CHAPTER 25

America Moves to the City, 1865–1900

# focus questions

. What were some of the reactions to the New Immigration? How were these immigrants different from the previous generations of American immigrants?

. What were the major challenges faced by the increased urban population?

. What were some of the challenges to traditional thought during the second half of the nineteenth century? How did the religious and secular elements in American society deal with those?

. What were some of the major reform movements during the second half of the nineteenth century?

. Who were some of the significant artistic and literary figures of the Gilded Age? What contributions did they make to American society?

# Chapter Theme

**Theme:** In the late nineteenth century, American society was increasingly dominated by large urban centers. Explosive urban growth was accompanied by often disturbing changes, including the New Immigration, crowded slums, new religious outlooks, and conflicts over culture and values. While many Americans were disturbed by the new urban problems, cities also offered opportunities to women and expanded cultural horizons.

**Theme:** African Americans suffered the most as the south lagged behind other regions of the country with regard to educational improvements and opportunities. Two schools of thought emerged as to the best way to handle this problem. Booker T. Washington advocated that blacks should gain knowledge of useful trades. With this would come self-respect and economic security—Washington avoided the issue of social equality. W.E.B. Du Bois demanded complete equality for blacks, both social as well as economic.

chapter summary

The United States moved from the country to the city in the post–Civil War decades. Mushrooming urban development was exciting but also created severe social problems, including overcrowding and slums. Attempts to remedy the growing problems of urbanization, such as the “City Beautiful” movement, were undertaken by people like Frederick Olmstead and Daniel Burnham.

After the 1880s, the cities were flooded with the New Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. With their strange customs and non-Protestant religions, the newcomers sometimes met with nativist hostility and discrimination.

Religion had to adjust to social and cultural changes. Roman Catholicism and Judaism gained strength, while conflicts over evolution and biblical interpretation divided Protestant churches.

American education expanded rapidly, especially at the secondary and graduate levels. Blacks and immigrants tried, with limited success, to use education as a path to upward mobility.

Significant conflicts over moral values, especially relating to sexuality and the role of women, began to appear. The new urban environment provided expanded opportunities for women but also created difficulties for the family. Families grew more isolated from society, the divorce rate rose, and the average family size shrank.

American literature and art reflected a new realism and regionalism, while popular amusement became a big business. The art of Thomas Eakins and Winslow Homer moved away from romanticism toward a more realistic view of life. Similarly, literature began to focus on the “coarse comedy” of human life. The novels of Henry James and Edith Wharton explored the psychological themes of modern life with an eye toward scientific objectivity. Symphony orchestra, operas, and ragtime reflected musical appeals to different segments of society.

# developing the chapter: suggested lecture or discussion topics

* Explain the strong connection among the new forces of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Show how each one tended to reinforce the others, creating a significantly new kind of urban environment.

REFERENCE: Eric Monkkonen, *America Becomes Urban* (1988).

* Describe the experience of the New Immigrants and explain why they were often regarded with suspicion or hostility. The emphasis might be on the factors that made them different from most earlier immigrants—particularly their “strange” cultures, religions, poverty, and the fact that they crowded into urban slums.

REFERENCE: John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (1985).

* Relate the cultural conflicts over religion and values to the new social and cultural environment of the city. Show how urban life tended to undermine traditional standards of belief and behavior (for example, about drinking or divorce) while creating new institutions and values, including popular culture.

REFERENCE: Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (1980).

* Consider the complicated effects of urbanization on women’s roles and family—new opportunities arose but they imposed new strains on marriage and child-rearing.

REFERENCES: Elaine May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (1983); Steven Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture* (1985).

