

I S T H E

AMERICAN

D R E A M

ACHIEVABLE?



EXPLORING AMERICA'S HISTORY THROUGH COMPELLING QUESTIONS



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# AMERICAN DREAM ACHIEVABLE?

EXPLORING AMERICA'S HISTORY THROUGH COMPELLING QUESTIONS

## SUPPORTING QUESTIONS

- 1 WAS IT BENEFICIAL OR HARMFUL FOR AMERICA TO BECOME A NATION OF CITIES?
- 2 CAN WRITERS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?
- 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?
- 4 WAS SUFFRAGE ESSENTIAL TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF WOMEN?

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# AMERICAN D R E A M ACHIEVABLE?

Not everybody was getting rich. The new wealthy class, although more prominent, larger, and richer than any class in American history, was still rather small. People soon began to ask fundamental questions. How did one get rich in America? Was it because of a combination of hard work and intelligence? Was it because of inheritance? Did education and skill play a role, or was it simply luck?

When a popular conception of survival of the fittest grew from Charles Darwin's idea of the process of natural selection in the wild, the world was forever changed. Church leaders condemned him as a heretic, and ordinary people everywhere cringed at the idea that humans may have evolved from apes.

Despite an initial backlash against Darwin's theory, it was inevitable that intellectuals would soon point Darwin's concepts at human society. These Social Darwinists believed that the humans who were the most fit became the most successful. Whatever people had the necessary skills to prosper — perhaps talent, brains, or hard work — would be the ones who would rise to the top. Why were some people poor? To the Social Darwinist, the answer was obvious. They simply did not have the required skills.

Into this mix of wealth and poverty, another idea was born. First articulated by Horatio Alger, the author of dime novels aimed at the hordes of immigrants rushing to America's shores. Although he penned many stories, each book answered the question of how to get rich in America. Alger believed that a combination of hard work and good fortune. Pluck and luck, in his words, was the key.

A typical Alger story would revolve around a hardworking immigrant who served on the bottom rung of the corporate ladder, perhaps as a stock boy. One day he would be walking down the street and see a safe falling from a tall building. The hero would bravely push aside the hapless young woman walking below and save her life. Of course, she was the boss's daughter. The two would get married, and he would become vice-president of the corporation.

This is what the masses wished to believe. Those at the bottom looking up rejected Social Darwinism. They hoped and believed that success would not come to a select few based on nature or divine intervention. Anyone who worked hard could make it in America. This idea became the American Dream.

Is Alger's American Dream a reality or just folklore? What do you think? Is the American Dream achievable?



# 1

## F I R S T Q U E S T I O N WAS IT BENEFICIAL OR HARMFUL FOR AMERICA TO BECOME A NATION OF CITIES?

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### INTRODUCTION

In the beginning, Americans were farmers. Stories of the first settlers at Jamestown and the Pilgrims of Plymouth all recount learning to grow corn or tobacco. Southern planters grew cotton, and western farmers built windmills to pump water out of the ground to irrigate the prairies and produce the amber waves of grain immortalized in song.

But we are no longer a nation of farmers. In fact, as of 2012, 80% of Americans live in cities. How did this happen, and when? What cause all those farmers to give up on the land and fight the hustle and bustle of city life? And what happened to the cities when everyone moved in?

We think of our cities as multicultural places. People from many backgrounds mingle. The smells of foods from many homelands waft through the air. The air is often polluted, the streets noisy, the subways crowded. Where did all these people come from? When did we become more than just a nation of White Protestants?

Was it beneficial or harmful that we became a nation of multicultural cities?

# 1 WAS IT BENEFICIAL OR HARMFUL FOR AMERICA TO BECOME A NATION OF CITIES?

## THE NEW IMMIGRANTS

With the exception of Native Americans, America is a nation of immigrants, and the turn of the century was a period of enormous immigration. Immigrants shifted the demographics of America's rapidly growing cities. Although immigration had always been a force of change in the United States, it took on a new character in the late nineteenth century.

Beginning in the 1880s, the arrival of immigrants from mostly southern and eastern European countries rapidly increased while the flow from northern and western Europe remained relatively constant. The previous waves of immigrants from northern and western Europe, particularly Germany, Great Britain, and the Nordic countries, were relatively well off, arriving in the country with some funds and often moving to the newly settled western territories. In contrast, the newer immigrants were from southern and eastern European countries, including Italy, Greece, and Russia.

Many were **pushed** from their countries by a series of ongoing famines, by the need to escape religious, political, or racial persecution, or by the desire to avoid compulsory military service. They were also **pulled** by the promise of land, jobs, education, and religious freedom. Whatever the reason, these **New Immigrants** arrived without the education and finances of the earlier waves of immigrants, and settled more readily in the port towns where they arrived, rather than setting out to seek their fortunes in the West. By 1890, over 80% of the population of New York City would be either foreign-born or children of foreign-born parentage. Other cities saw huge spikes in foreign populations as well, though not to the same degree. Due in large part to the fact that Ellis Island, a major immigration station was in New York harbor, New York City's status as a city of many cultures, was cemented at the turn of the century.



**Push Factors:** Reasons to leave a place. In the time of the New Immigrants these included religious persecution, war, famine and poverty.



**Pull Factors:** Reasons to come to a place. In the time of the New Immigrants these included jobs, religious freedom, education and land.



**New Immigrants:** The name for the immigrants who arrived in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They were different from the "Old Immigrants" in that they were often from Southern and Eastern Europe, were Catholic, Orthodox Christian or Jewish instead of Protestant. Unlike earlier groups of immigrants, they were also often poor and uneducated with few skills.



**Ellis Island:** Major immigration station in New York Harbor.



**Angel Island:** Major immigration station in San Francisco Harbor.

### Primary Source: Photograph

The central building at Ellis Island in New York Harbor, photographed here in 1905.

## THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION



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The number of immigrants peaked between 1900 and 1910, when over nine million people arrived in the United States. To assist in the processing and management of this massive wave of immigrants, the Bureau of Immigration in New York City, which had become the official port of entry, opened **Ellis Island** in 1892. An equivalent station opened in San Francisco Harbor at **Angel Island** where many immigrants from China were processed.

Today, nearly half of all Americans have ancestors who, at some point in time, entered the country through the portal at Ellis Island. Doctors or nurses inspected the immigrants upon arrival, looking for any signs of infectious diseases. Most immigrants were admitted to the country with only a cursory glance at any other paperwork. Roughly 2% of the arriving immigrants were denied entry due to a medical condition or criminal history. The rest would enter the country by way of the streets of New York, many unable to speak English and totally reliant on finding those who spoke their native tongue.

Seeking comfort in a strange land, as well as a common language, many immigrants sought out relatives, friends, former neighbors, townspeople, and countrymen who had already settled in American cities. This led to a rise in **ethnic neighborhoods** within the larger city. Little Italy, Chinatown, and many other communities developed in which immigrant groups could find everything to remind them of home, from local language newspapers to ethnic food stores. While these enclaves provided a sense of community to their members, they added to the problems of urban congestion, particularly in the poorest slums where immigrants could afford housing.

## NATIVISM

The demographic shift at the turn of the century was later confirmed by the Dillingham Commission, created by Congress in 1907 to report on the nature of immigration in America. The commission reinforced this ethnic identification of immigrants and their simultaneous discrimination. The report put it simply:

These newer immigrants looked and acted differently. They had darker skin tone, spoke languages with which most Americans were unfamiliar, and practiced unfamiliar religions, specifically Judaism and Catholicism. Even the foods they sought out at butchers and grocery stores set immigrants apart. Because of these easily identifiable differences, new immigrants became easy targets for hatred and discrimination. If jobs were hard to find, or if housing was overcrowded, it was easy to blame the immigrants.

Growing numbers of Americans resented the waves of new immigrants, resulting in a backlash dubbed **nativism** by historians. This belief in the superiority of native-born Americans over immigrants, was led by the Reverend **Josiah Strong** who fueled the hatred and discrimination in his bestselling book, "Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis," published in 1885. In a revised edition that reflected the 1890 census records, he clearly identified who he believed were undesirable immigrants, those New Immigrants from southern and eastern European countries, as a key threat to the moral fiber of the country, and urged all good Americans to face the challenge. Several thousand Americans answered his call by forming the American Protective Association, the chief political activist group to promote legislation curbing immigration into the United States. The group successfully lobbied Congress to adopt both an English language literacy test for immigrants,



Search Ellis Island Records



**Ethnic Neighborhoods:** Areas in major cities where groups of immigrants concentrated. They usually had restaurants, grocery stores, newspapers, support organizations and churches that served the neighborhood's immigrant population.



**Nativism:** A belief that people born in the United States are superior to immigrants.



**Josiah Strong:** A leading nativist in the late 1800s. He disliked the New Immigrants and argued for literacy tests. He eventually helped end the waves of immigration that characterized the turn of the century.

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which eventually passed in 1917, and laid the groundwork for the subsequent limits on immigration.

In 1882, Nativists convinced Congress to pass the **Chinese Exclusion Act**, barring this ethnic group in its entirety. 25 years later, Japanese immigration was restricted by executive agreement. These two Asian groups were the only ethnicities to be completely excluded from America.

But millions had already come. During the age when the **Statue of Liberty** beckoned the world's "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," American diversity mushroomed. Each brought pieces of an old culture and made contributions to a new one. Although many former Europeans swore to their deaths to maintain their old ways of life, their children did not agree. Most enjoyed a higher standard of living than their parents, learned English easily, and sought American lifestyles. At least to that extent, America was a **melting pot**.



**Chinese Exclusion Act:** Law passed in 1882 ending immigration from China and preventing Chinese immigrants already in the United States from applying for citizenship.



**Statue of Liberty:** Symbol of the pull factors that attracted the New Immigrants. It stands on an island in New York Harbor.



**Melting Pot:** The idea that America is made up of a blending of many diverse cultural influences.

## Primary Source: Editorial Cartoon

This cartoon celebrates the Chinese Exclusion Act, showing Uncle Sam washing America by expelling Chinese immigrants.



Read the Chinese Exclusion Act

## URBANIZATION

**Urbanization**, the process of shifting from a country in which most people live on farms, to one where most people live in cities, occurred rapidly in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in the United States for a number of reasons. The new technologies of the time led to a massive leap in industrialization, requiring large numbers of workers. New electric lights and powerful machinery allowed factories to run 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Workers were forced into grueling twelve-hour shifts, requiring them to live close to the factories.



**Urbanization:** The process of developing cities.

# 1 WAS IT BENEFICIAL OR HARMFUL FOR AMERICA TO BECOME A NATION OF CITIES?

While the work was dangerous and difficult, many were willing to leave behind the declining prospects of preindustrial agriculture in the hope of better wages in industrial labor. Furthermore, many of the New Immigrants settled and found work near the cities where they first arrived. The nation's cities became an invaluable economic and cultural resource for people who missed their homelands.

Although cities such as Philadelphia, Boston, and New York sprang up from the initial days of colonial settlement, the explosion in urban population growth did not occur until the mid-1800s.

At this time, the attractions of city life, and in particular, employment opportunities, grew exponentially due to rapid changes in industrialization. Before the mid-1800s, factories, such as the early textile mills, had to be located near rivers and seaports, both for the transport of goods and the necessary water power. Production was dependent upon seasonal water flow, with cold, icy winters all but stopping river transportation entirely. The development of the steam engine transformed this need, allowing businesses to locate their factories near urban centers. The factories moved to where the most workers could be found, and workers followed the jobs, leading to a rapid rise in city populations.

Eventually, cities developed their own unique characters based on the core industry that spurred their growth. In Pittsburgh it was steel, in Chicago it was meat packing, in New York the garment and financial industries, and Detroit the automobiles reigned. But all cities at this time, regardless of their industry, suffered from the universal problems that rapid expansion brought with it, including concerns over housing and living conditions, transportation, and communication. These issues were almost always rooted in deep class inequalities, shaped by racial divisions, religious differences, and ethnic strife, and distorted by corrupt local politics.

## GROWING OUT AND GROWING UP

As cities grew and sprawled outward, a major challenge was efficient **mass transit** within the city, from home to factories or shops, and then back again. Most transportation infrastructure was used to connect cities to each other, typically by rail or canal. Prior to the 1880s, transportation within cities was the usually the **omnibus**. This was a large, horse-drawn carriage, often placed on iron or steel tracks to provide a smoother ride. While omnibuses worked adequately in smaller, less congested cities, they were not equipped to handle the larger crowds that developed at the close of the century. The horses had to stop and rest and horse manure became an ongoing problem.

In 1887, Frank Sprague invented the **electric trolley**, which worked along the same concept as the omnibus, with a large wagon on tracks, but was powered by electricity rather than horses. The electric trolley could run throughout the day and night, like the factories and the workers who fueled them. But it also modernized less important industrial centers, such as the southern city of Richmond, Virginia. As early as 1873, San Francisco engineers adopted pulley technology from the mining industry to introduce cable cars and turn the city's steep hills into elegant middle-class communities. However, as crowds continued to grow in the largest cities, such as Chicago and New York, trolleys were unable to move efficiently through the crowds of pedestrians. To avoid this challenge, city planners elevated the trolley lines above the streets, creating **elevated trains**, or **L-trains**, as early as 1868 in New York City, and quickly spreading to Boston in 1887 and Chicago in 1892. Transportation evolved one step further to move underground as **subways**.



**Mass Transit:** Any form of transportation in cities designed to move many people. These include busses, subways, trolley cars and elevated trains.



**Omnibus:** A forerunner to the modern city bus. It was a carriage that ran on railroad tracks that was pulled by horses.



**Electric Trolley:** A trolley that ran on electricity.



**Elevated Train:** Similar to a subway, these trains ran on tracks built on bridges above city streets. The most famous is in Chicago and nicknamed the "L."



**Subway:** A form of mass transit that has trains running in tunnels underground. The first in the United States was in Boston, but the most famous is in New York City.



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Boston's subway system began operating in 1897, and was quickly followed by New York and other cities.

With the development of efficient means of mass transportation, **suburbs** developed. Boston and New York spawned the first major suburbs. No metropolitan area in the world was as well served by railroad commuter lines at the turn of the twentieth century as New York, and it was the rail lines to Westchester from the Grand Central Terminal commuter hub that enabled its development. Westchester's true importance in the history of American suburbanization derives from the upper-middle class development of villages including Scarsdale, New Rochelle and Rye serving thousands of businessmen and executives from Manhattan.



**Suburbs:** Cities built around a larger city. These developed because mass transit made it possible to live far from where a person worked.

## Primary Source: Photograph

The Flatiron Building, one of the world's first skyscrapers which graces Fifth Avenue in New York City. It was completed in 1902.



