–1894), who looked like a fanatic with his long hair and piercing gaze, became America’s leading landscapist. Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) attained a high degree of realism in his paintings, a quality not appreciated by portrait sitters who wanted their moles overlooked. Boston-born Winslow Homer (1836–1910), who as a youth had secretly drawn sketches in school, was perhaps the greatest painter of the group. Earthily American and largely resistant to foreign influences, he revealed rugged realism and boldness of conception. His canvases of the sea and of fisherfolk were masterly, and probably no American artist has excelled him in portraying the awesome power of the ocean.

Probably the most gifted sculptor yet produced by America was Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907). Born in Ireland of an Irish mother and a French father, he became an adopted American. Among his most moving works is the Robert Gould Shaw memorial, erected in Boston in 1897. It depicts Colonel Shaw, a young white “Boston Brahmin” officer, leading his black troops into battle in the Civil War. Music, too, was gaining popularity. America of the 1880s and 1890s was assembling high-quality symphony orchestras, notably in Boston and Chicago. The famed Metropolitan Opera House of New York was erected in 1883. In its fabled “Diamond Horseshoe,” the newly rich, often under the pretense of enjoying the imported singers, would flaunt their jewels, gowns, and furs. While symphonies and operas were devoted to bringing European music to elite American audiences, new strains of homegrown American music were sprouting in the South. Black folk traditions like spirituals and “ragged music” were evolving into the blues, ragtime, and jazz, which would transform American popular music in the twentieth century.

A marvelous discovery was the reproduction of music by mechanical means. The phonograph, though a squeakily imperfect instrument when invented by the deaf Edison, had by 1900 reached over 150,000 homes. Americans were rapidly being dosed with “canned music,” as the “sitting room” piano increasingly gathered dust.

A new generation of architects and planners looked to Europe to reshape American urban space with the “City Beautiful” movement. They wanted the new American city not just to look beautiful but also to convey a confident sense of harmony, order, and monumentality. To achieve these effects, they copied European styles of beaux arts classicism and planning ideas from the master builder of Paris, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, who in the 1860s had recast the City of Light with grand boulevards, parks, and public buildings. Aiming to assert America’s prominence among the greatest urban cultures of the Western world, architects constructed grandiose urban landmarks such as New York’s Grand Central Terminal. City planners such as Daniel Burnham redesigned Chicago and Washington, D.C., in the



Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, ca. 1907 By the late 1800s, the "Wild West" was already passing into the realm of myth—and popular entertainment. Famed frontiersman William F. ("Buffalo Bill") Cody (1846–1917) made his fortune showing off his tame cowboys and Indians to enthusiastic urban audiences in Europe as well as the United States. Buffalo Bill's "Wild West"—an extravaganza featuring skilled horsemen from around the globe, including Turks, South American gauchos, Arabs, and Cossacks—was even more motley than the real one.

belief they could make them perfect progressive cities, inspiring civic virtue in their inhabitants.

Burnham's first major project, which came to symbolize the City Beautiful movement, was his design for the great **World's Columbian Exposition**, held in Chicago in 1893. His imposing landscape of pavilions and fountains honored the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus's first voyage. This so-called dream of loveliness, which was visited by 27 million people, did much to raise American artistic standards and promote city planning, although many fairgoers proved more interested in the contortions of a hootchy-kootchy dancer named "Little Egypt."

THE BUSINESS OF AMUSEMENT

Fun and frolic were not neglected by the workaday American. The pursuit of happiness, heralded in the Declaration of Independence, had by century's end become a frenzied scramble. People sought their pleasures fiercely, as they had overrun their continent and built their cities fiercely. And now they had more time to play.

Varied diversions beckoned. The legitimate stage still flourished, as appreciative audiences responded to the lure of the footlights. Vaudeville, with its coarse jokes and graceful acrobats, continued to be immensely popular during the 1880s and 1890s, as were minstrel shows in the South, now performed by black singers and dancers rather than by whites wearing blackface as in the North before the Civil War.

The circus—high-tented and multiringed—finally emerged full-blown. Phineas T. Barnum, the master showman who had early discovered that "the public likes to be humbugged," joined hands with James A. Bailey in 1881 to stage the "Greatest Show on Earth."*

Colorful "Wild West" shows, first performed in 1883, were even more distinctively American. Headed by the knightly, goateed, and free-drinking William F. ("Buffalo Bill") Cody, the troupe included war-whooping Indians, live buffalo, and deadeye marksmen. Among them was the girlish Annie Oakley. Rifle in hand, she could at thirty paces perforate a tossed-up card half a dozen times before it fluttered to the ground (hence the term *Annie Oakley* for a punched ticket and later for a free pass).

Baseball, already widely played before the Civil War, was clearly emerging as the national pastime, if not a national mania. A league of professional players was formed in the 1870s, and in 1888 an all-star baseball team toured the world, using the pyramids as a backstop while in Egypt. Basketball was invented in 1891 by James Naismith, a YMCA instructor in Springfield, Massachusetts. Designed as an active indoor sport that could be played during the winter months, it spread rapidly and enjoyed enormous popularity in the next century.

A gladiatorial trend toward spectator sports, rather than participative sports, was exemplified by football. This rugged game, with its dangerous flying wedge, had become popular well before 1889, when Yale man Walter C. Camp chose his first "All American" team. The Yale-Princeton game of 1893 drew fifty thousand cheering fans, while foreigners jeered that the nation was getting sports "on the brain."

Even pugilism, with its long background of bare-knuckle brutality, gained a new and gloved respectability in 1892. Agile "Gentleman Jim" Corbett, a scientific boxer, wrestled the world championship from the aging and alcoholic John L. Sullivan, the fabulous "Boston Strong Boy."

Two crazes swept the country in the closing decades of the century. First, croquet became all the rage, though condemned by moralists of the "naughty nineties" because it exposed feminine ankles and promoted flirtation. Second, the low-framed "safety" bicycle came to replace the high-seated model. By 1893 a million bicycles were in use, and thousands of young women, jokesters remarked, were turning to this new "spinning wheel," one that offered freedom, not tedium.

The land of the skyscraper was plainly becoming more standardized, owing largely to the new industrialization. Although race and ethnicity assigned urban Americans to distinctive neighborhoods and workplaces, to an increasing degree they shared a common popular culture—playing, reading, shopping, and talking alike. As the century drew to a close, the explosion of cities paradoxically made Americans more diverse and more similar at the same time.

*Now Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

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26

The Great West and the Agricultural Revolution 1865-1896

Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West.

The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER, 1893

The White Man, who possesses this whole vast country from sea to sea, who roams over it at pleasure, and lives where he likes, cannot know the cramp we feel in this little spot, with the undying remembrance of the fact, which you know as well as we, that every foot of what you proudly call America, not very long ago belonged to the red man.

WASHAKIE (SHOSHONE INDIAN), 1878

When the Civil War crashed to a close, the frontier line was still wavering westward. A long fringe of settlement, bulging outward here and there, ran roughly north through central Texas and on to the Canadian border. Between this jagged line and the settled areas on the Pacific slope, there were virtually no white people. The few exceptions were the islands of Mormons in Utah, occasional trading posts and gold camps, and several scattered Spanish Mexican settlements throughout the Southwest.