Chapter 16

Standardizing the Nation:
Innovations in Technology, Business, and Culture,
1877–1890

Learning Objectives:

After reading Chapter 16, you should be able to:

1. Explain how new systems of production arose in the late nineteenth century.
2. Understand how the new shape of business impacted average American workers and farmers.
3. Discuss how the natural environment was altered by the new system of production.
4. Analyze the significance of the birth of a national urban culture.
5. Detail the emergence of a consumer culture and the rise of mass merchandising.
6. Explain the contradictory politics of laissez-faire.
7. Discuss what mechanisms were used to defend the new order.

Time Line

1877
Federal troops withdrawn from the South—Reconstruction ended

1878
San Francisco Workingmen’s Party had anti-Chinese protests

1879
Telephone connected two cities for the first time

1880
New York City lit by electricity

1881
President Garfield assassinated
1882
Chinese Exclusion Act passed
Standard Oil Trust formed

1883
Reform of civil service

1886
Haymarket radicals tried and convicted
Geronimo sent to Fort Marion, Florida

1887
Interstate Commerce Commission created

1889
National Farmers Alliance founded

1890
Sherman Anti-Trust Act passed
Wounded Knee Massacre

1891
People’s Party (Populists) formed

1892
Homestead steel strike against Carnegie

1893
Pro-U.S. coup against the Queen of Hawaii
Nationwide depression hit U.S.

1894
Pullman strike
Coxey’s Army marched on Washington, D.C.

1896
W.E.B. DuBois was first African-American to receive Harvard Ph.D.

1898
U.S. annexed Hawaii
U.S. defeated Spain in war
1899
Filipino revolt against 70,000 U.S. troops occupying the Philippines

1900
U.S. troops sent to China to crush the Boxer Rebellion

Chapter Overview

Between 1880 and 1900, clerical workers tripled in number, while managers increased from 68,000 to over 318,000. The rise of mass marketing and new forms of leisure activity took place during this period. Mass advertising heightened distinctions between Euro-Americans and those they thought inferior, exotic, or foreign. America’s story was part of a larger history of nation-states centralizing their power at home and expanding their influence abroad.

I. The New Shape of Business

The exploitation of natural resources like gold became an industrialized transcontinental enterprise. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the United States grew from 50 million to almost 63 million people and six new states entered the union.

Vital to industrial innovation were engineers, Americans both trained in Germany and at home at colleges like M.I.T. American engineers became the vanguard of American capitalism throughout the world. Business stressed building goods quickly, widely, and cheaply with a premium placed on technology, effective use of labor, and reducing the uncertainties of the competitive market.

A. New Systems and Machines—and their Price

American capitalism thrived on innovation. During the 1880s, new machines, technology, engineering, and factory-organization fueled the growth of business efficiency. Between 1880 and 1892, the U.S. Patent Office registered 125 patents for shoe “lasting” machines alone.

More and more businesses perfected the so-called American system of manufacturing, which was based on mass production of interchangeable parts. In the early 1880s, the Singer Sewing Machine Company was selling 500,000 machines a year, while McCormick Reaper Works was making over 21,000 units. The new technology facilitated the mass production of the modern bicycle as well as food and other consumer goods.
Farming benefited from engineering advances with improvements in irrigation and new labor-saving devices. The federal government continued to lead in the field of applied science, for example, organizing and disseminating information useful to farmers.

While new farm machines benefited consumers, they disrupted traditional labor patterns. As new technology boomed, the need for hired hands evaporated. In the early nineteenth century, producing an acre of wheat required 56 hours of labor, whereas by 1880 it needed only 20 hours.

B. Alterations in the Natural Environment

All this technological innovation altered the natural landscape and depleted certain natural resources. From trees to oysters, over-harvesting led to massive reductions in natural resources. Pollution from industry and mining led to the poisoning of fish and befouling of rivers.

Railroads made all these great transformations possible. Railroads consumed 20-25% of all lumber produced. Railroad tourism promoted the sport shooting of buffalo, which almost destroyed the entire species.

C. Innovations in Financing and Organizing Business

To avoid the competition which made profits slim, railroads came together in informal pools to share equipment and set prices. During the 1880s, railroads merged to form ever-larger companies. U.S. business grew ever larger and more quickly compared with western Europe because of America’s population growth, rich natural resources, and U.S. government support while bankers aggressively promoted growth.