Watch a movie about the  
Flatiron Building

The last limitation that large cities had to overcome was the ever-increasing need for space. Eastern cities, unlike their Midwestern counterparts, could not continue to grow outward, as the land surrounding them was already settled. Geographic limitations such as rivers or the coast also hampered sprawl. In all cities, citizens needed to be close enough to urban centers to conveniently access work, shops, and



**Skyscraper:** Tall buildings in cities. They made it possible for many more people to live and work in a smaller area.

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other core institutions of urban life. The increasing cost of real estate made upward growth attractive, and so did the prestige that towering buildings carried for the businesses that occupied them. Workers completed the first **skyscraper** in Chicago, the ten-story Home Insurance Building, in 1885. Although engineers had the capability to go higher, thanks to new steel construction techniques, they required another vital invention in order to make taller buildings viable. In 1889, **Elisha Otis** delivered, with the invention of the safety elevator. This began the skyscraper craze, allowing developers in eastern cities to build and market prestigious real estate in the hearts of crowded metropolises.

## CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS

As the country grew, certain elements led some towns to morph into large urban centers, while others did not. The following four innovations proved critical in shaping urbanization at the turn of the century: electric lighting, communication improvements, transportation, and the rise of skyscrapers. As people migrated for the new jobs, they often struggled with the absence of these basic services. Even necessities, such as fresh water and proper sanitation, often taken for granted in the countryside, presented a greater challenge in urban life.

**Thomas Edison** patented the incandescent light bulb in 1879. This development quickly became common in homes as well as factories, transforming how all social classes lived. Although slow to arrive in rural areas of the country, electric power became readily available in cities when the first commercial power plants began to open in 1882. When **Nikola Tesla** subsequently developed the AC (alternating current) system for the Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company, power supplies for lights and other factory equipment could extend for miles from the power source. AC power transformed the use of electricity, allowing urban centers to physically cover greater areas.

Gradually, cities began to illuminate the streets with electric lamps to allow the city to remain alight throughout the night. No longer did the pace of life and economic activity slow substantially at sunset, the way it had in smaller towns. The cities, following the factories that drew people there, stayed open all the time.

The telephone, patented in 1876 by **Alexander Graham Bell**, greatly transformed communication both regionally and nationally. The telephone rapidly supplanted the telegraph as the preferred form of communication. By 1900, over 1.5 million telephones were in use around the nation, whether as private lines in the homes of some middle- and upper-class Americans, or jointly used party lines in many rural areas.

In the same way that electric lights spurred greater factory production and economic growth, the telephone increased business through the more rapid pace of demand. With telephones, orders could come constantly, rather than via mail order. More orders generated greater production, which in turn required still more workers. This demand for additional labor played a key role in urban growth, as expanding companies sought workers to handle the increasing consumer demand for their products.

Lights and communication might have illuminated the cities, but much of the urban poor, including a majority of incoming immigrants, lived in horrible housing. If the skyscraper was the jewel of the American city, the tenement was its boil. In 1878, a publication offered \$500 to the architect who could provide the best design for mass



**Elisha Otis:** Inventor of a safe electric elevator. His invention made skyscrapers possible.



**Thomas Edison:** Prolific American inventor. His creations included the electric lightbulb, phonograph (record player) and movie camera.



**Nikola Tesla:** Electrical engineer and inventor who developed alternating current that powers all of our electrical systems today.



**Alexander Graham Bell:** Inventor of the telephone and founder of the various Bell Telephone Companies.



Replicate the first telephone



**Tenement:** Public housing designed to provide inexpensive places to live in cities. Designed by James Ware, they were usually overcrowded, dirty, and places where disease was common.

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housing. James Ware won the contest with his plan for a dumbbell **tenement**. This structure was thinner in the center than on its extremes to allow light to enter the building, no matter how tightly packed the tenements may be. Unfortunately, these vents were often filled with garbage. The air that managed to penetrate also allowed a fire to spread from one tenement to the next more easily.

The cities stank. The air stank, the rivers stank, the people stank. Although public sewers were improving, disposing of human waste was increasingly a problem. People used private cesspools, which overflowed with a long, hard rain. Old sewage pipes dumped the waste directly into the rivers or bays. These rivers were often the very same used as water sources.

Trash collection had not yet been systemized. Trash was dumped in the streets or in the waterways. Better sewers, water purification, and trash removal were some of the most pressing problems for city leadership. As the 20<sup>th</sup> Century dawned, many improvements were made, but the cities were far from sanitary.



## Primary Source: Photograph

An example of a tenement building at the turn of the century. They were overcrowded, with many more people, and sometimes families, living in a single unit than the designers ever intended.

Because of the massive overcrowding and poor sanitation, disease was widespread. **Cholera** and **Yellow Fever** epidemics swept through the slums on a regular basis. **Tuberculosis** was a huge killer. Infants suffered the most. Almost 25% of babies born in late-1800s cities died before reaching the age of one. **Sewer systems** and the development of clean water delivery were one some of the most important technological reforms of the time.

Poverty often breeds crime. Desperate people will often resort to theft or violence to put food on the family table when the factory wages would not suffice. Youths who dreaded a life of monotonous factory work and pauperism sometimes roamed the streets in gangs. Vices such as gambling, prostitution, and alcoholism were widespread. Gambling rendered the hope of getting rich quick. Prostitution



**Cholera:** A disease common in major cities at the turn of the century caused by drinking polluted water. Sewer systems helped eliminate the disease.



**Yellow Fever:** A disease common in major cities at the turn of the century caused by the bite of mosquitos who bred in puddles of standing water. Paved streets and sewer systems reduced both the mosquitos and the disease.



**Tuberculosis:** A lung disease that spread in overcrowded cities at the turn of the century.

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provided additional income. Alcoholism furnished a false means of escape. The old system of town sheriffs were clearly inadequate for city life. The development of professional police forces is a legacy of the age of urbanization. In tandem with police forces, fire departments grew to meet the demand of city life. While small towns might be able to rely on a team of volunteer firefighters, or simply a bucket brigade of townspeople, cities required firefighters on duty day and night.

As the population became increasingly centered in urban areas while the century drew to a close, some reformers began to question the wisdom of moving into an entirely built environment. Was it wise to live in a world without trees, without lakes, rivers, or anything green?

Through the **City Beautiful Movement**, leaders such as **Frederick Law Olmsted** worked to bring nature back to the cities. Olmsted, one of the earliest and most influential designers of urban green space, and the original designer of **Central Park** in New York, worked to introduce the idea of the City Beautiful movement at the Columbian Exposition in 1893. From wide-open green spaces to brightly painted white buildings, connected with modern transportation services and appropriate sanitation, the White City of the Exposition set the stage for American urban city planning for the next generation. This model encouraged city planners to consider three principal tenets. First, create larger park areas inside cities. Second, build wider boulevards to decrease traffic congestion and allow for lines of trees and other greenery between lanes. And third, add more suburbs in order to mitigate congested living in the city itself. As each city adapted these principles in various ways, the City Beautiful movement became a cornerstone of urban development well into the twentieth century.



## ENJOYING URBAN LIFE

Americans in cities wanted something to take their minds off of the hardships of daily life, and Americas entertainers rose to the challenge. One form of popular entertainment was **vaudeville**, large stage variety shows that included everything from singing, dancing, and comedy acts to live animals and magic. The vaudeville



**Sewer Systems:** Major public works at the turn of the century designed to clean wastewater and provide clean drinking water.



**City Beautiful Movement:** A movement at the turn of the century to build parks in major cities. It was driven by the idea that humans should not live in an environment built of stone and concrete. Frederick Law Olmsted who designed Central Park in New York City was the most famous proponent of this idea.



**Frederick Law Olmsted:** Champion of the City Beautiful Movement and designer of many famous city parks including Central Park in New York City.



**Central Park:** Famous park in Manhattan in New York City designed by Frederick Law Olmsted.

### Primary Source: Photograph

The Polo Grounds, the first home of the New York Yankees baseball team. Professional baseball provided an inexpensive form of entertainment for the masses.



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circuit gave rise to several prominent performers, including magician **Harry Houdini**, who began his career in these variety shows before his fame propelled him to solo acts. Although the new film industry would eventually kill off vaudeville, many of the most successful vaudeville performers moved from stage to screen.

A major form of entertainment for the working class was professional baseball. Club teams transformed into professional baseball teams with the Cincinnati Red Stockings, now the Cincinnati Reds, in 1869. Soon, professional teams sprang up in several major American cities. Baseball games provided an inexpensive form of entertainment, where for less than a dollar, a person could enjoy a double-header, two hot dogs, and a beer. But more importantly, the teams became a way for newly relocated Americans and immigrants of diverse backgrounds to develop a unified civic identity, all cheering for one team. By 1876, the National League had formed, and soon after, cathedral-style ballparks began to spring up in many cities. Fenway Park in Boston, Forbes Field in Pittsburgh, and the Polo Grounds in New York all became touch points where working-class Americans came together to support a common cause.

Other popular sports included prize-fighting, which attracted a predominantly male, working- and middle-class audience who lived vicariously through the triumphs of the boxers during a time where opportunities for individual success were rapidly shrinking, and college football, which paralleled a modern corporation in its team hierarchy, divisions of duties, and emphasis on time management.

## CONCLUSION

As is clear, the turn of the century also turned American into city dwellers, and that shift was anything but easy. Overcrowding, pollution, poor sanitation, a lack of transportation, crime, fire, and overt racism all challenged the Americans, and newly arrived Americans, who built our cities. But, as we have come to expect of ourselves, those who struggled also persevered and developed ingenious ways to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges. They built skyscrapers, streetcars, sewers and suburbs. They learned English, became citizens and gave us new foods, music, art and entertainment.

But with urbanization also died Thomas Jefferson's dream of a nation built on yeoman farmers. Americans would never again be tied to the land. We would be a nation of people who lived among paved streets, brick high rises, and electric lights instead of being regulated by the passing of the four seasons and the rising and setting of the sun.

What do you think? Was it beneficial or harmful for America to become a nation of cities?



**Vaudeville:** A form of entertainment popular in the early 1900s. It featured groups of travelling performers who put on played music, acted, or performed magic and similar acts. This form of entertainment died out as movies became popular.



**Harry Houdini:** Famous vaudeville magician.



Watch Harry Houdini



## SUMMARY

Beginning in the 1880s, America experienced about four decades of massive immigration. These people are called the New Immigrants because they were different from earlier immigrants in important ways. First, they were poor and didn't come with many skills. They left their homelands to escape poverty, war, famine and persecution. They came in search of jobs, religious freedom, and opportunities for their children. Most came from Southern and Eastern Europe. They were Italian, Greek, Romanian, Polish and Russia. Also, Chinese immigration increased.

New York City's Ellis Island was a major immigration station and the city grew and expanded its reputation as multicultural melting pot. Immigrants tended to settle into neighborhoods with support systems in place that they could rely on. The growth of ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown or Little Italy was a hallmark of urban growth at this time.

Some Americans did not like these new immigrants. Nativism once again was common. Efforts to make English the official language expanded. Anti-Semitism grew. Eventually, the KKK embraced these anti-immigrant ideas. The Chinese Exclusion Act officially banned all immigration from China, a victory for nativists. In contrast, the Statue of Liberty stood as a sign of welcome and symbol of all that immigrants hoped for in their adopted country.

Immigrants and migration from the countryside drove urbanization. It was around the year 1900 that America became a nation where more people lived in cities than on farms. As cities grew, so did problems associated with urban areas. Garbage and polluted water, crime, fire, poverty, and overcrowding were issues. In response, city leaders created professional police and fire departments.

Mass transit was developed. Cities built the first subways and trolley systems. Mass transit made it possible for people to live in suburbs and commute to work, so cities expanded outward. Otis's safety elevator made skyscrapers possible, and cities expanded upward as well. Edison and Tesla's work on electricity resulted in electric lights both inside and out. Bell's telephone also revolutionized American city life.

Tenements were built to help house the poor. These low-rent apartments soon became overcrowded and emblematic of the problems with growing cities.

Cities built sewer systems to combat disease. The City Beautiful Movement encouraged the construction of parks such as Central Park in New York City. Americans went to baseball games for fun. Vaudeville performers travelled from place to place in the time before movies to entertain the masses.



## KEY CONCEPTS

**Push Factors:** Reasons to leave a place. In the time of the New Immigrants these included religious persecution, war, famine and poverty.

**Pull Factors:** Reasons to come to a place. In the time of the New Immigrants these included jobs, religious freedom, education and land.

**Nativism:** A belief that people born in the United States are superior to immigrants.

**Melting Pot:** The idea that America is made up of a blending of many diverse cultural influences.

**Urbanization:** The process of developing cities.

**City Beautiful Movement:** A movement at the turn of the century to build parks in major cities. It was driven by the idea that humans should not live in an environment built of stone and concrete. Frederick Law Olmstead who designed Central Park in New York City was the most famous proponent of this idea.

**Vaudeville:** A form of entertainment popular in the early 1900s. It featured groups of travelling performers who put on played music, acted, or performed magic and similar acts. This form of entertainment died out as movies became popular.



## LOCATIONS

**Ellis Island:** Major immigration station in New York Harbor.

**Angel Island:** Major immigration station in San Francisco Harbor.

**Ethnic Neighborhoods:** Areas in major cities where groups of immigrants concentrated. They usually had restaurants, grocery stores, newspapers, support organizations and churches that served the neighborhood's immigrant population.

**Statue of Liberty:** Symbol of the pull factors that attracted the New Immigrants. It stands on an island in New York Harbor.

**Suburbs:** Cities built around a larger city. These developed because mass transit made it possible to live far from where a person worked.

**Central Park:** Famous park in Manhattan in New York City designed by Frederick Law Olmstead.



## LAWS

**Chinese Exclusion Act:** Law passed in 1882 ending immigration from China and preventing Chinese immigrants already in the United States from applying for citizenship.



## PEOPLE AND GROUPS

**New Immigrants:** The name for the immigrants who arrived in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They were different from the "Old Immigrants" in that they were often from Southern and Eastern Europe, were Catholic, Orthodox Christian or Jewish instead of Protestant. Unlike earlier groups of immigrants, they were also often poor and uneducated with few skills.

**Josiah Strong:** A leading nativist in the late 1800s. He disliked the New Immigrants and argued for literacy tests. He eventually helped end the waves of immigration that characterized the turn of the century.

**Elisha Otis:** Inventor of a safe electric elevator. His invention made skyscrapers possible.

**Thomas Edison:** Prolific American inventor. His creations included the electric lightbulb, phonograph (record player) and movie camera.

**Nikola Tesla:** Electrical engineer and inventor who developed alternating current that powers all of our electrical systems today.

**Alexander Graham Bell:** Inventor of the telephone and founder of the various Bell Telephone Companies.

**Frederick Law Olmsted:** Champion of the City Beautiful Movement and designer of many famous city parks including Central Park in New York City.

**Harry Houdini:** Famous vaudeville magician.



## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

**Mass Transit:** Any form of transportation in cities designed to move many people. These include busses, subways, trolley cars and elevated trains.

**Omnibus:** A forerunner to the modern city bus. It was a carriage that ran on railroad tracks that was pulled by horses.

**Electric Trolley:** A trolley that ran on electricity.

**Elevated Train:** Similar to a subway, these trains ran on tracks built on bridges above city streets. The most famous is in Chicago and nicknamed the "L."

