

CHAPTER 19

TOWARD AN URBAN SOCIETY, 1877-1890

SUMMARY

The development of American cities radically altered the nation's social environment and problems.

The Lure of the City

In the late nineteenth century, the city became a symbol of American life and people flocked to it, drawn by the hope of economic opportunity and the promise of a more exciting life. By 1900, the U.S. had three cities with over one-half million and three more with more than one million people.

Skyscrapers and Suburbs

Between 1870 and 1900, cities expanded upward and outward on a base of new technologies including metal-frame skyscrapers, electric elevators, streetcar systems, and outlying green suburbs. Cities were no longer “walking cities.” As the middle class moved out, immigrants and working class people poured in, creating urban slums through overcrowding. The city produced what was an increasingly stratified and fragmented society

Tenements and the Problems of Overcrowding

Immigrants from abroad joined rural Americans in search of jobs in the nation's cities. These newcomers to the city were often forced to live in hastily constructed and overcrowded tenement houses with primitive, if any, sanitation facilities. The “dumbbell tenement” was the most infamous housing of this type.

Strangers in a New Land

The “new” immigrants, mostly poor, unskilled, non-Protestant laborers between the ages of 15 and 40, clung to their native languages, religions, and cultural traditions to endure the economic and social stresses of industrial capitalism. Between 1877 and 1890, 6.3 million people immigrated to the United States, most from southern and eastern Europe. Much of mainstream society found these “new immigrants” troubling, resulting in a rise in anti-immigrant feeling and activity.

Immigrants and the City

Immigrant families were mostly close-knit nuclear families, and they tended to marry within their own ethnic groups. They depended on immigrant associations for their social safety net, native language newspapers for their news and political views, and community-based churches and schools.

The House That Tweed Built

Political “machines” provided some needed services for these immigrants while also enriching themselves by exploiting the dependency of the cities' new residents. William

“Boss” Tweed and his Tammany Hall in New York was the most infamous of the political machines.

Social and Cultural Change, 1877-1900

The rapid development of an urban society transformed America. How people lived, what and how they ate, and how they took care of their health all changed.

Manners and Mores

Victorian morality, epitomized by strict rules of dress, manners, and sexual behavior, set the tone for the era, but adherence to such prescriptions often declined in the face of rapid social change brought on by industrialization and urbanization. There were vast differences in the manners and mores adhered to by the middle and upper classes and the lower socio-economic classes. These differences often caused social tension as the former tried to control the behavior of the latter.

Leisure and Entertainment

This period saw the rise of organized spectator sports, which supplemented traditional leisure activities such as concerts, fairs, the circus, and even croquet. Technology brought a variety of new forms of leisure and entertainment, and the use of gas and electric street lights ensured that fewer people stayed home at night.

Changes in Family Life

Economic changes also produced new roles for women and the family. Working-class families rarely toiled together, but did maintain the strong ties needed to survive the urban industrial struggle. Middle-class women and children became more isolated, and homemakers attempted to construct a sphere of domesticity as a haven from rampaging materialism. Families, especially White families, became smaller as the birthrate fell dramatically.

Changing Views: A Growing Assertiveness Among Women

Americans also began to change their views about women, demonstrating a limited but growing acceptance of the “new woman.” Important changes included a rise in working and career women, more liberalized divorce laws, an increasingly frank discussion of sexuality, and a growing women’s rights movement.

Educating the Masses

With the development of childhood as a distinct time of life, Americans placed greater emphasis on education as the means by which individuals were prepared for life and work in an industrial world. Schools instituted a structured curriculum, a longer school day, and new educational techniques that varied according to the gender of the student. The South lagged behind in such educational changes primarily because of its Jim Crow laws.

Higher Education

Colleges grew in number, expanded in size, broadened their curriculum, developed the first American graduate schools, and provided more educational opportunities for

women. They provided few prospects for African Americans and other minorities, however, forcing men like W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, who differed in their methods, to develop independent schools to train Black students.

The Stirrings of Reform

In spite of the period's adherence to the beliefs of "Social Darwinism," increasing numbers of Americans in fields that varied from religion and economics to politics, literature, and the law proposed the need for reforms.

Progress and Poverty

Henry George launched critical studies of the new urban America with his book *Progress and Poverty*. While his reforms were not adopted, many began to ask the same questions and recognize, as George did, the need for reform.