Large enterprises conquered not only local markets but national ones as well. For example, Bell Telephone, Kroger Grocery, Marshall Field and the Boston Fruit Company all became giants during this period. By combining their operations, large companies cut costs and monopolized markets with the result that many small businesses folded.

Vertical integration, as practiced in Carnegie’s Steel Companies, consists of a single firm controlling all aspects of production and distribution. Horizontal integration, a method used in Rockefeller’s oil companies, is when a number of companies producing the same product merge to reduce competition and control prices. Still, many small businesses survived, particularly within local markets.
D. New Labor Supplies for a New Economy

Expanding industries needed increased supplies of labor to grow crops, mine, and work in manufacturing. Many of these workers were immigrants. In the period 1880-1890, over 5 million people entered the United States from abroad. During this time, traditional immigrant groups--Germans, Scandinavians and English--kept arriving in the U.S.A. but were supplemented by many Italians, Russians and Poles. At this stage, forty percent of all newcomers were “birds of passage,” that is, men who came to earn money and then return to their homeland.

Most newcomers worked in machine shops and sweatshops in New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago, while some immigrants settled in various far-flung parts of the country. Although southern planters sought to replace blacks with European or even Asian immigrants, most newcomers quickly fled the plantation economy.

The influx of such a large number of foreign-born workers changed the U.S. labor market, with the recently arrived taking the lowest, unskilled or semi-skilled jobs as native born Protestant men moved into the white collar ranks. By 1890, ninety percent of the New York City public works employees were Italian-born as were ninety-nine percent of Chicago street workers. Women and children were concentrated in textile, garment making, and food processing industries.

Specific immigrant groups often gravitated towards certain types of employment, such as Poles in Pittsburgh Steel or Russian Jews in the NYC garment industry. Referred to as ethnic niches, these concentrations of workers from the same culture proved important for many immigrant communities, as newcomers would receive help in finding employment from their countrymen.

E. Efficient Machines, Efficient People

Employers used machines producing uniform parts and increasingly tried to mold workers in a like manner. In the 1880s, so-called efficiency experts attempted to cut labor costs by standardizing plant procedures for machine operation, maintenance, and the organization of workers.

In the South, factory work was reserved for whites, while blacks who had worked in industry before the Civil War were limited to farm labor.
II. The Birth of a National Urban Culture

From 1875 until the end of the century, American cities developed ever more complex systems to transport people and provide residents with services. Moreover, cities now represented a new cultural diversity in American life.

A. Economic Sources of Urban Growth

New England and the Mid-Atlantic cities became centers of concentrated manufacturing, while New York City’s Wall Street and Boston’s State Street financed the main streets of the Midwest and West. Chicago, rivaled only by New York City, supplied the interior with processed food, raw materials, and manufactured goods. San Francisco commercially encompassed much of the western part of the nation. Cities like San Francisco, Chicago, and New York attracted both foreign immigrants and native-born citizens fleeing the hardships of farm life.

B. Building the Cities

As wealth accumulated in the cities, new technology allowed adequate water supply, transportation, garbage disposal, and nighttime lighting of major streets. New towns emerged as industrialists sought to lure and retain workers. These industrialists sought to link housing, education, and commerce to a specific company. One of the most famous of these towns was the one built by George M. Pullman just outside Chicago.

Cities grew upward as well as outward as elevators extended living and office spaces towards the sky. Streetcars allowed cities to expand outward, as many wealthy and middle class residents moved to the greener suburbs while being within reach of downtown jobs. New technology reduced epidemics; for example, Chicago reversed the flow of the Chicago River so that sewage would flow downstream rather than into Lake Michigan, the city’s drinking water source.

C. Local Government Gets Bigger

New city services and growing immigrant neighborhoods combined with political corruption to cause rising taxes and municipal debts. Urban political machines, known for their corruption, secured jobs for loyal supporters while leaders grew rich. These machines received pay-offs from outlawed forms of entertainment like prostitution and gambling while promoting legal professional sports and other leisure time activities.
III. Thrills, Chills and Bathtubs: The Emergence of Consumer Culture

The late nineteen-century saw the emergence of consumer culture as industries created novel services, goods, and experiences. There were now people with cash available to purchase them.