**Subway:** A form of mass transit that has trains running in tunnels underground. The first in the United States was in Boston, but the most famous is in New York City.

**Skyscraper:** Tall buildings in cities. They made it possible for many more people to live and work in a smaller area.

**Tenement:** Public housing designed to provide inexpensive places to live in cities. Designed by James Ware, they were usually overcrowded, dirty, and places where disease was common.

**Cholera:** A disease common in major cities at the turn of the century caused by drinking polluted water. Sewer systems helped eliminate the disease.

**Yellow Fever:** A disease common in major cities at the turn of the century caused by the bite of mosquitos who bred in puddles of standing water. Paved streets and sewer systems reduced both the mosquitos and the disease.

**Tuberculosis:** A lung disease that spread in overcrowded cities at the turn of the century.

**Sewer Systems:** Major public works at the turn of the century designed to clean wastewater and provide clean drinking water.

# 2

## S E C O N D Q U E S T I O N CAN WRITERS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

I S T H E  
**AMERICAN**  
**DREAM**  
ACHIEVABLE?

### INTRODUCTION

In modern times, our media world revolves around video, formerly on television or the movie theaters, but increasingly on small screens, and even more so, in video we produce ourselves with smartphones. Before the advent of video, however, the information travelled in print, and the Gilded Age was great time to be a reader or writer. Millions of Americans wanted something to read and newspapers, magazines and books sold like wildfire.

Of course, not everything that was written back then was worth reading, just as not everything that is posted online now is worth watching. However, in the same way that our cameras today can capture and expose wrongdoing, the writers of the Gilded Age put pen to paper and tried to effect change.

What do you think? Can writers make the world a better place?

## 2 CAN WRITERS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

### THE PRINT REVOLUTION

In a time before the Internet, smart phones, television and even radio, paper was the way Americans communicated and found out what was happening in the world. Even very small towns had at least one newspaper, and large cities had dozens. Many newspapers published morning and evening editions and when breaking news happened, news boys in the street could be heard hawking, “Extra! Extra! Read all about it!” as papers put out special editions.

The mail carried magazines, pamphlets, flyers and Americans flocked to newsstands and bookstores. In a time of print, publishing was an enormous business. As Americans streamed into cities from small towns and overseas, **journalists** realized the economic potential. If half of Boston’s citizens would buy a newspaper three times a week, a publisher could become a millionaire.

The **linotype machine**, invented in 1883, allowed for much faster printing of many more papers. The market was there. The technology was there. All that was necessary was a group of entrepreneurs bold enough to seize the opportunity. Anybody with a modest sum to invest could buy a printing press and make newspapers. The result was an American revolution in print.

The modern American newspaper took its familiar form during the Gilded Age. To capitalize on those who valued Sunday leisure time, the Sunday newspaper was expanded and divided into supplements. The subscription of women was courted for the first time by including fashion and beauty tips. For Americans who followed the emerging professional sports scene, a sports page was added.

**Dorothea Dix**, the pen name of Elizabeth Gilmer, became the nation’s first advice columnist for the New Orleans Picayune in 1896. To appeal to those completely disinterested in politics and world events, Charles Dana of the New York Sun invented the **human interest story**. These articles often retold a heart-warming everyday event like it was national news.



**Journalist:** A person who researches, interviews and then writes stories for newspapers, magazines, radio, television, or online publications.



**Linotype Machine:** An 1883 invention that allowed for fast printing of newspapers. It helped lead to a boom in newspaper publishing at the turn of the century.



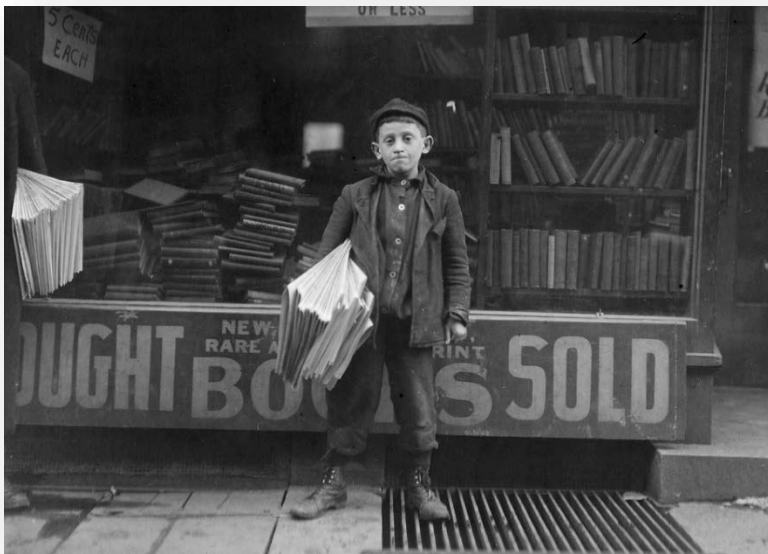
**Dorothea Dix:** Turn of the century social reformer and journalist. She invented the advice column for newspapers.



**Human Interest Story:** A type of news story that focused on emotional stories rather than breaking news.

#### Primary Source: Photograph

One of the many newsboys who hawked newspapers in the cities at the turn of the century. This was a common form of child labor.



### THE YELLOW PRESS

Competition for readers was fierce, especially in New York. The two titans of American publishing were Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. These men stopped at nothing to increase their readership. If a news story was too boring, why not twist the facts to make it more interesting? If the truth was too bland, why not spice it up with some innocent fiction? If all else failed, the printer could always increase the size of the headlines to make a story seem more important.

This kind of sensationalism was denounced by veteran members of the press corps. Labeled **Yellow Journalism** by its critics, this practice was prevalent in late-19th century news. At its most harmless, it bent reality to add a little extra excitement to everyday life. At its most dangerous, it fired up public opinion and helped push America into war with Spain.

Nevertheless, as a business strategy, it worked. Pulitzer increased the daily circulation of the Journal from 20,000 to 100,000 in one year. By 1900, it had increased to over a million.

**Joseph Pulitzer** purchased the New York World in 1883 after making the St. Louis Post-Dispatch the dominant daily in that city. Pulitzer strove to make the New York World an entertaining read, and filled his paper with pictures, games and contests that drew in new readers. Crime stories filled many of the pages, with headlines like “Was He a Suicide?” and “Screaming for Mercy.” In addition, Pulitzer charged readers only two cents per issue but gave readers eight and sometimes 12 pages of information. The only other two cent paper in the city never exceeded four pages.

While there were many sensational stories in the New York World, they were by no means the only pieces, or even the dominant ones. Pulitzer believed that newspapers were public institutions with a duty to improve society, and he put the World in the service of social reform.

Just two years after Pulitzer bought it, the World became the newspaper with the highest circulation in New York. Older publishers, envious of Pulitzer’s success, began criticizing the World, harping on its crime stories and stunts while ignoring its more serious reporting. Charles Dana, editor of the New York Sun, attacked The World and said Pulitzer was “deficient in judgment and in staying power.”

Pulitzer’s approach made an impression on **William Randolph Hearst**, a mining heir in California who acquired the San Francisco Examiner from his father in 1887. Hearst read the World while studying at Harvard University and resolved to make the Examiner as bright as Pulitzer’s paper.

Under his leadership, the Examiner devoted 24 percent of its space to crime, presenting the stories as morality plays, and sprinkled adultery and risqué illustrations on the front page. A month after Hearst took over the paper, the Examiner ran this story about a hotel fire:

*“HUNGRY, FRANTIC FLAMES. They Leap Madly Upon the Splendid Pleasure Palace by the Bay of Monterey, Encircling Del Monte in Their Ravenous Embrace From Pinnacle to Foundation. Leaping Higher, Higher, Higher, With Desperate Desire. Running Madly Riotous Through Cornice, Archway and Facade. Rushing in Upon the Trembling Guests with Savage Fury. Appalled and Panic-Stricken the Breathless Fugitives Gaze Upon the Scene of Terror. The Magnificent Hotel and Its Rich*



**Yellow Journalism:** A style of newspaper writing pioneered by Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst at the turn of the century featuring bold headlines, images and sensational stories designed to capture readers’ attention and sell papers. This style is generally credited with inflaming public opinion in the lead up to the Spanish-American War.



**Joseph Pulitzer:** American newspaper publisher who helped pioneer the style of yellow journalism. His primary rival was William Randolph Hearst.



**William Randolph Hearst:** American newspaper publisher who helped pioneer the style of yellow journalism. His primary rival was Joseph Pulitzer.

## 2 CAN WRITERS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

*Adornments Now a Smoldering heap of Ashes. The Examiner Sends a Special Train to Monterey to Gather Full Details of the Terrible Disaster. Arrival of the Unfortunate Victims on the Morning's Train — A History of Hotel del Monte — The Plans for Rebuilding the Celebrated Hostelry — Particulars and Supposed Origin of the Fire."*

It was classic yellow press style.

Hearst could be hyperbolic in his crime coverage; one of his early pieces, regarding a "band of murderers," attacked the police for forcing Examiner reporters to do their work for them. However, while indulging in these stunts, the Examiner also increased its space for international news, and sent reporters out to uncover municipal corruption and inefficiency.

The work of the reporters and the popularity of newspapers could result in more than just interesting reading. In one well-remembered story, Examiner reporter Winifred Black was admitted into a San Francisco hospital and discovered that indigent women were treated with "gross cruelty." The entire hospital staff was fired the morning the piece appeared.

With the success of the Examiner established by the early 1890s, Hearst began looking for a New York newspaper to purchase, and acquired the New York Journal in 1895, a penny paper which Pulitzer's brother Albert had sold to a Cincinnati publisher the year before.

Primary Source: Newspaper

A classic example of the Yellow Press style, featuring bold, sensational headlines.

**\$50,000 REWARD.—WHO DESTROYED THE MAINE?—\$50,000 REWARD.**

EDITION FOR GREATER NEW YORK.

**NEW YORK JOURNAL**

AND ADVERTISER.

200 LISTS. PUBLISHED WEEKLY. NEW YORK, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1898. PRICE ONE CENT.

**DESTRUCTION OF THE WAR SHIP MAINE WAS THE WORK OF AN ENEMY**

**\$50,000!**

**\$50,000 REWARD!**

**For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage!**

The Journal offers \$50,000 reward for the conviction of the criminals who sent 258 American sailors to their death. Naval officers unanimous that the ship was destroyed on purpose.

**Assistant Secretary Roosevelt Convinced the Explosion of the War Ship Was Not an Accident.**

**\$50,000!**

**\$50,000 REWARD!**

**For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage!**

The Journal offers \$50,000 reward for the conviction of the criminals who sent 258 American sailors to their death. Naval officers unanimous that the ship was destroyed on purpose.



**NAVAL OFFICERS THINK THE MAINE WAS DESTROYED BY A SPANISH MINE**

Hidden Mine or a Sunk Torpedo Believed to Have Been the Weapon Used Against the American Man-of-War—Officers and Men Tell Thrilling Stories of Being Blown Into the Air Amid a Mass of Shattered Steel and Exploding Shells—Survivors Brought to Key West Scout the Idea of Accident—Spanish Officials Protest Too Much—Our Cabinet Orders a Searching Inquiry—Journal Sends Divers to Havana to Report Upon the Condition of the Wreck.

## 2 CAN WRITERS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

Metropolitan newspapers started going after department store advertising in the 1890s, and discovered the larger the circulation base, the better. This drove Hearst; following Pulitzer's earlier strategy, he kept the Journal's price at one cent (compared to The World's two cent price) while providing as much information as rival newspapers. The approach worked, and as the Journal's circulation jumped to 150,000, Pulitzer cut his price to a penny, hoping to drive his young competitor into bankruptcy.

In a counterattack, Hearst raided the staff of the World in 1896. While most sources say that Hearst simply offered more money, Pulitzer, who had grown increasingly abusive to his employees, had become an extremely difficult man to work for, and many World employees were willing to jump at the chance to get away from him.

Although the competition between the World and the Journal was fierce, the papers were temperamentally alike. Both supported Democrats, both were sympathetic to labor and immigrants and both invested enormous resources in their Sunday publications, which functioned like weekly magazines, going beyond the normal scope of daily journalism.

Their Sunday entertainment features included the first color comic strip pages, and some theorize that the term yellow journalism originated there. Hogan's Alley, a comic strip revolving around a bald child in a yellow nightshirt, nicknamed The Yellow Kid, became exceptionally popular when cartoonist Richard F. Outcault began drawing it in the World in early 1896. When Hearst predictably hired Outcault away, Pulitzer asked artist George Luks to continue the strip with his characters, giving the city two Yellow Kids. The use of yellow journalism as a synonym for over-the-top sensationalism apparently started with more serious newspapers commenting on the excesses of "the Yellow Kid papers."

Perhaps ironically, the **Pulitzer Prize**, which was established by Pulitzer in his will, is awarded every year to recognize outstanding journalism in such categories as Breaking News, Investigative Reporting, and Editorial Cartoons.

### MUCKRAKERS

Journalists at the turn of the century were powerful. The print revolution enabled publications to increase their subscriptions dramatically. Writing to Congress in hopes of correcting abuses was slow and rarely produced results. Publishing a series of articles had a much more immediate impact. Collectively called **muckrakers**, a brave cadre of reporters exposed injustices so grave they made the blood of the average American run cold.

The first to strike was **Lincoln Steffens**. In 1902, he published an article in McClure's magazine called "Tweed Days in St. Louis." Steffens exposed how city officials used the city's public tax dollars to make deals with big business in order to maintain power. More articles followed, and soon Steffens published the collection as a book entitled **The Shame of the Cities**. Public outcry from outraged readers led to reform of city government and gave strength to the progressive ideas of a city commission or city manager system.

**Ida Tarbell** struck next. One month after Lincoln Steffens launched his assault on urban politics, Tarbell began her McClure's series entitled "History of the Standard Oil Company." She outlined and documented the cutthroat business practices



**Pulitzer Prize:** An annual award for excellence in journalism, ironically named after one of the trade's most notorious promoters of the yellow press.



**Muckraker:** A journalist at the turn of the century who research and published stories and books uncovering political or business scandal. The term was coined by President Theodore Roosevelt.



**Lincoln Steffens:** Muckraker and author of *The Shame of the Cities* about corruption in city governments.



**The Shame of the Cities:** Lincoln Steffens' book about corruption in major American cities at the turn of the century.



**Ida Tarbell:** Muckraker and author of a tell-all book about John D. Rockefeller and the rise of Standard Oil.



## 2 CAN WRITERS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

behind John Rockefeller's meteoric rise. Tarbell's motives may also have been personal. Her own father had been driven out of business by Rockefeller.

John Spargo's 1906 "The Bitter Cry of the Children" exposed hardships suffered by child laborers, such as these coal miners. "From the cramped position [the boys] have to assume," wrote Spargo, "most of them become more or less deformed and bent-backed like old men..."