New Currents in Social Thought

Social thinkers challenged the tenets of "Social Darwinism," arguing the importance of environmental influences on people's behavior, the exploitation of labor by a "predatory" business class that was allowed by laissez-faire economic policies, and the societal value of cooperation over competition. Churches established missions in the inner-cities and began to preach the "Social Gospel" to encourage those with means to help those in need.

The Settlement Houses

New professional social workers, many of them middle-class women, established settlement houses in inner cities allowing them to experience the slum conditions of lower-class life firsthand. As residents they could then provide education, training, and other social services within their neighborhoods. Settlement house workers also tried to abolish child labor. The settlement house movement had its limits, mostly racial and ethnic. Best known among the settlement movement workers is Jane Addams of Hull House in Chicago.

A Crisis in Social Welfare

In responding to the depression of 1893, professional social workers introduced new methods of providing assistance that would also allow them to study the poor in order to alleviate their condition. Such efforts approached poverty as a social problem rather than an individual shortcoming.

Conclusion: The Pluralistic Society

By 1920 most Americans lived in cities rather than rural areas. Almost half of the population were descended from immigrants that arrived after the conclusion of the American Revolution, creating a society that was a jumble of ethnic and racial groups of varying class standing. Social changes wrought by industrialization and urbanization created tension and often open conflict, initiating the beginning efforts at reform.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After mastering this chapter, you should be able to

1. Trace the journeys of the new immigrants from their places of origin to America and explain their adaptation to urban stresses and their effect on American cities.
2. Specify the role of skyscrapers, suburbs and tenements in the rise of the city.
3. Identify and describe the major problems of American central cities in the Victorian era.
4. Explain and evaluate the operation of the early political “machines.”
5. Describe the most common form of food, housing, and medical care in 1877 and trace the changes through 1900.
6. Identify and describe the principal moral values and issues of Victorian America.
7. Describe the most popular pastimes and forms of entertainment in Victorian America.
8. Delineate the changing roles of both women and the family in America from 1877-1900.
9. Describe the changes taking place in public education between 1877-1890.
10. Describe the major changes taking place in American higher education between 1877-1900.
11. Compare and contrast the educational and civil rights policies of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois.
12. Describe the principal tenets of Social Darwinism and the opposing reform theory, including some of the specific arguments of major proponents of each view.
13. Trace the rise of professional social workers in the settlement houses and in the depression of 1893.

GLOSSARY

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms:

1. **philanthropy** charitable donation or action. "Private philanthropy . . . spurred growth in higher education".
2. **land-grant institutions** colleges and universities established with large tracts of land granted to states by the federal government under the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862. "The act fostered 69 'land grant' institutions".
3. **nuclear family** the immediate family of father, mother, and children. ". . . most immigrant families were nuclear in structure . . .".
4. **nativists** those who support the interests of the native born as opposed to those of immigrants. ". . . a fact that worried nativists opposed to immigration".
5. **wards** administrative and political districts of a city. ". . . one of whose wards had a population density of 334,000 people per square mile".
6. **"boss"** one who controls a political organization. ". . . they were headed by a strong, influential leader--the 'boss' . . .".
7. **precinct captain** a political leader of the ward, precinct, or neighborhood level, subordinate to the "boss." ". . . a network of ward and precinct captains, each of whom looked after his local constituents".
8. **mores** customs of a group or society that are considered so important that they usually have legal sanction. "Mores changed . . .".
9. **mortality** the death rate, usually expressed as a ratio of the number of deaths to the total population. "Infant mortality declined...."
10. **behavioral** a school of social or psychological studies founded on facts of human behavior. "William James...laid the foundations of modern behavioral psychology...."
11. **census** an official counting of the population and its constituent groups. "In 1882, the United States Census Bureau took the first census of working women...."
12. **common law** law based on court decision and custom, as opposed to written, statutory law. "One important change occurred in...common law doctrine...."
13. **chattel** movable, personal property. "Under that doctrine, wives were chattel of their husbands...."

14. **Victorian** pertaining to the reign of England's Queen Victoria (1837-1901) or to its stuffy, prudish morality. "a bestseller that...challenged Victorian notions...."
15. **dogmatism** insistent support for principles treated as truths. "Ely...attacked classical economics for its dogmatism...."

IDENTIFICATION

Briefly identify the meaning and significance of the following terms.