A. Shows as Spectacles

More and more Americans craved new and stimulating forms of entertainment, such as athletic events. During this time, three major sports began to attract attention: baseball, football, and boxing. In 1882, “Buffalo Bill” Cody produced a traveling road show with Annie Oakley, cowboy musicians, and Sioux warriors. By the 1890s, Cody was performing in Europe. One form of traveling road show, the Medicine Show, sought to sell so-called health tonics.

B. Entertainment Collides with Tradition

After 1865, mass entertainment gained huge followings. A good example is the traveling circus with wild animals, gravity-defying gymnasts, rollicking brass bands, and funny clowns. Sideshows featured people with unusual physical characteristics while on the circus grounds, people were sold a variety of exotic foods. Although wildly popular with many people, conservative religious types often disliked circuses as places with foul language, lightly clothed entertainers, and massive alcohol abuse. Further, the circus encouraged school children to cut class and workers to take off work. Such concerns were particularly strong in the rural South.

C. “Palaces of Consumption”

Late in the nineteenth century, shopping became an adventure in and of itself. New shopping stores promoted a pleasurable experience which appealed to middle-class women. The department store became a regular part of urban life. In rural areas, Americans could consume products through mail-order catalogues issued by Montgomery Ward and Sears.

Mass production of consumer goods depended on mass advertising, which was in its infancy in the 1880s. L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wizard of Oz*, understood that Americans were eager to buy fantasy wherever they could find it.
IV. Defending the New Order

By the late 1870s, Democrats and Republicans disagreed about little on the national level except the tariff. Both parties mainly sought office to give jobs and favors to their supporters.

A. Contradictory Politics of Laissez-Faire

The 1880 presidential election pitted two former Union generals, James A. Garfield (Republican) and Winfield S. Hancock (Democrat), against each other. The campaign was mainly notable for its indifference to the national depression which had badly hurt industrial workers and farmers.

Garfield narrowly won and his victory set off a scramble for patronage jobs among Republicans. On July 2, 1881, Garfield was shot by an enraged unsuccessful office seeker. When he died a few months later, the presidency passed to Chester A. Arthur.

In 1882, under President Chester, the government outlawed polygamy and sent a commission to oversee elections in heavily Mormon Utah. Pressure from West Coast Euro-Americans pushed Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned immigration from China. Members of both parties scapegoated the Chinese by blaming them for unemployment in California. The real cause of western joblessness was the flood of cheap east coast-made industrial goods.

In 1883, The Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional and thus allowed discrimination against blacks by private individuals. President Chester supported civil service reform and Congress passed a law requiring a merit system for federal job applicants and created the federal Civil Service Commission.

Grover Cleveland was elected president in 1884 over the corruption-tainted James G. Blaine. Cleveland was the first Democrat to become president in twenty-eight years. Federal policy towards Native Americans resulted in intensifying their plight. Between 1887 and 1900, the amount of Indian land declined from 138 million to 78 million acres.

In response to popular pressure, Congress passed the Inter-State Commerce Act in 1887 that outlawed secret combinations and required that all shippers be charged the same rates. The idea of laissez-faire did little to deal with the reality of big business destroying competition. In 1890, Congress passed the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to outlaw trusts and large combinations. This law lacked effective enforcement mechanisms, so many industrialists simply ignored it. In fact, the act was used mainly against labor unions.
B. Social Darwinism and the “Natural” State of Society

By the late nineteenth century, a new social order had emerged, consisting of a few extremely wealthy individuals, a growing middle class and an increasingly diverse workforce of ill-paid field and factory workers. To justify this order, some invented the theory of “Social Darwinism” which claimed inequality was both natural and good. Middle-class ministers preached the virtues of poverty and the evils of labor unions. People even claimed that white Anglo-Saxons would displace “barbarous” dark-skinned people as a part of destiny.

White, rich, native-born Protestants contended that they set the standards for the entire nation. Although some historians argue that the great industrialists like Carnegie and Rockefeller were the chief representatives of American values, a case can be made that engineers were the true representatives of the age. They spoke the language of rationalism.