Once other publications saw how profitable these exposés had been, they courted muckrakers of their own. In 1905, Thomas Lawson brought the inner workings of the stock market to light in "Frenzied Finance." John Spargo unearthed the horrors of child labor in "The Bitter Cry of the Children" in 1906. That same year, David Phillips linked 75 senators to big business interests in "The Treason of the Senate." In 1907, William Hard went public with industrial accidents in the steel industry in the blistering "Making Steel and Killing Men." Ray Stannard Baker revealed the oppression of Southern blacks in "Following the Color Line" in 1908.



### Primary Source: Photograph

One of the many photographs taken by Jacob Riis in the slums of New York City. Photographs like this one of three homeless boys helped foster sympathy among middle and upper class Americans and foster the progressive agenda to address the problems faced by the urban poor.

**Jacob Riis** was a Danish immigrant who moved to New York, and after experiencing poverty and joblessness first-hand, ultimately built a career as a police reporter. In the course of his work, he spent much of his time in the slums and tenements of New York's working poor. Appalled by what he found there, Riis began documenting these scenes of squalor and sharing them through lectures and ultimately through the publication of his book, **How the Other Half Lives**, in 1890.

By most contemporary accounts, Riis was an effective storyteller, using drama and racial stereotypes to tell his stories of the ethnic slums he encountered. While his racial thinking was very much a product of his time, he was also a reformer. He felt strongly that upper and middle-class Americans could and should care about the living conditions of the poor. In his book and lectures, he argued against the immoral landlords and useless laws that allowed dangerous living conditions and high rents. He also suggested remodeling existing tenements or building new ones. While other



**Jacob Riis:** Muckraker, photographer and author of the book *How the Other Half Lives* about the life in city slums.



**How the Other Half Lives:** Jacob Riis's book of photographs about life in city slums at the turn of the century.



## 2 CAN WRITERS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

reporters and activists had already brought the issue into the public eye, Riis's photographs added a new element to the story.

Among the muckrakers was one pioneering female journalist who defied gender stereotypes of the day and became well known for her work uncovering corruption in business and government in New York City. **Nellie Bly** was catapulted to fame after convincing a judge that she was insane and being remanded to the Blackwell's Island lunatic asylum where she experienced the terrible treatment women there received. Her subsequent article in the New York World entitled Ten Days in a Mad-House secured her a permanent spot among the most respected muckrakers. She later gained national attention and notoriety by embarking on a round-the-world journey in an attempt to beat Phileas Fogg's fictional record of 80 days from Jules Verne's famous adventure novel. She completed the journey in 72 days.

Perhaps no muckraker caused as great a stir as **Upton Sinclair**. An avowed Socialist, Sinclair hoped to illustrate the horrible effects of capitalism on workers in the Chicago meatpacking industry. His bone-chilling account, **The Jungle**, detailed workers sacrificing their fingers and nails by working with acid, losing limbs, catching diseases, and toiling long hours in cold, cramped conditions. He hoped the public outcry would be so fierce that reforms would soon follow.

The clamor that rang throughout America was not, however, a response to the workers' plight. Sinclair also uncovered the contents of the products being sold to the general public. Spoiled meat was covered with chemicals to hide the smell. Skin, hair, stomach, ears, and nose were ground up and packaged as head cheese. Rats climbed over warehouse meat, leaving piles of excrement behind.

Sinclair said that he aimed for America's heart and instead hit its stomach. Even President Roosevelt, who had coined the derisive term muckraker, was propelled to act. Within months, Congress passed the **Pure Food and Drug Act** and the **Meat Inspection Act** to curb these sickening abuses. Today, the **Food and Drug Administration** within the Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for monitoring the nation's food and pharmaceutical supply in order to prevent the problems Sinclair so grotesquely chronicled.

### MAGAZINES

Along with newspapers and books, magazines provided Americans with news, information and commentary.

The weekly magazine **Puck** was founded by Joseph Keppler in St. Louis. It began publishing English and German language editions in March 1871. Five years later, the German edition of Puck moved to New York City, where the first magazine was published in 1876. The English language edition soon followed. The English language magazine continued in operation for more than 40 years under several owners and editors. A typical 32-page issue contained a full-color political cartoon on the front cover and a color non-political cartoon or comic strip on the back cover. There was always a double-page color centerfold, usually on a political topic. Each issue also included numerous black-and-white cartoons used to illustrate humorous anecdotes. A page of editorials commented on the issues of the day, and the last few pages were devoted to advertisements.

Founded by S. S. McClure and John Sanborn Phillips in 1893, **McClure's** magazine featured both political and literary content, publishing serialized novels-in-progress,



**Nellie Bly:** Muckraker who wrote about corruption in New York government and business and traveled around the world in 72 days.



Read The Jungle



**Upton Sinclair:** Muckraker and author of *The Jungle* about working and sanitary conditions in meat packing plants in Chicago at the turn of the century.



**The Jungle:** Upton Sinclair's book about working and sanitary conditions in meat packing plants in Chicago at the turn of the century.



**Pure Food and Drug Act:** Law passed in 1906 providing public inspection of food and pharmaceutical production. It was inspired in part by Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle*.



**Meat Inspection Act:** Law passed in 1906 providing regulation of the meat industry. It was inspired in part by Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle*.



**Food and Drug Administration:** Organization in the federal government charged with monitoring the food and pharmaceutical industries.



**Puck:** Weekly magazine popular at the turn of the century. It was originally published in St. Louis in German.



**McClure's:** Weekly magazine popular at the turn of the century that

## 2 CAN WRITERS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

a chapter at a time. In this way, McClure's published such writers as Willa Cather, Arthur Conan Doyle, Herminie T. Kavanagh, Rudyard Kipling, Jack London, Lincoln Steffens, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mark Twain. McClure's published Ida Tarbell's series in 1902 exposing the monopoly abuses of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, and Ray Stannard Baker's earlier look at the United States Steel Corporations. From January 1907 to June 1908, McClure's published the first detailed history of Christian Science and the story of its founder, Mary Baker Eddy.

**Collier's** was another magazine of the time that featured both muckraking journalism and outstanding literary content. In May 1906, the editors commissioned Jack London to cover the San Francisco earthquake, a report accompanied by 16 pages of pictures. Collier's published the work of investigative journalists such as Samuel Hopkins Adams, Ray Stannard Baker, C.P. Connolly, Upton Sinclair and Ida Tarbell. The work of the writers and editors at Collier's helped pass reform of child labor laws, slum clearance, food safety and women's suffrage. Starting October 7, 1905, Collier's startled readers with "The Great American Fraud," analyzing the contents of popular patent medicines. The author, Samuel Hopkins Adams, pointed out that the companies producing many of the nation's medicines were making false claims about their products and some were health hazards.

featured literature by famous authors and ran the work of muckrakers including Ida Tarbell's expose of Standard Oil.



**Collier's:** Weekly magazine popular at the turn of the century. It ran numerous stories by muckrakers including The Great American Fraud which exposed abuses in the pharmaceutical industry.



Primary Source: Magazine Cover

The Saturday Evening Post was known for featuring illustrated covers highlighting everyday life.

**The Saturday Evening Post** was founded in 1821 and grew to become the most widely circulated weekly magazine in America. Like its competitors, the magazine published current event articles, editorials, human interest pieces, humor, illustrations, a letter column, poetry and stories by the leading writers of the time. It was known for commissioning lavish illustrations and original works of fiction. Illustrations were featured on the cover and embedded in stories and advertising. Some Post illustrations became popular and continue to be reproduced as posters or prints, especially those by Norman Rockwell. The Post published stories and essays by Ray Bradbury, Agatha Christie, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Vonnegut, Louis L'Amour, Sinclair Lewis, Edgar Allan Poe, and John Steinbeck. It also published poetry by such noted poets as Carl Sandburg, Ogden Nash, Dorothy Parker and Hannah Kahn. Jack London's best-known novel *The Call of the Wild* was first published, in serialized form, in the Saturday Evening Post in 1903.



**The Saturday Evening Post:** Weekly magazine popular at the turn of the century and well into the 1950s. It featured paintings on the cover depicting scenes of daily life, most notably by the artist Norman Rockwell.

## 2 CAN WRITERS MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

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Weekly magazines such as Puck, McClures, Collier's and The Saturday Evening Post flourished at the turn of the century, and for nearly half a century. It was not until the 1950s when they lost popularity as Americans turned to a new form of entertainment: television.

### CONCLUSION

The printed word in the Gilded Age captured the imagination of America. Sometimes it made us cry, or laugh, or become outraged. But whatever the effect, the editors, illustrators, investigators, and authors of the Gilded Age made a difference. They brought down corrupt politicians and exposed crooked businessmen. They gave us some of America's great literature.

On the other hand, incendiary headlines fanned war-fever and exaggerated truths in the pursuit of profits.

What do you think? Can writers make the world a better place?

### SUMMARY

The beginning of the 1900s was a time of growth in the print industry. Before the Internet, radio or television, most people got their news from newspapers, and even small cities had multiple newspapers that were printed twice a day. Two great publishers, Pulitzer and Hearst competed for subscribers and developed a style of sensational journalism that exaggerated the truth and used flashy headlines to catch potential readers' attention. Called Yellow Journalism, it was both good and bad.

The Yellow Journalists loved publishing stories that exposed wrongdoing by politicians and business leaders. These muckrakers did America a great service by showing the wrongs of city life, the meat packing industry, robber baron practices, and government corruption. Some of their work led directly to changes in laws that made America better. The best-known example is the connection between Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and the passage of the Meat Inspection and Pure Food and Drug Acts.

This was a time period of growth in magazines as well. Weekly publications such as *Puck*, *McLure's*, *Collier's*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* grew in popularity and remained a staple of American life until after World War II when television replaced reading as a favored pastime.



## KEY CONCEPTS

**Human Interest Story:** A type of news story that focused on emotional stories rather than breaking news.

**Yellow Journalism:** A style of newspaper writing pioneered by Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst at the turn of the century featuring bold headlines, images and sensational stories designed to capture readers' attention and sell papers. This style is generally credited with inflaming public opinion in the lead up to the Spanish-American War.

**Pulitzer Prize:** An annual award for excellence in journalism, ironically named after one of the trade's most notorious promoters of the yellow press.



## BOOKS & MAGAZINES

**The Shame of the Cities:** Lincoln Steffens' book about corruption in major American cities at the turn of the century.

**How the Other Half Lives:** Jacob Riis's book of photographs about life in city slums at the turn of the century.

**The Jungle:** Upton Sinclair's book about working and sanitary conditions in meat packing plants in Chicago at the turn of the century.

**Puck:** Weekly magazine popular at the turn of the century. It was originally published in St. Louis in German.

**McClure's:** Weekly magazine popular at the turn of the century that featured literature by famous authors and ran the work of muckrakers including Ida Tarbell's expose of Standard Oil.

**Collier's:** Weekly magazine popular at the turn of the century. It ran numerous stories by muckrakers including The Great American Fraud which exposed abuses in the pharmaceutical industry.

**The Saturday Evening Post:** Weekly magazine popular at the turn of the century and well into the 1950s. It featured paintings on the cover depicting scenes of daily life, most notably by the artist Norman Rockwell.



## PEOPLE AND GROUPS

**Journalist:** A person who researches, interviews and then writes stories for newspapers, magazines, radio, television, or online publications.

**Dorothea Dix:** Turn of the century social reformer and journalist. She invented the advice column for newspapers.

**Joseph Pulitzer:** American newspaper publisher who helped pioneer the style of yellow journalism. His primary rival was William Randolph Hearst.

**William Randolph Hearst:** American newspaper publisher who helped pioneer the style of yellow journalism. His primary rival was Joseph Pulitzer.

**Muckraker:** A journalist at the turn of the century who research and published stories and books uncovering political or business scandal. The term was coined by President Theodore Roosevelt.

**Lincoln Steffens:** Muckraker and author of The Shame of the Cities about corruption in city governments.

**Ida Tarbell:** Muckraker and author of a tell-all book about John D. Rockefeller and the rise of Standard Oil.

**Jacob Riis:** Muckraker, photographer and author of the book How the Other Half Lives about the life in city slums.

**Nellie Bly:** Muckraker who wrote about corruption in New York government and business and traveled around the world in 72 days.

**Upton Sinclair:** Muckraker and author of The Jungle about working and sanitary conditions in meat packing plants in Chicago at the turn of the century.



## GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

**Food and Drug Administration:** Organization in the federal government charged with monitoring the food and pharmaceutical industries.



## TECHNOLOGY

**Linotype Machine:** An 1883 invention that allowed for fast printing of newspapers. It helped lead to a boom in newspaper publishing at the turn of the century.



## LAWS

**Pure Food and Drug Act:** Law passed in 1906 providing public inspection of food and pharmaceutical production. It was inspired in part by Upton Sinclair's book The Jungle.

**Meat Inspection Act:** Law passed in 1906 providing regulation of the meat industry. It was inspired in part by Upton Sinclair's book The Jungle.

# 3

## T H I R D Q U E S T I O N W H A T D O E S I T M E A N T O B E P R O G R E S S I V E ?

I S T H E  
**AMERICAN**  
**D R E A M**  
A C H I E V A B L E ?

### INTRODUCTION

As you probably have already come to understand, the Gilded Age was a time of extremes. On one hand, there were some Americans who through their ingenuity and determination, and probably a fair amount of luck, became fabulously rich. On the other hand, there were so many more who struggled everyday to earn enough to feed their families. Americans were farmers, but were quickly becoming city dwellers.

Amid all this change, reformers worked to improve the lives of those around them. Like the muckrakers, or the Progressive Presidents, many everyday Americans worked in thousands of small ways to make America a better place.

Some worked to improve the lives of farmers, or laborers, or children, or immigrants. Some wanted political change. Others just wanted to help a fellow citizens find a job.

The people who worked to make that change were known as the Progressives. What do you think? What does it mean to be progressive?

### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

#### THE POPULISTS

Like the oppressed laboring classes of the East, it was only a matter of time before Western farmers would attempt to use their numbers to effect positive change. In 1867, the first such national organization was formed. Led by Oliver Kelley, the **Patrons of Husbandry**, also known as the **Grange**, organized to address the social isolation of farm life. Like other secret societies, such as the Masons, Grangers had local chapters with secret passwords and rituals.

The local Grange sponsored dances and gatherings to attack the doldrums of daily life. It was only natural that politics and economics were discussed in these settings, and the Grangers soon realized that their individual problems were common.

Identifying the railroads as the chief villains, Grangers lobbied state legislatures for regulation of the industry. By 1874, several states passed the Granger laws, establishing maximum shipping rates. Grangers also pooled their resources to buy grain elevators of their own so that members could enjoy a break on grain storage.

Farmers' alliances went a step further. Beginning in 1889, Northern and Southern Farmers' Alliances championed the same issues as the Grangers, but also entered the political arena. Members of these alliances won seats in state legislatures across the Great Plains to strengthen the agrarian voice in politics.

What did all the farmers seem to have in common? The answer was simple: debt. Looking for solutions to this condition, farmers began to attack the nation's monetary system. As of 1873, Congress declared that all federal money must be backed by gold. This limited the nation's money supply and benefited the wealthy.