1.The "new woman" _____

2. Booker T. Washington _____

3. "New Immigrants" _____

4. Mugwumps _____

5. tenements _____

6. political "machines" _____

7. Social Darwinism _____

8. Plessy v. Ferguson _____

9. Social Gospel _____

10. settlement houses _____

MATCHING

A. Match the following authors with the appropriate titles and themes.

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. William Graham Sumner | a. <i>How the Other Half Lives</i> ; describes the horrible conditions of laborers who lived in the tenement houses |
| ___ 2. Thorstein Veblen | b. <i>What Social Classes Owe to Each Other</i> ; holds that government aid to the poor interferes with evolution |
| ___ 3. Edward Bellamy | c. <i>Looking Backward, 2000-1887</i> ; describes a socialist utopia of the future |
| ___ 4. Jacob Riis | d. <i>Progress and Poverty</i> ; urges a tax on land to equalize wealth |
| ___ 5. Lillian Ward | e. <i>The Theory of the Leisure Class</i> ; says business elites display "conspicuous consumption" |
| | f. <i>The House on Henry Street</i> ; describes a New York settlement house |

B. Match the following reformers with the appropriate description.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. Stanton Coit | a. devoted life's work to solving the problem of child labor |
| ___ 2. Jane Addams | b. founded Hull House in Chicago's slums |
| ___ 3. Florence Kelley | c. worked as unskilled laborer, then described findings in <i>The Workers</i> (1897) |
| ___ 4. Walter Wyckoff | d. borrowed the settlement house idea from England |
| ___ 5. Walter Rauschenbusch | e. described tenements in <i>How the Other Half Lives</i> |
| | f. stressed the responsibility of organized religion to advance social justice |

COMPLETION

Answer the question or complete the statement by filling in the blanks with the correct word or words.

1. A former shoe salesman named _____ conducted mass revivals across the country.
2. Educated upper-class individuals who worked to end political corruption—including Thomas Nast, George William Curtis, and E. L. Godkin—were called _____.
3. In 1873, Congress prohibited the transporting or mailing of “obscene, lewd, or lascivious” articles with the _____ Law.
4. Courtship often occurred at an outdoor game called _____.
5. Critics of the turn of the century denounced as “vulgar, filthy, and suggestive” a new form of music called _____.
6. One of the period's most widely used textbooks, written by a language professor, was called _____.
7. By 1890, the number of Americans who were foreign-born had reached _____ percent of the total population.

8. The leader of a group of Chicago architects who led in the innovation of new forms of building was _____.
9. The leader of Tammany Hall who provided a model of the political “machine” was _____.
10. In 1890 Susan B. Anthony helped to form the _____ to work for the enfranchisement of American women.

TRUE/FALSE

Mark the following statements either T (True) or F (False).

- ___ 1. By 1877, technological change had produced a set of sharply defined political issues.
- ___ 2. Because of their rather sedate taste in entertainment, nineteenth-century Americans opposed such frivolities as circuses and melodramas.
- ___ 3. Between 1877 and 1890, the American family was declining in its economic function but increasing in emotional significance.
- ___ 4. In the late nineteenth century, American colleges and universities moved away from the traditional classical curriculum toward “reality and practicality.”
- ___ 5. In the years 1877 to 1890, African Americans enjoyed more educational opportunities than did women.
- ___ 6. The South’s Jim Crow system was the primary reason it lagged behind the rest of the nation in educational progress between 1877 and 1900.
- ___ 7. Immigrants who passed through Ellis Island found a hardy welcome into the United States.
- ___ 8. In the 1880's American cities suffered less crowding, pollution, and crime than do today's cities.
- ___ 9. Clarence Darrow argued that the “unjust condition of human life” produced criminals.
- ___ 10. The new social workers of the late nineteenth century produced theoretical and utopian studies that neglected specifics and details.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. In 1877 most Americans lived
 - a. in central cities.
 - b. in the suburbs.
 - c. in central cities or suburbs.
 - d. in small towns or on farms.

2. What was the average life expectancy of Americans in 1900?
 - a. thirty-seven years, but only thirty-five years for African Americans
 - b. forty-seven years, but only forty-five years for African Americans
 - c. forty-seven years, but only thirty-three years for African Americans
 - d. fifty-seven years, but only fifty-three years for African Americans

3. Late nineteenth-century reforms benefiting women included
 - a. increased status for housewives.
 - b. laws granting women control of their earnings.
 - c. the right to vote.
 - d. laws granting women equal pay for equal work.

4. Educational changes in the years 1877 to 1900 did not include
 - a. a decrease in illiteracy.
 - b. education as a field of university study.
 - c. development of the kindergarten.
 - d. compulsory school attendance in all states.