# for further interest: additional class topics

* Use Jane Addams’s experiences to demonstrate how some Americans encountered the problems of new industrial metropolises like Chicago. (See boxed quote on page 562.)
* Examine the myths and the realities of immigration. A good starting point might be Emma Lazarus’s Statue of Liberty poem, which says, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” but also called the immigrants “wretched refuse.”
* Analyze the impact of urban life, immigration, Darwinism, and biblical higher criticism (literary scholarship) on religion, including the “immigrant religions” such as Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Judaism.
* Consider the impact and meaning of new “popular amusements” such as the circus, baseball, vaudeville, and so on. (See boxed quote on page 570.)
* Conduct a class debate on topics such as Blacks Should Stop Agitating for Political Equality and Racial Segregation Is Constitutional; primary source readings will come from the following book: *Opposing Viewpoints in American History—Volume II: From Reconstruction to the Present*, San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 1996. Another good source of debate topics is Larry Madaras and James M. SoRelle, *Taking Sides—Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History, Volume II: Reconstruction to the Present*, Connecticut: McGraw-Hill, 2000.
* Have students read William James, *Pragmatism* (1907). Use the book to explore the criticisms James had of both the transcendental and rational traditions in American philosophy; in this work, James argues for the concept that any idea must have validity only in terms of its practical consequences.
* Have students read Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888). Use the novel to explore a number of key issues of late-nineteenth-century economic and political thought: the proper role of government, the nature of humanity, cooperation versus competition, the practicality of utopian thought, and the merits of socialism. (See boxed quote on page 558.)
* Have students look at art slides from the American Realists tradition, especially, Winslow Homer, *The Gulf Stream* (1899); Thomas Eakins, *The Gross Clinic* (1875); George Bellows, *The Lone Tenement* (1909), *Pennsylvania Station Excavation* (1906), *Cliff Dwellers* (1913), *Stag at Sharkey’s* (1909), and *Tennis at Newport* (1920). Use the slides as visual primary sources—have students discuss the ways in which artists used visual critiques as guides to implement change within society.
* Have students read Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). “Long ago it was said that ‘one half of the world does not know how the other half lives.’ That was true then. It did not know because it did not care.”
* Have the students read selections from W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) in David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper’s (Editors), *The American Intellectual Tradition: Volume II—1865 to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. (See boxed quote on page 555.)
* Have the students read Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., “Natural Law” (1918) in David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper’s (Editors), *The American Intellectual Tradition: Volume II—1865 to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

# character sketches

## Jane Addams (1860–1935)

Addams, the founder of Hull House and the profession of social work, was the leading female reformer of the progressive era.

Her father was a prominent Illinois businessman and politician who had served in the state legislature with Lincoln. Her mother died when she was two, and she remained deeply devoted to her father until he suddenly died when she was twenty-one.

For the next eight years, she underwent a prolonged personal crisis, marked by physical ailments and deep depression. Her decision to open Hull House with her friend Ellen Gates Starr came partly out of her growing awareness of urban problems, but it also ended her personal struggles and gave meaning to her life.

Addams first used her own money for Hull House but later became a highly skilled fund-raiser. Her opposition to World War I lost her considerable popularity in the 1920s. Addams was benevolent, thoughtful, and modest but somewhat cool, aloof, and formal in personal relations.

**Quote:** “I found myself…with high expectations and a certain belief that whatever perplexities and discouragement concerning the life of the poor were in store for me, I should at least know something at firsthand and have the solace of daily activity.… I had at last finished with the ever-lasting ‘preparation for life,’ however ill-prepared I might be.”

REFERENCE: Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (1973).

## Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899)

Moody was the most prominent evangelical revivalist of the post–Civil War era and the founder of Moody Bible Institute and other schools.

After growing up in rural New England, in 1856, he moved to Chicago and became a successful shoe salesman. He began taking slum dwellers to church with him and in 1858 organized a Sunday school for Chicago street kids.

He traveled to Britain to study evangelical methods and conducted spectacularly well-received revivals there. His musician and choir leader, Ira D. Sankey, contributed greatly to Moody’s success with his popular, sentimental hymns.

Never officially ordained, Moody spoke the plain language of the ordinary person. His organization was large and sophisticated but developed techniques like the “conference room” to give each convert a sense of personal concern.

**Quote:** “Water runs down hill, and the highest hills are the great cities. If we can stir them, we can stir the whole nation.… There is misery in the great city, but what is the cause of it? Why, the sufferers have become lost from the Shepherd’s care.” (1876)

REFERENCE: Lyle Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D.L. Moody* (1997).

## Booker T. Washington (1856–1915)

A former slave who became the dominant American black leader in the period from 1890 to 1910, Washington was popular with whites but extremely controversial among blacks.

He was born in Virginia; his father was a white man from a neighboring plantation. As a boy, Washington lived in a one-room, floorless cabin and slept on the ground.

After emancipation, he and his mother walked over a hundred miles to Charleston, West Virginia, so that he could go to school. He was taken under the wing of whites at Hampton Institute and eventually was sent to organize Tuskegee Institute.

His 1895 speech at the Atlanta Exposition accepting segregation made him a national figure, but many blacks disagreed strongly. He eventually built up a large “machine” in the black community and controlled newspapers, jobs, and substantial patronage. His famous autobiography, *Up from Slavery,* was ghostwritten by a journalist and excluded many harsh facts of his life, especially in relation to his treatment by whites.

**Quote:** “The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly.… The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera house.” (1895)

REFERENCES: Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader* (1975); *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901–1915* (1986).

## Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935)

Gilman was the feminist theorist and writer whose work on economics influenced the early women’s movement and whose ideas and writings have attracted renewed attention since the revival of American feminism in the 1960s.