The farmers wanted to create inflation. Inflation actually helps debtors. The economics are simple. If a farmer owes \$3,000 and can earn \$1 for every bushel of wheat sold at harvest, he needs to sell 3,000 bushels to pay off the debt. If inflation could push the price of a bushel of wheat up to \$3, he needs to sell only 1,000 bushels. Of course, inflation is bad for the bankers who made the loans.

To create inflation, farmers suggested that the money supply be expanded to include dollars not backed by gold. First, farmers attempted was to encourage Congress to print Greenback Dollars like the ones issued during the Civil War. Since the greenbacks were not backed by gold, more dollars could be printed, creating an inflationary effect.

The Greenback Party and the Greenback-Labor Party each ran candidates for President in 1876, 1880, and 1884 under this platform. No candidate was able to muster national support for the idea, and farmers turned to another strategy.

Inflation could also be created by printing money that was backed by silver as well as gold. This idea was more popular because people were more confident in their money if they knew it was backed by a precious metal. Also, America had coined money backed by silver until 1873.

Out of the ashes of the Greenback-Labor Party grew the **Populist Party**. In addition to demanding the **free coinage of silver**, the Populists called for a host of other reforms. They demanded a **graduated income tax**, whereby individuals earning a higher income paid a higher percentage in taxes.



#### **Patrons of Husbandry / Grange:**

Organization of farmers in the late 1800s who, suffering from high shipping costs and debt, advocated for government regulation of railroad rates and the free coinage of silver.



#### **Populist Party:** Political party formed in the late 1800s out of the Grange Movement. They advocated for the

free coinage of silver, a graduated income tax and government regulation of business. Their leader was William Jennings Bryan. Eventually their members mostly joined the Democratic Party.



### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

They wanted Constitutional reforms as well. Up until this point, Senators were still not elected by the people directly. They were chosen by state legislatures. The Populists demanded a constitutional amendment allowing for the direct election of Senators.

They demanded democratic reforms such as the **initiative**, where citizens could directly introduce debate on a topic in the legislatures. The **referendum** would allow citizens, rather than their representatives, to vote a proposed law. **Recall** would allow the people to end an elected official's term before it expired. They also called for the secret ballot and a one-term limit for the president.

In 1892, the Populists ran James Weaver for president on this ambitious platform. He poled over a million popular votes and 22 electoral votes. Although he came far short of victory, Populist ideas gained traction at the national level. When the financial Panic of 1893 hit the following year, an increased number of unemployed and dispossessed Americans gave momentum to the Populist movement. A great showdown was in place for 1896.

#### THE ELECTION OF 1896

All the elements for political success seemed to be falling into place for the Populists. James Weaver made an impressive showing in 1892, and Populist ideas were being discussed across the nation. The **Panic of 1893** was the worst financial crisis to date in American history. As the soup lines grew larger, so did voters' anger.

When **Jacob S. Coxey** of Ohio marched his 200 supporters, dubbed **Coxey's Army**, into the nation's capital to demand reforms in the spring of 1894, many thought a revolution was brewing. The climate seemed to ache for change. All that the Populists needed was a winning Presidential candidate in 1896.



✓ **Free Coinage of Silver:** Objective of the Populist Party. They wanted inflation to ease loan repayments and asked the government to go off the gold standard. This was the topic of William Jennings Bryan's famous "Cross of Gold" speech.

✓ **Graduated Income Tax:** An income tax system in which wealthy individuals pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes than lower class individuals.

✓ **Initiative:** When citizens can gather signatures and force their legislature to vote on an issue.

✓ **Referendum:** When citizens can gather signatures and have a proposed law put on a ballot so everyone can vote. This was a way to enact legislation that might otherwise have been prevented by business interests who could pay off elected officials.

✓ **Recall:** When citizens can gather signatures and force a vote to remove an elected official. This was enacted to curb corruption in government.

📅 **Panic of 1893:** Financial crisis in the 1893.

👤 **Jacob Coxey:** The leader of a group of Populist farmers who marched to Washington, DC in 1894 demanding reform.

👥 **Coxey's Army:** A group of Populist farmers who marched to Washington, DC in 1894 demanding reform.

**Primary Source: Photograph**

Coxey's Army in Washington, DC

### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

Ironically, the person who defended the Populist platform that year came from the Democratic Party. **William Jennings Bryan** was the unlikely candidate. An attorney from Lincoln, Nebraska, Bryan's speaking skills were among the best of his generation. Known as the "Great Commoner," Bryan developed a reputation as defender of the farmer.



**William Jennings Bryan:** Populist, Progressive, and later democratic leader who championed the rights of farmers. His "Cross of Gold" speech catapulted him to national fame. He ran four times for president but never won.

**Primary Source: Photograph**

William Jennings Bryan speaking during the Election of 1896. He was known as a dynamic speaker.



Read and listen to  
William Jennings Bryan  
give the Cross of Gold speech

When Populist ideas began to spread, Democratic voters of the South and West gave enthusiastic endorsement. At the Chicago Democratic convention in 1896, Bryan delivered a speech that made his career. Demanding the free coinage of silver, Bryan shouted, "You shall not crucify mankind upon a **cross of gold!**" Thousands of delegates roared their approval, and at the age of thirty-six, the "Boy Orator" received the Democratic nomination.



**Cross of Gold Speech:** 1896 speech by William Jennings Bryan at the Democratic National convention arguing for the free coinage of silver.

### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

Faced with a difficult choice between surrendering their identity and hurting their own cause, the Populist Party nominated Bryan as their candidate as well, effectively merging the Populist and Democratic Parties.

The Republican competitor was **William McKinley**, the governor of Ohio. He had the support of the moneyed eastern establishment. Behind the scenes, a wealthy Cleveland industrialist named Mark Hanna was determined to see McKinley elected. He, like many of his class, believed that the free coinage of silver would bring financial ruin to America, or at least financial ruin to the pocketbooks of the wealthy.

Using his vast resources and power, Hanna directed a campaign based on fear of a Bryan victory. McKinley campaigned from his home, leaving the politicking for the party hacks. Bryan revolutionized campaign politics by launching a nationwide **whistle-stop** effort, making twenty to thirty speeches per day from the back of a train as it stopped in each town along a rail line.

When the results were finally tallied, McKinley beat Bryan by an electoral vote margin of 271 to 176. The popular vote was much closer. McKinley won 51% of the vote to Bryan's 47%.

Many factors led to Bryan's defeat. He was unable to win a single state in the populous and industrial Northeast. Laborers feared the free silver idea as much as their bosses. While inflation would help the debt-ridden, mortgage-paying farmers, it could hurt the wage-earning, rent-paying factory workers. In a sense, the election came down to a clash between the interests of the city versus country and by 1896, the urban forces won. Bryan's campaign marked the last time a major party attempted to win the White House by exclusively courting the rural vote.

The economy in 1896 was also on the upswing. Had the election occurred in the heart of the Panic of 1893, the results may have been different. Farm prices were rising by 1896, albeit slowly and the Populist Party fell apart with Bryan's loss. Although they continued to nominate candidates, most of their membership reverted to the major parties.

The ideas, however, did endure. Although the free silver issue died, the graduated income tax, direct election of senators, initiative, referendum, recall, and the secret ballot were all later enacted. These issues were kept alive by the next standard bearers of reform, the Progressives.

#### THE PROGRESSIVES

The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was an age of reform. Urban reformers and Populists had already done much to raise attention to the nation's most pressing problems.

America in 1900 looked nothing like America in 1850, yet those in power seemed to be applying the same old strategies to complex new problems. The Populists had tried to effect change by capturing the presidency in 1896 but had failed. The Progressives would succeed where the Populists could not.

The **Progressives** were urban, northeastern, educated, middle-class, Protestant reform-minded men and women. There was no official **Progressive Party** until 1912, but progressivism had already swept the nation.

It was more of a movement than a political party, and there were adherents to the philosophy in each major party. There were three progressive presidents: Theodore



**William McKinley:** Republican President first elected in 1896. He defeated William Jennings Bryan. Reelected in 1900, he led the nation through the Spanish-American War, but was assassinated.



**Whistle-Stop:** Short campaign speeches given from the back of a train car as it stopped in small towns.

They were a way spreading a candidate's message in the days before radio, television or the internet.



**Progressives:** Groups of people at the turn of the century interested in making change in society, business and government. They were often urban, northeastern, educated, middle class, and protestant.

### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt and Taft were Republicans and Wilson was a Democrat. What united the movement was a belief that the **laissez faire**, **Social Darwinist** outlook of the Gilded Age was morally and intellectually wrong. Progressives believed that people and government had the power to correct abuses produced by nature and the free market.

The results were astonishing. Seemingly every aspect of society was touched by progressive reform. Worker and consumer issues were addressed, conservation of natural resources was initiated, and the plight of the urban poor was confronted. National political movements such as temperance and women's suffrage found allies in the progressive movement. The era produced a host of national and state regulations, plus four amendments to the Constitution.

The single greatest factor that fueled the progressive movement in America was urbanization. For years, educated, middle-class women had begun the work of reform in the nation's cities.

Underlying this new era of reform was a fundamental shift in philosophy away from Social Darwinism. Why accept hardship and suffering as simply the result of natural selection? Humans can and have adapted their physical environments to suit their purposes. Individuals need not accept injustices as the law of nature if they can think of a better way. Philosopher William James called this new way of thinking, **pragmatism**. His followers came to believe that an activist government could be the agent of the public to pursue the betterment of social ills.

#### THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

Protestant churches during the Gilded Age were afraid of losing influence over changes in society. Although the population of America was growing rapidly, there were many empty seats in the pews of urban Protestant churches. Middle-class churchgoers were faithful, but large numbers of workers were starting to lose faith in their local churches. The old-style heaven and hell sermons seemed irrelevant to those who toiled long hours for inadequate pay.

Meanwhile, immigration swelled the ranks of Roman Catholic churches. Eastern Orthodox churches and Jewish synagogues were sprouting up everywhere. Many cities reported the loss of Protestant congregations.

Out of this concern grew the **Social Gospel Movement**. Progressive-minded preachers began to tie the teachings of Christianity with contemporary problems. Christian virtue, they declared, demanded a redress of poverty and despair on earth.

Many ministers became politically active. Washington Gladden, the most prominent of the social gospel ministers, supported the workers' right to strike in the wake of the Great Upheaval of 1877. Ministers called for an end to child labor, the enactment of temperance laws, and civil service reform. Liberal churches such as the Congregationalists and the Unitarians led the way, but the movement spread to many sects.

The **Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)** and the **Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)** were founded by Christian Progressives to address the challenges faced by urban youth.

Two new sects formed. Mary Baker Eddy founded the **Christian Science**, a new variation of Christianity whose followers tried to reconcile religion and science. She



**Progressive Party:** A minor political party formed in 1912 to champion progressive issues.



**Laissez Faire:** A government policy toward business that favored low taxes and regulation.



**Social Darwinism:** An idea common at the turn of the century applying the survival of the fittest concept to human experiences. It argued that people and nations that succeed did so because they were inherently superior to those who lost or were less successful.



**Pragmatism:** A way of approaching problems developed by William James at the turn of the century. It advocated that people did not need to accept life as it was, but could work for change.



**Social Gospel Movement:** A movement at the turn of the century based on the belief that helping the poor was a Christian virtue. Members of the movement built settlement houses, formed the YMCA and YWCA and founded the Salvation Army.



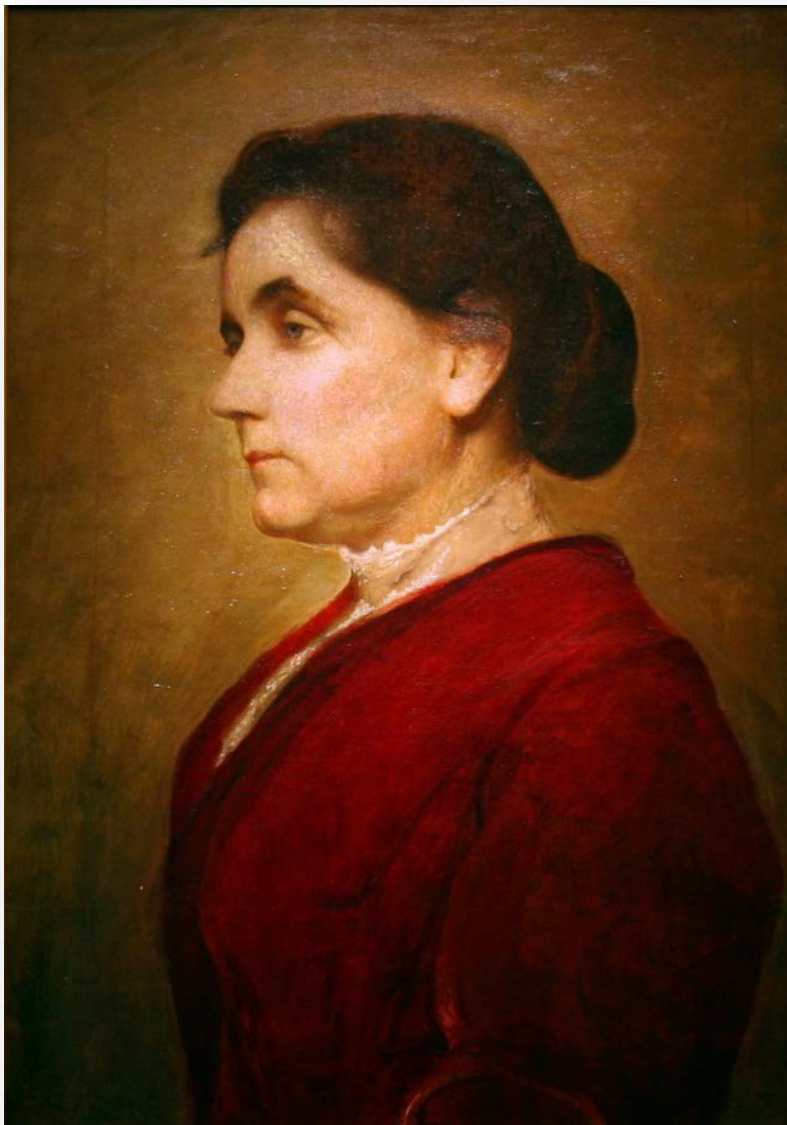
**Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA):** Organization founded by members of the Social Gospel Movement to give young men a place to improve physical fitness and moral character.



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preached that faith was a means to cure evils such as disease. The **Salvation Army** crossed the Atlantic from England and provided free soup for the hungry. More of a service organization than a church, the Salvation Army remains a potent force for good in many American cities.

Middle class women who had time and financial resources became particularly active in the arena of progressive social reform. The Settlement House Movement spread across the country. Women organized and built **Settlement Houses** in urban centers where destitute immigrants could go when they had nowhere else to turn. Settlement houses provided family-style cooking, lessons in English, and tips on how to adapt to American culture.



**Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA):** Organization founded by members of the Social Gospel Movement to give young women a place to improve physical fitness and moral character.



**Christian Science:** Religious group founded at the turn of the century which tried to find a balance between traditional Christian teaching and new discoveries in science and technology.