5. In response to Booker T. Washington's policies of political passivity and vocational training, W. E. B. Du Bois proposed
 - a. political activism and intellectual education.
 - b. political passivity and intellectual education.
 - c. political activism and vocational training.
 - d. political passivity and vocational training.

6. Which of the following places events in the correct chronological order?
 - a. Morrill Land Grant Act, Plessy v. Ferguson, establishment of Tuskegee Institute
 - b. Plessy v. Ferguson, Morrill Land Grant Act, establishment of Tuskegee Institute
 - c. Establishment of Tuskegee Institute, Morrill Land Grant Act, Plessy v. Ferguson
 - d. Morrill Land Grant Act, establishment of Tuskegee Institute, Plessy v. Ferguson

7. During the late nineteenth century, American women did not
 - a. move into the work force in greater numbers.
 - b. cease to be chattel of their husbands in the law of many states.
 - c. espouse fewer reforms than earlier generations of American women.
 - d. all of the above

8. As a solution to the poverty in modern society, Henry George proposed
 - a. to let nature take its evolutionary course.
 - b. to replace all taxes with a "single tax" on land.
 - c. a socialist utopia in which the government owns the means of production.
 - d. to establish worker and farmer "cooperatives" to own the means of production.

9. Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism held that
 - a. humans advanced civilization with social cooperation.
 - b. society should help the rich and powerful to encourage "survival of the fittest."
 - c. government should help the poor to overcome the "struggle to survive."
 - d. society evolved by adapting to the environment through social selection.

10. Leaders of the "settlement house" movement tried to
 - a. help immigrants to learn American history and language while preserving their own ethnic heritage.
 - b. reduce school dropouts and regulate child labor.
 - c. create for the city small-town values and community.
 - d. all of the above

11. Which of the following authors argued that the American ideal of women's "innocence" really meant their ignorance?
 - a. Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Women and Economics*
 - b. Edward Bliss Foote in *Plain Home Talk of Love, Marriage, and Parentage*
 - c. Bessie and Marie Von Vorst in *The Woman Who Toils*
 - d. Helen Campbell in *Women Wage Earners*

12. Changes in higher education included all of the following *except*
 - a. an increased number of colleges and universities.
 - b. the first separate graduate schools.
 - c. an increased emphasis on a classical curriculum.
 - d. more educational opportunities for women.

13. According to George Washington Plunkett, political "machines" survived because they
 - a. offered good, honest government.
 - b. offered needed services for the poor.
 - c. bought votes with "honest graft."
 - d. all of the above

14. Significant medical developments in Victorian America included all of the following *except*
 - a. prevention of tuberculosis, typhoid, and diphtheria.
 - b. discovery that germs cause infection and disease.
 - c. relatively safe and painless surgery.
 - d. more antiseptic practices in childbirth.

15. Which approach to poverty was used by professional social workers but not by church and charity volunteers?
- reform of individual families
 - alleviation of underlying conditions of poverty
 - help in alleviating the suffering caused by economic depression
 - all of the above

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

To check your understanding of the key issues of this period, solve the following problems:

- Many historians have emphasized the role of the western frontier in shaping American society. Should we place greater emphasis on the significance of the city? Why or why not?
- What factors led to the rapid development of the city in the late nineteenth century?
- Why have urban Americans been more tolerant of individual social and cultural differences?
- The social workers tried to alleviate the conditions of poverty that the political machines exploited. To what extent have they succeeded? Have they simply transformed the dependency of the urban poor?
- On the whole, has our society gained more than it lost in the transition from rural to urban?
- In what ways did ethnic pluralism shape the American city? American society?

CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISE

Using material in Chapter 19 of the text and the Primary Sources provided below, please answer the questions that follow the documents.

Charles Lorin Brace, "The Life of the Street Roles"
The Secret Oath of the American Protective Society (1893)

Charles Loring Brace, "The Life of the Street Rats" (1872)

. . . The intensity of the American temperament is felt in every fibre of these children of poverty and vice. Their crimes have the unrestrained and sanguinary character of a race accustomed to overcome all obstacles. They rifle a bank, where English thieves pick a pocket; they murder, where European proletaires cudgel or fight with fists; in a riot, they begin what seems about to be the sacking of a city, where English rioters would merely batter policemen, or smash lamps. The "dangerous classes" of New York are mainly American-born, but the children of Irish and German immigrants. . . .