Gilman was a descendant of the famous Beecher family of American clergymen and writers. Her father abandoned the family, and her mother struggled to raise the family alone. Charlotte’s unhappy marriage to Charles Stetson, an artist, led to a “nervous collapse” and depression. This experience was eventually described in her short story, “The Yellow Wall-Paper,” published after her divorce from Stetson.

Gilman’s major work, *Women and Economics,* differed from most progressive feminism in emphasizing the need for new communal social systems of child-rearing, cooking, and home maintenance, if women were ever to attain full economic and social equality. Her belief that women were morally superior to men was presented in her utopian novel *Herland,* in which she presented a perfect all-female society.

**Quote:** “In the school [the child] learns something of social values, in the church something, in the street something…but in the home he learns…every day and hour, that life, this deep, new, thrilling mystery of life consists mainly of eating and sleeping, of the making and wearing of clothes.” (*The Home,* 1903)

REFERENCE: Mary A. Hill, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Making of a Radical Feminist* (1980).

## Edward Bellamy (1850–1898)

Bellamy was an American author and socialist, whose novel *Looking Backward* earned him immediate fame and vaulted him into an elite circle of literary figures.

Bellamy was born in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, in a long line of Baptist ministers. He first attended Union College, but did not graduate. He spent time over in Europe (especially Germany); when he returned to the United States he took up the study of law and was admitted to the Massachusetts bar. Bellamy was unsatisfied with the legal profession (he quit after one case) and turned his attention to writing, first journalism, then as a novelist.

Bellamy’s novel *Looking Backward* told the story of unsuspecting time traveler Julian West, who falls asleep in the later part of the nineteenth century and awakes one hundred years into the future. Boston is very different now; instead of being a capitalist society, the United States is a socialist utopia. The novel was extremely popular. Bellamy’s sequel, *Equality*, fell dead on the presses. It never achieved the same level of success and popularity as *Looking Backward*.

**Quote:** “So long as competition continues to be the ruling factor in our industrial system, the highest development of the individual cannot be reached, the loftiest aims of humanity cannot be realized.” (“Declaration of Principles” *The Nationalist*, May 1889; quoted in *Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!*, 1937)

REFERENCE: Arthur E. Morgan, *Edward Bellamy* (1944).

# questions for class discussion

. Did the development of American cities justify Jefferson’s claim that “when we get piled up in great cities we will become as corrupt as Europe”?

. Compare the “heroic” story of immigration, as illustrated in the Statue of Liberty, with the historical reality. What explains the ambivalence toward the New Immigrants reflected in Lazarus’s poem? (See boxed quotes on page 546 and page 551 as well as section Examining the Evidence on page 548.)

. Did urban life cause a decline in American religion or just an adjustment to new forms?

. Why did urban life alter the condition of women and bring changes like birth control and rising divorce rates to the family?

# makers of america: the italians

# Questions for Class Discussion

. In what ways was the Italian experience typical of that of other New Immigrant groups, such as the Polish, Greeks, Jews, and others? (See Chapter 26.)

. Why did so many Italian-Americans initially intend to return to Italy after a time? How does that fact fit with the common understanding of immigration to America?

# Suggested Student Exercises

* Compare the ethnic “Little Italy” enclaves in various American cities with the “Chinatowns” established by the Chinese-Americans. (See Chapter 24.) Consider what functions these communities served for the new immigrants, and how they affected other Americans’ perceptions of the immigrants.
* Examine biographies of some recently prominent Italian-Americans (for example, Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro, New York Governor Mario Cuomo, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, actor Al Pacino, historian Eugene Genovese). Explore how their parents’ and grandparents’ experience fits into the general history of Italian immigration to America.

# CONTENDING VOICES: HENRY CABOT LODGE VS. GROVER CLEVELAND

# Questions for Class Discussion

1. How did Lodge view the “new” immigrants and why did he see the major increase in their arrival as a threat?

2. How did Cleveland respond to remarks such as those made by Lodge?

# MAKERS OF AMERICA: PIONEERING PRAGMATISTS

# Questions for Class Discussion

. Assess the validity of the following quote, “pragmatism offers … a philosophy of life built on experimentation, ethical commitment, and open-ended democratic debate.”

. Why is pragmatism considered the quintessential American philosophy? Do you agree with that assessment? Why or why not?

. Historically speaking what was so appealing about pragmatism and what was so repugnant about pragmatism? Does this philosophical worldview have anything to offer twenty-first century Americans?

# Suggested Student Exercise

* Have students read Louis Medand’s *The Metaphysical Club*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.