**Salvation Army:** British service organization that was transplanted to America as part of the Social Gospel Movement. They serve the needy by providing shelters for the homeless and soup kitchens.



**Settlement House:** A place in large cities where new immigrants could come to learn English, job skills, and find childcare while they worked. The most famous was Hull House in Chicago.

#### Primary Source: Painting

A contemporary painting of Jane Addams who founded Hull House in Chicago and launched the Settlement House Movement.

### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

The first settlement house began in 1889 in Chicago and was called **Hull House**. Its organizer, **Jane Addams**, intended Hull House to serve as a prototype for other settlement houses. By 1900 there were nearly 100 settlement houses in the nation's cities. Jane Addams was considered the founder of social work, a new profession.

The changes were profound. Many historians call this period in the history of American religion the **Third Great Awakening**. Like the first two awakenings, it was characterized by revival and reform. The temperance movement and the settlement house movement were both affected by church activism. The chief difference between this movement and those of an earlier era was location. These changes in religion transpired because of urban realities, underscoring the social impact of the new American city.



**Hull House:** The most famous settlement house. It was founded by Jane Addams in Chicago in 1889.



**Jane Addams:** Founder of the Settlement House movement.



**Third Great Awakening:** Term for the general increase in religious practice at the turn of the century. It included the Social Gospel Movement and establishment of organizations such as the Salvation Army, YMCA, YWCA, and Christian Science Church.

#### Primary Source: Photograph

Horrific images from the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire such as this one were published around the nation and spurred workplace safety reforms.



Read primary sources  
From the Triangle  
Shirtwaist Fire

#### THE TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FIRE

The **Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire** on March 25, 1911, was the deadliest industrial disaster in the history of New York City and resulted in the fourth-highest loss of life from an industrial accident in American history. The fire caused the deaths of 146 garment workers, who died from the fire, smoke inhalation, or falling or jumping to their deaths. Most of the victims were recent Jewish and Italian immigrant women aged 16 to 23. Of the victims whose ages are known, the oldest victim was 43, and the youngest were just 14.

Because the managers had locked the doors to the stairwells and exits — a common practice at the time to prevent pilferage and unauthorized breaks — many of the workers who could not escape the burning building jumped to the streets below from the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors. The fire led to legislation requiring improved factory safety standards and helped spur the growth of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, which fought for better working conditions for sweatshop workers.



**Triangle Shirtwaist Fire:** A well-publicized fire in New York City in which young women chose to jump to their deaths to escape the flames. Public outrage led to important workplace safety reforms.

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In New York City, a Committee on Public Safety was formed, headed by noted social worker Frances Perkins, to identify specific problems and lobby for new legislation. The subsequent reforms shortened work weeks, instituted mandatory fire escapes, and generally led to safer working conditions. Similar reforms were instituted all around the nation.

#### CHILD LABOR

One of the most important reforms of the Progressive Era was the elimination of child labor. After its conception in 1904, the **National Child Labor Committee (NCLC)** focused its attacks on child labor and endorsed the first national anti-child labor bill. Although the bill was defeated, it convinced many opponents of child labor that a solution lay in the cooperation and solidarity between the states.

The NCLC called for the establishment of a federal children's bureau that would investigate and report on the circumstances of all American children. In 1912, the NCLC succeeded in passing an act establishing a United States Children's Bureau in the Department of Commerce and Labor. On April 9, President William Taft signed the act into law. Over the next thirty years, the Children's Bureau would work closely with the NCLC to promote child labor reforms on both the state and national level.



**National Child Labor Committee (NCLC):** Government organization established in 1904 and charged with finding ways to reduce child labor.



#### Primary Source: Photograph

One of the iconic images from the Gilded Age, this photograph of a young girl working at the Lancaster Mills has come to symbolize the thousands of children who worked in factories around the turn of the century rather than attending school.

In 1915, Pennsylvania Congressman A. Mitchell Palmer, who would go on to be Attorney General, introduced a bill to end child labor in most American mines and factories. President Wilson found it constitutionally unsound and after the House voted 232 to 44 in favor on February 15, 1915, he allowed it to die in the Senate. Nevertheless, Arthur Link has called it “a turning point in American constitutional history” because it attempted to establish for the first time “the use of the Commerce Clause commerce power to justify almost any form of federal control over working conditions and wages.”



**Keating-Owen Act:** Law passed in 1916 prohibiting the shipment of products across state lines created with child labor. It was struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in

### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

In 1916, Senator Robert L. Owen of Oklahoma and Representative Edward Keating of Colorado introduced the NCLC backed **Keating-Owen Act** which prohibited shipment in interstate commerce of goods manufactured or processed by child labor. The bill passed by a margin of 337 to 46 in the House and 50 to 12 in the Senate and was signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson. However, in 1918 the law was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in a five-to-four decision in *Hammer v. Dagenhart*. The court, while acknowledging child labor as a social evil, felt that the Keating-Owen Act overstepped congress' power to regulate trade.

The NCLC then switched its strategy to passing of a federal constitutional amendment. In 1924 Congress passed the Child Labor Amendment, however, by 1932 only six states had voted for ratification while twenty-four had rejected the measure. Today, the amendment is technically still-pending and has been ratified by a total of twenty-eight states, requiring the ratification of ten more for its incorporation into the Constitution.

In 1938, the National Child Labor Committee threw its support behind the **Fair Labor Standards Act** (FLSA) which included child labor provisions designed by the NCLC. The act prohibits any interstate commerce of goods produced through oppressive child labor. The act defines "oppressive child labor" as any form of employment for children under age sixteen and any particularly hazardous occupation for children ages sixteen to eighteen. This definition excludes agricultural labor and instances in which the child is employed by his or her guardians, such as in a family shop. On June 25, 1938, after the approval of Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill into law; the FLSA remains the primary federal child labor law to this day. Students who want to work during the school year must first apply for a **work permit** from their school. Although they may see this as an inconvenience, it is in fact and important protection against the child labor abuses of the past.

#### EDUCATION REFORM

The Progressives embraced education reform. Employers wanted a better educated workforce to fill increasingly technical jobs. Classical liberals believed that public education was the cornerstone of any democracy. A government based on public participation would be imperiled if large numbers of uneducated masses voted unwisely.

Church leaders and modern liberals who were concerned for the welfare of children believed that a strong education was not only appropriate, but an inalienable right. Critics of child labor practices wanted longer mandatory school years. After all, if a child was in school, he or she would not be in the factory.

In 1870, about half of the nation's children received no formal education whatsoever. Although many states provided for a free public education for children between the ages of 5 and 21, economic realities kept many children working in mines, factories, or on the farm. Only six states had compulsory education laws at this point, and most were for only several weeks per year.

Massachusetts was the leader in tightening laws. By 1890, all children in Massachusetts between the ages of 6 and 10 were required to attend school at least twenty weeks per year. These laws were much simpler to enact than to enforce. truant officers were necessary to chase down offenders. Private and religious schools had to be monitored to ensure quality standards similar to public schools.

*Hammer v. Dagenhart* in 1918. It was replaced by the Fair Labor Standards Act.



**Fair Labor Standards Act:** Law passed in 1938 protecting workers, and effectively ending child labor in America.



**Work Permit:** Permission granted from a school for a teenager to work. It is one of the effects of the Fair Labor Standards Act and is designed to protect young Americans from the abuses of child labor.



### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

Despite resistance, acceptance of mandatory elementary education began to spread. By the turn of the century, such laws were universal throughout the North and West, with only the South lagging behind. There, under the laws of Jim Crow, the public schools in operation in the South were entirely segregated by race in 1900. Mississippi became the last state to require elementary education in 1918.

Other reforms began to sweep the nation. Influenced by German immigrants, kindergartens sprouted in urban areas, beginning with St. Louis in 1873.

The most famous reformer of the time was **John Dewey**. Dewey applied pragmatic thinking to education. Rather than having students memorize facts or formulas, Dewey proposed “learning by doing.” He emphasized the importance of free, public education in promoting democracy. Dewey also championed the development of **normal schools**, colleges that specialized in preparation of future teachers. By 1900, one in five public school teachers had a college degree.

More and more **high schools** were built in the last three decades of the 1800s. During that period, the number of public high schools increased from 160 to 6,000, and the nation’s illiteracy rate was cut nearly in half. Despite the expansion of high schools, still only 4% of American children between the ages of 14 and 17 actually attended a high school. For most Americans, an eighth grade education was sufficient.

Higher education was changing as well. In general, the number of colleges increased, owing to the creation of public land-grant colleges by the states and private universities sponsored by philanthropists, such as Stanford and Vanderbilt.

Opportunities for women to attend college were also on the rise. Mt. Holyoke, Smith, Vassar, Wellesley, and Bryn Mawr Colleges provided a liberal arts education equivalent to their males-only counterparts. By 1910, 40% of the nation’s college students were female, despite the fact that many professions were still closed to women.

Although nearly 47% of the nation’s colleges accepted women, African American attendance at white schools was virtually nonexistent. Black colleges such as Howard, Fisk, and Atlanta University rose to meet this need.

#### POLITICAL REFORM

The Populist movement influenced progressivism, especially in the promotion of political reform. While rejecting the call for free silver, the progressives embraced the political reforms of secret ballot, initiative, referendum, and recall. Most of these reforms were on the state level. Under the governorship of **Robert La Follette**, Wisconsin became a laboratory for many of these reforms, enacting them first so other states could see an example to copy.

The Populist ideas of an income tax and direct election of senators became the **16<sup>th</sup> Amendment** and **17<sup>th</sup> Amendment** to the United States Constitution under progressive direction.



**John Dewey:** Advocate for education reform at the turn of the century. He championed the development of normal schools, which were colleges that prepared future teachers.



**Normal School:** A form of college that would train future teachers. They were especially promoted by John Dewey at the turn of the century.



**High School:** Free public schools for students after 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They first became common around the turn of the century.



**Robert La Follette:** Progressive governor of Wisconsin. He led the way in promoting many reforms in state government.



**16<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Constitutional amendment that made a federal income tax legal.

### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

Reformers went further by trying to root out urban corruption by introducing new models of city government. The **city commission** and the **city manager** systems removed important decision making from politicians and placed it in the hands of skilled technicians. Such reforms did a great deal to reduce the power of political machines like New York's Tammany Hall.

#### ENVIRONMENTALISM

As America grew, Americans were destroying its natural resources. Farmers were depleting the nutrients of the overworked soil. Miners removed layer after layer of valuable topsoil, leading to catastrophic erosion. Everywhere forests were shrinking and wildlife was becoming scarcer.

The growth of cities brought a new interest in preserving the old lands for future generations. Dedicated to saving the wilderness, the **Sierra Club** formed in 1892. **John Muir**, the president of the Sierra Club, worked valiantly to stop the sale of public lands to private developers. At first, most of his efforts fell on deaf ears. Then Theodore Roosevelt moved into the Oval Office, and his voice was finally heard.



**17<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Constitutional amendment that provided for the direct election of senators.



**City Commission:** A legislative body for a city. Sometimes called a council, this form of government was a progressive reform and limited the influence of corrupt political machines by allowing voters to select city leaders.



**City Manager:** A professional selected by a city government who executes policy. This was a progressive reform and sought to separate the decision to spend public money from the awarding of contracts, thus reducing corruption.



**John Muir:** Environmentalist at the turn of the century who became friends with President Theodore Roosevelt and founded the Sierra Club.



**Sierra Club:** Environmental organization formed in 1892 by John Muir.

#### Primary Source: Photograph

President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir at Yosemite National Park in California. The two leaders had a shared interest in conservation and became friends.

### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

Roosevelt was an avid outdoorsman. He hunted, hiked, and camped whenever possible. He believed that living in nature was good for the body and soul. Although he proved willing to compromise with Republican conservatives on many issues, he was dedicated to protecting the nation's public lands.

The first measure he backed was the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902. This law encouraged developers and homesteaders to inhabit lands that were useless without massive irrigation works. The lands were sold at a cheap price if the buyer assumed the cost of irrigation and lived on the land for at least five years. The government then used the revenue to irrigate additional lands. Over a million barren acres were rejuvenated under this program.

John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt were more than political acquaintances. In 1903, Roosevelt took a vacation by camping with Muir in Yosemite National Park. The two agreed that making efficient use of public lands was not enough. Certain wilderness areas should simply be left undeveloped.

Under an 1891 law that empowered the President to declare national forests and withdraw public lands from development, Roosevelt began to preserve wilderness areas. By the time he left office 150,000,000 acres had been deemed national forests, forever safe from the ax and saw. This amounted to three times the total protected lands since the law was enacted.

In 1907, Congress passed a law blocking the President from protecting additional territory in six western states. In typical Roosevelt fashion, he signed the bill into law — but not before protecting 16 million additional acres in those six states.

Conservation fever spread among urban intellectuals. By 1916, there were sixteen national parks with over 300,000 annual visitors. The **Boy Scouts** and **Girl Scouts**, groups originally founded in England, formed to give urban youths a greater appreciation of nature. Memberships in conservation and wildlife societies soared.

Teddy Roosevelt distinguished himself as the greatest Presidential advocate of the environment since Thomas Jefferson. Much damage had been done, but America's beautiful, abundant resources were given a new lease on life.

#### CONCLUSION

When the United States became involved in the First World War, attention was diverted from domestic issues and progressivism went into decline. While unable to solve the problems of every American, the Progressive Era set the stage for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century trend of an activist government trying to assist its people.

The Progressives were involved in so many different areas of life, that sometimes it can be hard to pin down a definition. Based on what the Progressives of history did, what do you think? What does it mean to be progressive?



**Boy Scouts:** Organization for boys founded in Britain and brought to America at the turn of the century to promote citizenship and stewardship of the environment.



**Girl Scouts:** Organization for girls founded in Britain and brought to America at the turn of the century to promote citizenship and stewardship of the environment.

### 3 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PROGRESSIVE?

#### SUMMARY

Farmers in the West were upset with the railroad in the late 1800s. They needed railroads to carry their crops to the East where they could be sold to hungry people in growing cities. However, railroads were the only way to move these products, and they were charging enormous rates, so the farmers wanted government to take over the railroads and lower prices. The farmers also wanted inflation which would make it easier for them to repay loans more easily. Thus, they wanted the government to start minting silver money. These two key political goals led to the creation of the Populist Party. A group of farmers led by Jacob Coxey even marched to Washington, DC to demand change. William Jennings Bryan championed these ideas. Although he never won the presidency, Bryan's Cross of Gold Speech captured the Populists' grievances. Government regulation of the railroads and free coinage of silver didn't become law, and eventually, the Democratic Party took on these issues and absorbed the Populist voters.

Other reformers around 1900 were more pragmatic. They looked for small changes they could achieve. These were the Progressives.

Some political reforms did become law. Initiatives, referendums and recalls became law, making it easier for the people to get rid of corrupt politicians and pass laws that politicians might be unwilling to vote for on their own. City commissioners became common as a way to stop political machines. The 17th Amendment provided for the direct election of senators. Before this, the state legislatures had elected senators.