There are thousands on thousands in New York who have no assignable home, and "flirt" from attic to attic, and cellar to cellar; there are other thousands more or less connected with criminal enterprises; and still other tens of thousands, poor, hard-pressed, and depending for daily bread on the day's earnings, swarming in tenement-houses, who behold the gilded rewards of toil all about them, but are never permitted to touch them.

All these great masses of destitute, miserable, and criminal persons believe that for ages the rich have had all the good things of life, while to them have been left the evil things. Capital to them is the tyrant.

Let but Law lift its hand from them for a season, or let the civilizing influences of American life fail to reach them, and, if the opportunity offered, we should see an explosion from this class which might leave this city in ashes and blood.

Seventeen years ago, my attention had been called to the extraordinarily degraded condition of the children in a district lying on the west side of the city, between Seventeenth and Nineteenth Streets, and the Seventh and Tenth Avenues. A certain block, called "Misery Row," in Tenth Avenue, was the main seed-bed of crime and poverty in the quarter, and was also invariably a "fever-nest." Here the poor obtained wretched rooms at a comparatively low rent; these they sub-let, and thus, in little, crowded, close tenements, were herded men, women and children of all ages. The parents were invariably given to hard drinking, and the children were sent out to beg or to steal. Besides them, other children, who were orphans, or who had run away from drunkards' homes, or had been working on the canal-boats that discharged on the docks near by, drifted into the quarter, as if attracted by the atmosphere of crime and laziness that prevailed in the neighborhood. These slept around the breweries of the ward, or on the hay-barges, or in the old sheds of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Streets. They were mere children, and kept life together by all sorts of street-jobs—helping the brewery laborers, blackening boots, sweeping sidewalks, "smashing baggages" (as they called it), and the like. Herding together, they soon began to form an unconscious society for vagrancy and idleness. Finding that work brought but poor pay, they tried shorter roads to getting money by petty [sic] thefts, in which they were very adroit. Even if they earned a considerable sum by a lucky day's job, they quickly spent it in gambling, or for some folly.

The police soon knew them as "street-rats"; but, like the rats, they were too quick and cunning to be often caught in their petty plunderings, so they gnawed away at the foundations of society undisturbed.

The Secret Oath of the American Protective Association (1893)

I do most solemnly promise and swear that I will always, to the utmost of my ability, labor, plead, and wage a continuous warfare against ignorance and fanaticism; that I will use my utmost power to strike the shackles and chains of blind obedience to the Roman Catholic Church from the hampered and bound consciences of a priest-ridden and church-oppressed people; that I will never allow anyone, a member of the Roman Catholic Church, to become a member of this order, I knowing him to be such; that I will use my influence to promote the interest of all Protestants everywhere in the world that I may be; that I will not employ a Roman Catholic in any capacity, if I can procure the services of a Protestant.

I furthermore promise and swear that I will not aid in building or maintaining, by my resources, any Roman Catholic church or institution of their sect or creed whatsoever, but will do all in my power to retard and break down the power of the Pope, in this country or any other; that I will not enter into any controversy with a Roman Catholic upon the subject of this order, nor will I enter into any agreement with a Roman Catholic to strike or create a disturbance

whereby the Catholic employees may undermine and substitute their Protestant co-workers; that in all grievances I will seek only Protestants, and counsel with them to the exclusion of all Roman Catholics, and will not make known to them anything of any nature matured at such conferences.

I furthermore promise and swear that I will not countenance the nomination, in any caucus or convention, of a Roman Catholic for any office in the gift of the American people, and that I will not vote for, or counsel others to vote for, any Roman Catholic, but will vote only for a Protestant, so far as may lie in my power (should there be two Roman Catholics in opposite tickets, I will erase the name on the ticket I vote); that I will at all times endeavor to place the political positions of this government in the hands of Protestants, to the entire exclusion of the Roman Catholic Church, of the members thereof, and the mandate of the Pope.

To all of which I do most solemnly promise and swear, so help me God.

Amen.

1. After reading the text, describe each of the following: changes in the roles of women and the family; the operation of “political machines;” the competing educational and civil rights strategies of Washington and Du Bois.
2. After reading the text, describe the principal tenets of both social Darwinism and reform theory.
3. Does Brace’s explanation of the life of the “street role” reflect the views of social Darwinism, reform theory, or both? If both, which of the two views does it emphasize most?
4. Contrast the American Protective Society’s attitude toward immigrants with Brace’s treatment of the “street role.”
5. Do today’s social and immigration debates reflect the issues raised by your answer to question 4? If so, which provides the best general approach to those issues, social Darwinism, or reform theory?