Identification

*Explain the significance of each of the following:*

1. Thomas A. Scott:

2. “Great Labor Uprising” (1877):

3. Andrew Carnegie:

4. Thomas A. Edison:

5. “American system”:

6. John D. Rockefeller:

7. vertical integration:

8. “birds of passage”: 
9.  Pullman, Illinois:

10. Boss Tweed:

11. National Baseball League:

12. William Cody:


14. J. P. Morgan:

15. Grand Army of the Republic:

16. laissez-faire:

17. Chinese Exclusion Act:

18. Mormon polygamy:

19. Civil Service Commission:

20. Interstate Commerce Act (1887):

21. Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890):
22. Social Darwinism:

23. Henry Ward Beecher:

24. road show:

25. Statue of Liberty:

**Multiple Choice Questions:**

1. Which of the following was NOT part of being a standard “normal” American?
   A. native-born
   B. Catholic
   C. middle-class
   D. white
   E. heterosexual

2. Many American engineers were trained in
   A. Germany.
   B. England.
   C. France.
   D. Canada.
   E. none of the above.

3. The American system of manufacturing depended on
   A. highly skilled American craftsmen.
   B. American “know-how.”
   C. mass production of interchangeable parts.
   D. cheap imported Chinese goods.
   E. unique artisan design superior to mass-produced European products.
4. New agricultural machinery benefited consumers but also
   A. increased the need for “hired hands.”
   B. made wheat production more time-consuming.
   C. decreased the size of the average American farm.
   D. made farming less profitable.
   E. disrupted traditional labor patterns.

5. Railroads made which of the following possible?
   A. large scale copper mines in Arizona
   B. textile mills in Georgia
   C. cattle ranches in Texas and Kansas
   D. all of the above
   E. none of the above

6. Horizontal integration takes place when a number of companies
   A. compete freely within the market place.
   B. are all owned by different individuals.
   C. which produce the same product merge to reduce competition.
   D. all of the above.
   E. none of the above.

7. Which groups came to the U.S. in the greatest numbers in the late nineteenth century?
   A. Italians, Russians, Poles
   B. Chinese, Mexicans, Africans
   C. Irish, Mexicans, French
   D. Germans, Puerto Ricans, Chinese
   E. Japanese, English, Canadians

8. Southern textile mills were noted for
   A. high wages and good working conditions.
   B. equal treatment of black workers.
   C. employing only whites.
   D. promoting American ideals of free trade unionism.
   E. their concern for the welfare of their workers.
9. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, American cities were
   A. losing population to the countryside.
   B. known for their cultural diversity.
   C. for “white men only.”
   D. occupied by only about ten percent of the population.
   E. unable to establish transportation systems.

10. New York City’s Tammany Hall is often cited as an example of
    A. good old-fashioned Yankee know-how.
    B. the corruption of urban political machines.
    C. the problems which continued to plague the Plains Indians.
    D. the miracle of the free enterprise system.
    E. the new American style of architecture.

11. Which of the following was NOT a major spectator sport by 1900?
    A. baseball
    B. basketball
    C. boxing
    D. football
    E. all of the above

12. The act of shopping for goods, especially luxury goods, became
    A. an adventure in itself.
    B. a patriotic duty, according to President Grover Cleveland.
    C. difficult, as cities lacked department stores with central heating.
    D. all of the above.
    E. none of the above.

13. The Grand Army of the Republic
    A. was expanded to 500,000 men because of the Communist threat.
    B. became the mainstay of the Democratic Party.
    C. later became the 1st Airborne Division.
    D. replaced the Army of the Potomac.
    E. favored high import duties and kept “waving the bloody shirt.”

14. “Laissez-faire” is a French term which was used to mean
    A. equality for black workers.
    B. government regulation, if not ownership, of all basic industry.
    C. absence of government interference in the economy.
    D. a living wage for all workers.
    E. none of the above.
15. Social Darwinism was a theory which held that
   A. labor unions and social welfare legislation were dangerous.
   B. humans evolved from apes.
   C. the meek shall inherit the earth.
   D. the new social order was opposed to the God-ordained natural order.
   E. trade unions were a natural part of evolution.

MAP QUESTION:

After looking at Map 16.2, explain the reason for the concentration of Chinese in certain areas of the South.

CONNECTING HISTORY

Discuss how and why advertising became such a vital part of American life. Give examples from your own personal experience.

INTERPRETING HISTORY

If you were able to meet Andrew Carnegie, what would you say to him about his “Gospel of Wealth”? What positive/negative aspects of his theory would you stress?
Answers to Multiple Choice Questions

1. B
2. A
3. C
4. E
5. D
6. C
7. A
8. C
9. B
10. B
11. B
12. A
13. E
14. C
15. A