Americans passed the 16th Amendment to make an income tax legal. The graduated income tax required the wealthy to pay a higher percentage of their income than the poor.

Some progressives were inspired by religion. The Social Gospel Movement encouraged people to serve others the way they believed Jesus would have done. They created the YMCA and YWCA. They built settlement houses to help the waves of new immigrants. They opened the Salvation Army to serve the poor. This era of service-minded Christianity is sometimes called the Third Great Awakening.

Other Progressives tried to improve working conditions. The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire showed just how bad working conditions were. These reformers were especially concerned with children who had to work instead of attending school. Although the Keating-Owen Act that was passed at the time was later declared unconstitutional, the Fair Labor Standards Act still stands as protection against exploitation of children as workers.

Progressives worked to improve public education and the first free, public high schools were built.

The first environmentalists emerged. President Theodore Roosevelt helped launch the National Park Service as a means of protecting America's natural wonders. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts were founded, as was the Sierra Club.



## KEY CONCEPTS

**Free Coinage of Silver:** Objective of the Populist Party. They wanted inflation to ease loan repayments and asked the government to go off the gold standard. This was the topic of William Jennings Bryan's famous "Cross of Gold" speech.

**Graduated Income Tax:** An income tax system in which wealthy individuals pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes than lower class individuals.

**Initiative:** When citizens can gather signatures and force their legislature to vote on an issue.

**Referendum:** When citizens can gather signatures and have a proposed law put on a ballot so everyone can vote. This was a way to enact legislation that might otherwise have been prevented by business interests who could pay off elected officials.

**Recall:** When citizens can gather signatures and force a vote to remove an elected official. This was enacted to curb corruption in government.

**Whistle-Stop:** Short campaign speeches given from the back of a train car as it stopped in small towns. They were a way spreading a candidate's message in the days before radio, television or the internet.

**Laissez Faire:** A government policy toward business that favored low taxes and regulation.

**Social Darwinism:** An idea common at the turn of the century applying the survival of the fittest concept to human experiences. It argued that people and nations that succeed did so because they were inherently superior to those who lost or were less successful.

**Pragmatism:** A way of approaching problems developed by William James at the turn of the century. It advocated that people did not need to accept life as it was, but could work for change.

**Social Gospel Movement:** A movement at the turn of the century based on the belief that helping the poor was a Christian virtue. Members of the movement built settlement houses, formed the YMCA and YWCA and founded the Salvation Army.

**Settlement House:** A place in large cities where new immigrants could come to learn English, job skills, and find childcare while they worked. The most famous was Hull House in Chicago.

**Work Permit:** Permission granted from a school for a teenager to work. It is one of the effects of the Fair Labor Standards Act and is designed to protect young Americans from the abuses of child labor.

**Normal School:** A form of college that would train future teachers. They were especially promoted by John Dewey at the turn of the century.

**High School:** Free public schools for students after 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They first became common around the turn of the century.

**City Commission:** A legislative body for a city. Sometimes called a council, this form of government was a progressive reform and limited the influence of corrupt political machines by allowing voters to select city leaders.

**City Manager:** A professional selected by a city government who executes policy. This was a progressive reform and sought to separate the decision to spend public money from the awarding of contracts, thus reducing corruption.



## LOCATIONS

**Hull House:** The most famous settlement house. It was founded by Jane Addams in Chicago in 1889.



## LAWS

**Keating-Owen Act:** Law passed in 1916 prohibiting the shipment of products across state lines created with child labor. It was struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in Hammer v. Dagenhart in 1918. It was replaced by the Fair Labor Standards Act.

**Fair Labor Standards Act:** Law passed in 1938 protecting workers, and effectively ending child labor in America.

**16<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Constitutional amendment that made a federal income tax legal.

**17<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Constitutional amendment that provided for the direct election of senators.



## GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

**National Child Labor Committee (NCLC):** Government organization established in 1904 and charged with finding ways to reduce child labor.



## PEOPLE AND GROUPS

**Patrons of Husbandry/Grange:** Organization of farmers in the late 1800s who, suffering from high shipping costs and debt, advocated for government regulation or railroad rates and the free coinage of silver.

**Populist Party:** Political party formed in the late 1800s out of the Grange Movement. They advocated for the free coinage of silver, a graduated income tax and government regulation of business. Their leader was William Jennings Bryan. Eventually their members mostly joined the Democratic Party.

**Jacob Coxey:** The leader of a group of Populist farmers who marched to Washington, DC in 1894 demanding reform.

**Coxey's Army:** A group of Populist farmers who marched to Washington, DC in 1894 demanding reform.

**William Jennings Bryan:** Populist, Progressive, and later democratic leader who championed the rights of farmers. His "Cross of Gold" speech catapulted him to national fame. He ran four times for president but never won.

**William McKinley:** Republican President first elected in 1896. He defeated William Jennings Bryan. Reelected in 1900, he led the nation through the Spanish-American War, but was assassinated.

**Progressives:** Groups of people at the turn of the century interested in making change in society, business and government. They were often urban, northeastern, educated, middle class, and protestant.

**Progressive Party:** A minor political party formed in 1912 to champion progressive issues.

**Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA):** Organization founded by members of the Social Gospel Movement to give young men a place to improve physical fitness and moral character.

**Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA):** Organization founded by members of the Social Gospel Movement to give young women a place to improve physical fitness and moral character.

**Christian Science:** Religious group founded at the turn of the century which tried to find a balance between traditional Christian teaching and new discoveries in science and technology.

**Salvation Army:** British service organization that was transplanted to America as part of the Social Gospel Movement. They serve the needy by providing shelters for the homeless and soup kitchens.

**Jane Addams:** Founder of the Settlement House movement.

**John Dewey:** Advocate for education reform at the turn of the century. He championed the development of normal schools, which were colleges that prepared future teachers.

**Robert La Follette:** Progressive governor of Wisconsin. He led the way in promoting many reforms in state government.

**John Muir:** Environmentalist at the turn of the century who became friends with President Theodore Roosevelt and founded the Sierra Club.

**Sierra Club:** Environmental organization formed in 1892 by John Muir.

**Boy Scouts:** Organization for boys founded in Britain and brought to America at the turn of the century to promote citizenship and stewardship of the environment.

**Girl Scouts:** Organization for girls founded in Britain and brought to America at the turn of the century to promote citizenship and stewardship of the environment.



## EVENTS

**Panic of 1893:** Financial crisis in the 1893.

**Third Great Awakening:** Term for the general increase in religious practice at the turn of the century. It included the Social Gospel Movement and establishment of organizations such as the Salvation Army, YMCA, YWCA, and Christian Science Church.

**Triangle Shirtwaist Fire:** A well-publicized fire in New York City in which young women chose to jump to their deaths to escape the flames. Public outrage led to important workplace safety reforms.



## SPEECHES

**Cross of Gold Speech:** 1896 speech by William Jennings Bryan at the Democratic National convention arguing for the free coinage of silver

# 4

## F O U R T H Q U E S T I O N WAS SUFFRAGE ESSENTIAL TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF WOMEN?

I S T H E  
**AMERICAN  
DREAM**  
ACHIEVABLE?

### INTRODUCTION

The story of American women can be told as a series of bursts of activity and reform, and the Progressive Era is one such time. Many of the most active progressive reformers were women, and many of the issues the progressives addressed related directly to the needs and interests of women. Mostly White, upper-middle-class women, many had received a college education and felt obliged to put it to use. About half of these women group never married, choosing independence instead.

For women who did not attend college, life was much different. Many single, middle-class women took jobs in the new cities. Clerical jobs opened as typewriters became indispensable to the modern corporation. The telephone service required switchboard operators and the new department store required sales positions.

For others, life was less glamorous. Wives of immigrants often took extra tenants called boarders into their already crowded tenement homes. By providing food and laundry service at a fee, they generated necessary extra income for the families. Many did domestic work for the middle class to supplement income.

Of all the changes these women Progressives achieved, perhaps none was greater than the right to vote. Long denied to them, women had been fighting for suffrage for over 100 years and the final passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920 was the crowning jewel of their work.

But did women have to win the right to vote in order to make a difference? Was suffrage essential to improve the lives of women?



## 4 WAS SUFFRAGE ESSENTIAL TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF WOMEN?

### VICTORIAN VALUES

The 1800s are often referred to as the Victorian Age, named after Queen Victoria of Great Britain who ruled for 1837 to 1901. The time was one of conservative social rules, especially related to women. As was true in much of Europe, Victorian values dominated American social life. The notion of separate spheres of life for men and women was commonplace. The male sphere included wage work and politics, while the female sphere involved childrearing and domestic work. In the United States, historians have dubbed this idea the **Cult of Domesticity**.

Industrialization and urbanization challenged Victorian values. Men grew weary of toiling tireless hours and yearned for the blossoming leisure opportunities of the age. Women were becoming more educated, but upon graduation found themselves shut out of many professions. Immigrants had never been socialized in the Victorian mindset.

At the vanguard of a social revolt were the young, single, middle-class women who worked in the cities. Attitudes toward sex were loosening in private, yet few were brave enough to discuss the changes publicly.

One exception was **Victoria Woodhull**. In 1871, she declared the right to love the person of her choice as inalienable. Indeed, she professed the right to free love. She and her sister, Tennessee Claflin, published their beliefs in the periodical Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly.

Woodhull's support of free love likely started after she discovered the infidelity of her first husband, Canning. Women who married in the United States during the 1800s were bound into the unions, even if loveless, with few options to escape. Divorce was limited by law and considered socially scandalous. Women who divorced were stigmatized and often ostracized by society. Victoria Woodhull concluded that women should have the choice to leave unbearable marriages.

Woodhull believed in monogamous relationships, although she also said she had the right to change her mind. In her view, the choice to have sex or not was, in every case, the woman's choice, since this would place her in an equal status to the man, who had the capacity to rape and physically overcome a woman, whereas a woman did not have that capacity with respect to a man.

In 1871, Woodhull declared, "To woman, by nature, belongs the right of sexual determination. When the instinct is aroused in her, then and then only should commerce follow. When woman rises from sexual slavery to sexual freedom, into the ownership and control of her sexual organs, and man is obliged to respect this freedom, then will this instinct become pure and holy; then will woman be raised from the iniquity and morbidness in which she now wallows for existence, and the intensity and glory of her creative functions be increased a hundred-fold..."

In this same speech, Woodhull said of **free love**, "Yes, I am a Free Lover. I have an inalienable, constitutional and natural right to love whom I may, to love as long or as short a period as I can; to change that love every day if I please, and with that right neither you nor any law you can frame have any right to interfere."

To be sure, not everyone agreed.



**Cult of Domesticity:** Idea that men should leave home to work and earn money while women stayed at home to cook, clean and raise children. It developed in the early 1800s with the onset of the industrial revolution.



**Victoria Woodhull:** Women's rights advocate in the late 1800s. She was most famously a champion of free love.



**Free Love:** The idea that women should be able to love whomever they want for however long they wanted, and change their mind as many times as they wanted. It was championed by Victoria Woodhull in the late 1800s.

## 4 WAS SUFFRAGE ESSENTIAL TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF WOMEN?



Primary Source: Photograph

Victoria Woodhull, Champion of Free Love

Woodhull railed against the hypocrisy of society's tolerating married men who had mistresses and engaged in other sexual dalliances. In 1872, Woodhull publicly criticized well-known clergyman **Henry Ward Beecher** for adultery. Beecher was known to have had an affair with his parishioner Elizabeth Tilton, who had confessed to it, and the scandal was covered nationally. Woodhull was prosecuted on obscenity charges for sending accounts of the affair through the mail, and she was briefly jailed.

A devout feminist, Woodhull protested the male hold on politics by running for President in 1872. She became the first female American to do so in a time when women did not even enjoy the right to vote. Her criticisms of Beecher and arrest for obscenity fueled sensational coverage in the media during her campaign.



**Henry Ward Beecher:** Famous preacher in the late 1800s in Brooklyn, NY. He had an affair with a married petitioner whose husband sued him. The trial was a nationally publicized public scandal. Victoria Woodhull used the case to argue for free love.



## Primary Source: Editorial Cartoon

"Get thee behind me, Satan!" In this 1872 cartoon by Thomas Nast, a wife carrying a heavy burden of children and a drunk husband, admonishes Satan (Victoria Woodhull), "I'd rather travel the hardest path of matrimony than follow your footsteps." Mrs. Satan's sign reads, "Be saved by free love."

## BIRTH CONTROL

For many feminists, legalizing contraception became a central issue in the campaign for equal social and political rights. In the nineteenth century, **contraception** was often under attack from religious groups, loosely known as the purity movement, which were composed primarily of Protestant moral reformers and middle-class women. This anti-contraception campaign attacked birth control as an immoral practice that promoted prostitution and venereal disease. Anthony Comstock, a postal inspector and leader in the purity movement, successfully lobbied for the passage of the 1873 **Comstock Act**, a federal law prohibiting the mailing of, "any



**Contraception:** Any form of birth control.



**Comstock Act:** Law passed in 1873 that prohibited the distribution of birth control and any material promoting birth control. It was used to prosecute Margaret Sanger.



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article or thing designed or intended for the prevention of conception or procuring of abortion,” as well as any form of contraceptive information. Many states also passed similar laws, collectively known as the Comstock laws, that extended the federal law by outlawing the use of contraceptives as well as their distribution. In response, contraception went underground. Drugstores continued to sell condoms as “rubber goods” and cervical caps as “womb supporters.”

At the turn of the century, an energetic movement arose that sought to overturn anti-obscenity laws and the Comstock Acts. Centered in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City, the movement was largely composed of radicals, feminists, anarchists, and atheists such as Ezra Heywood, Moses Harman, D.M. Bennett, **Emma Goldman**, and **Margaret Sanger**. In 1913, Sanger worked in New York’s Lower East Side, often with poor women who were suffering severe medical problems due to frequent pregnancies, childbirth and self-induced abortions.



**Emma Goldman:** Famous socialist activist at the turn of the century. She advocated for labor and women’s rights, but lost credibility due to her connection to the Haymarket Square riot and President McKinley’s assassin.



**Margaret Sanger:** Champion of birth control in the early 1900s.

### Primary Source: Photograph

Margaret Sanger surrounded by her supporters as she exits a New York courthouse after one of her multiple encounters with the anti-contraception legal system.

Under the influence of Goldman and the Free Speech League, Sanger became determined to challenge the Comstock Acts that outlawed the dissemination of contraceptive information. In 1914, she launched *The Woman Rebel*, an eight-page monthly newsletter that promoted contraception using the slogan, “No Gods, No Masters,” and proclaimed that each woman should be, “the absolute mistress of her own body.” Sanger coined the term **birth control**, which first appeared in her newsletter. Sanger’s goal of challenging the law was fulfilled when she was indicted in August 1914, but the prosecution focused their attention on articles Sanger had written about marriage, rather than those about contraception. Afraid that she might be sent to prison without an opportunity to argue for birth control in court, Sanger fled to England to escape arrest. While Sanger was in Europe, her husband



**Birth Control:** Any form of contraception. The term was coined by Margaret Sanger.

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continued her work, which led to his arrest after he distributed a copy of a birth-control pamphlet to an undercover postal worker.

New York state law prohibited the distribution of contraceptives or even contraceptive information, but Sanger hoped to exploit a provision in the law that permitted doctors to prescribe contraceptives for the prevention of disease. On October 16, 1916, she opened the **Brownsville Clinic** in Brooklyn. It was an immediate success, with more than 100 women visiting on the first day. A few days after the clinic's opening, an undercover policewoman purchased a cervical cap at the clinic, and Sanger was arrested. Refusing to walk, Sanger and a coworker were dragged out of the clinic by police officers. The clinic was shut down, and no other birth-control clinics were opened in the United States until the 1920s. However, the publicity from Sanger's trial generated immense enthusiasm for the cause, and by the end of 1917, there were more than 30 birth-control organizations in the United States.

In the aftermath of Sanger's trial, the birth-control movement began to grow from its radical, working-class roots into a campaign backed by society women and liberal professionals. Sanger and her fellow advocates toned down their radical rhetoric and emphasized the socioeconomic benefits of birth control, a policy that led to increasing acceptance by mainstream Americans. Media coverage increased, and several silent motion pictures produced in the 1910s featured birth control as a theme. Sanger's organization grew, changed names, and has developed over time into **Planned Parenthood**, a nation-wide chain of clinics that provide contraceptive education, women's health services, as well as abortions.

The birth-control movement received an unexpected political boost during World War I, as hundreds of soldiers were diagnosed with syphilis or gonorrhea while overseas. The military undertook an extensive education campaign, focusing on abstinence, but also offering some contraceptive guidance. Previously, the military did not distribute condoms, or even endorse their use, making the United States the only military force in World War I that did not supply condoms to its troops. When American soldiers were in Europe, they found rubber condoms readily available, and when they returned to America, they continued to use condoms as their preferred method of birth control.

The military's anti-venereal-disease campaign marked a major turning point for the movement. It was the first time a government institution had engaged in a sustained, public discussion of sexual matters. The government's public discourse changed sex into a legitimate topic of scientific research, and it transformed contraception from an issue of morals to an issue of public health.

Although Sanger and supporters of birth control were unsuccessful in the early-1900s, their efforts moved the issue forward and made it possible for women's rights advocates in the 1960s and 1970s to make birth control, especially birth control pills, a legal and acceptable part of American life.

### MULLER V. OREGON

In 1909, the Supreme Court decided an important case regarding women in the workplace. The state of Oregon had passed a law limiting the number of hours women were allowed to work outside the home. Legislators at the time believed that women needed to be protected, especially women who were at an age where they might be having and raising young children. Curt Muller, the owner of a laundry



**Brownsville Clinic:** Clinic opened in Brooklyn, NY by Margaret Sanger to provide birth control. It was closed down and Sanger was arrested for violation of the Comstock Act.



**Planned Parenthood:** Modern organization originally founded by Margaret Sanger. They provide health services and information to women, and most controversially, abortions.

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business, was put on trial for violating the Oregon law, and convicted of making his female employee work more than ten hours in a single day. Muller was fined \$10, but appealed his case all the way to the Supreme Court.

In the case **Muller v. Oregon**, the Supreme Court found that Oregon's limit on the working hours of women was constitutional under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, as it was justified by the strong state interest in protecting women's health.

The central question of the Muller case was whether women's freedom to negotiate a contract with an employer should be equal to a man's. In 1908, gender discrimination was commonplace. The Oregon law was not designed to hurt women, but in the thinking at the time, to protect them, and the Supreme Court decided that the government could enact labor laws that were intended to nurture women's welfare for the "benefit of all" people did not violate a woman's right to make contracts.

The case included a few quotes that shed light on societal attitudes about gender roles at the turn of the century. The court wrote, "woman has always been dependent upon man," and "in the struggle for subsistence she is not an equal competitor with her brother." And, perhaps most importantly, the case showed that Americans still valued women primarily because of their role as mothers. The court wrote, "her physical structure and a proper discharge of her maternal functions — having in view not merely her own health, but the well-being of the race — justify legislation to protect her from the greed as well as the passion of man... The limitations which this statute places upon her contractual powers, upon her right to agree with her employer as to the time she shall labor, are not imposed solely for her benefit, but also largely for the benefit of all."

The case divided feminists at the time. Groups like the National Consumer League, which included noted feminists Florence Kelley and Josephine Goldmark, supported the law because it limited working hours for women. However, many equal-rights feminists opposed the ruling, since it allowed laws based on stereotyped gender roles that restricted women's rights and financial independence. While it provided protection from long hours to white women, it did not extend to women of color, food processors, agricultural workers, and women who worked in white-collar jobs. Although later laws have eroded the Muller decision, women still are not guaranteed equal protection under the Constitution.

### SUFFRAGE

Women's **suffrage** in the United States was established over the course of several decades, first in various states and localities, sometimes on a limited basis, and then nationally in 1920.

The demand for women's suffrage began to gather strength in the 1840s, emerging from the broader movement for women's rights. In 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention, passed a resolution in favor of women's suffrage despite opposition from some of its organizers, who believed the idea was too extreme. By the time of the first National Women's Rights Convention in 1850, however, gaining suffrage was becoming an increasingly important aspect of the movement's activities.

At the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, women activists were optimistic about the possibility that they would gain suffrage along with newly freed African



**Muller v. Oregon:** 1909 Supreme Court case that upheld a law limiting the number of hours women could work outside the home.



**Suffrage:** The right to vote.



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Americans. However, activists such as Frederick Douglass and Henry Blackwell argued successfully that the 1860s was the time of the Black male. They feared that linking women's suffrage to African American suffrage would doom passage of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Although the leading feminists of the time argued otherwise, the Civil War resulted only in universal male suffrage, a step in the right direction to be sure, but still, half of all Americans remained outside the political process.



### Primary Source: Drawing

Susan B. Anthony, one of the first advocates for women's suffrage. Anthony was instrumental in the movement in the 1800s but passed away before the final push for the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

The first national suffrage organizations were established in 1869 after the disappointment of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment. **Susan B. Anthony** and **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** led one group, and **Lucy Stone** led another. After years of rivalry, the two organizations merged in 1890 and became the **National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)** with Anthony as its leading force.

Hoping the Supreme Court would rule that women had a constitutional right to vote, suffragists made several attempts to vote in the early 1870s and then filed lawsuits when they were turned away. Anthony actually succeeded in voting in 1872 but was arrested for that act and found guilty in a widely publicized trial that gave the movement fresh momentum. After the Supreme Court ruled against them in 1875, suffragists began the decades-long campaign for an amendment to the Constitution that would enfranchise women. Much of the movement's energy, however, went toward working for suffrage on a state-by-state basis.



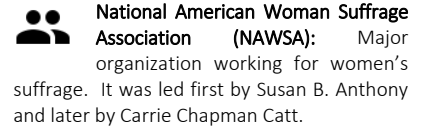
**Susan B. Anthony:** Early champion of women's suffrage. She headed the NAWSA. She was honored when a silver dollar coin was minted in 1979 with her likeness.



**Elizabeth Cady Stanton:** Early champion of women's suffrage. She cofounded a group with Susan B. Anthony.



**Lucy Stone:** Early champion of women's suffrage. Her organization merged with that of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton's to form the NAWSA.



This map, published by the National Woman Suffrage Publishing Company shows the states that enacted laws granting women's suffrage as of 1916. The states and Canadian provinces in white allowed full suffrage. Clearly, western states were ahead of the trend.

In 1916, **Alice Paul** formed the **National Woman's Party (NWP)**, a militant group focused on the passage of a national suffrage amendment. More than 200 NWP supporters, known as the "Silent Sentinels," were arrested in 1917 while picketing the White House. Some of the protestors went on a hunger strike and endured forced feeding after being sent to prison. The two-million-member NAWSA, by then

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under the leadership of **Carrie Chapman Catt**, also made a national suffrage amendment its top priority.

Brewers and distillers, typically rooted in the German-American community, opposed women's suffrage, fearing that women voters would favor the prohibition of alcohol. German Lutherans and German Catholics typically opposed prohibition and women's suffrage. They favored paternalistic families in which the husband decided the family position on public affairs. Their opposition to women's suffrage was subsequently used as an argument in favor of suffrage when German Americans became pariahs during World War I.

Some other businesses, such as Southern cotton mills, opposed suffrage because they feared that women voters would support the drive to eliminate child labor. Political machines, such as Tammany Hall in New York City, opposed it because they feared that the addition of female voters would dilute the control they had established over groups of male voters.



**National Woman's Party (NWP):** Organization founded by Alice Paul in 1916 to work for women's suffrage. They used more aggressive tactics to spread their message.



**Carrie Chapman Catt:** Leader of the NAWSA in the early 1900s. She succeeded Susan B. Anthony and saw the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.



### Primary Source: Photograph

Alice Paul at the time of the fight for the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

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Anti-suffrage forces, initially called the “remonstrants,” organized as early as 1870 when the Women’s Anti-Suffrage Association of Washington was formed. Widely known as the “antis,” they eventually created organizations in some 20 states. In 1911, the **National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage** was created. It claimed 350,000 members and opposed women’s suffrage, feminism, and socialism. It argued that woman suffrage, “would reduce the special protections and routes of influence available to women, destroy the family, and increase the number of socialist-leaning voters.”

Many upper class women opposed suffrage for women. They had personal access to powerful politicians and feared that having the right to vote themselves would mean surrendering their influence.

Most often the “antis” believed that politics was dirty and that women’s involvement would surrender the moral high ground that women claimed, and that partisanship would disrupt local club work for civic betterment.

Despite opposition, the movement for universal suffrage gained ground, especially in the West. Because states manage elections, individual states began passing laws granting women the right to vote. Many western states, which had recently been settled, were still in the process of establishing traditions. Pioneer women who struggled along the trails west and labored under the sun alongside their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons to tame the soil of the prairie were in no mood to take a back seat to the politically. Eastern states, with hundreds of years of traditional gender divisions were less eager to adopt reformist laws.

Paul, Catt and the advocates for suffrage were persistent however, and after a hard-fought series of votes in Congress and in state legislatures, the **19<sup>th</sup> Amendment** became part of the Constitution in 1920. It reads, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

When the Founding Fathers were drafting the Declaration of Independence, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband urging them to “remember the ladies” in their new government. Unfortunately, the Founding Fathers did not, and it took another 144 years and the work of countless women to guarantee both genders the right to vote.

### CONCLUSION

The passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment has been rightly celebrated throughout history as an important step toward gender equality and the expansion of political equality in America. In a land where “all men are created equal,” it was a chance to include women in that idea.

But suffrage did not radically change the lives of women. The same jobs were available, and the same jobs were closed to women. Nearly 100 years later, women are doing much more in our society, but we have still not elected a women president. Which leads us to our question. Could women have achieved all they did without the right to vote? Could they have opened doors of opportunity in education, health and business if the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment had never been ratified?

What do you think? Was suffrage essential to improve the lives of women?



**National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage:** Organization in the early 1900s which fought against the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.



**19<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Constitutional amendment ratified in 1920 granting women the right to vote.

## 4 WAS SUFFRAGE ESSENTIAL TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF WOMEN?

### SUMMARY

During the 1800s, Americans were very conservative about the roles of men and women and especially about how women could behave and dress. In the 1870s, Victoria Woodhull challenged these beliefs. She championed free love, the idea that she could love whoever she wanted and change her mind as much as she wanted. Her ideas were controversial, but she was an important early challenger to social restrictions.

Margaret Sanger believed that women couldn't be free if they had no control over how many children they would have. She challenged the Comstock Act which prohibited the promotion of birth control. She went to jail multiple times for sending information about birth control through the mail and for opening a birth control clinic in New York City. Her organization grew and is now called Planned Parenthood. Although she wasn't successfully able to change the law at the time, the government did become concerned about promoting reproductive health during World War I when American troops started contracting STDs. After the war, Americans continued to use condoms they had learned about while in the army.

Women suffered a legal setback in their quest for equality in the Muller v. Oregon Supreme Court Case when the Court ruled that laws that limited the number of hours women could work were constitutional. They reasoned that the primary role women played in society was to be mothers and that allowing women to work as much as they wanted might hurt society.

Women finally won the right to vote in 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment. Women had been working for this right since the early 1800s, but Alice Paul and Carrie Chapman Catt succeeded in convincing men in government to approve the amendment. Many western states had already granted women the right to vote in state elections.



## KEY CONCEPTS

**Cult of Domesticity:** Idea that men should leave home to work and earn money while women stayed at home to cook, clean and raise children. It developed in the early 1800s with the onset of the industrial revolution.

**Free Love:** The idea that women should be able to love whomever they want for however long they wanted, and change their mind as many times as they wanted. It was championed by Victoria Woodhull in the late 1800s.

**Contraception:** Any form of birth control.

**Birth Control:** Any form of contraception. The term was coined by Margaret Sanger.

**Suffrage:** The right to vote.



## LOCATIONS

**Brownsville Clinic:** Clinic opened in Brooklyn, NY by Margaret Sanger to provide birth control. It was closed down and Sanger was arrested for violation of the Comstock Act.



## LAWS & COURT CASES

**Comstock Act:** Law passed in 1873 the prohibited the distribution of birth control and any material promoting birth control. It was used to prosecute Margaret Sanger.

**Muller v. Oregon:** 1909 Supreme Court case that upheld a law limiting the number of hours women could work outside the home.

**19<sup>th</sup> Amendment:** Constitutional amendment ratified in 1920 granting women the right to vote.



## PEOPLE AND GROUPS

**Victoria Woodhull:** Women's rights advocate in the late 1800s. She was most famously a champion of free love.

**Henry Ward Beecher:** Famous preacher in the late 1800s in Brooklyn, NY. He had an affair with a married petitioner whose husband sued him. The trial was a nationally publicized public scandal. Victoria Woodhull used the case to argue for free love.

**Emma Goldman:** Famous socialist activist at the turn of the century. She advocated for labor and women's rights, but lost credibility due to her connection to the Haymarket Square riot and President McKinley's assassin.

**Margaret Sanger:** Champion of birth control in the early 1900s.

**Planned Parenthood:** Modern organization originally founded by Margaret Sanger. They provide health services and information to women, and most controversially, abortions.

**Susan B. Anthony:** Early champion of women's suffrage. She headed the NAWSA. She was honored when a silver dollar coin was minted in 1979 with her likeness.

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton:** Early champion of women's suffrage. She cofounded a group with Susan B. Anthony.

**Lucy Stone:** Early champion of women's suffrage. Her organization merged with that of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton's to form the NAWSA.

**National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA):** Major organization working for women's suffrage. It was led first by Susan B. Anthony and later by Carrie Chapman Catt.

**Alice Paul:** Advocate for women's suffrage in the early 1900s. She founded the National Women's Party and used more aggressive tactics to publicize the movement.

**National Woman's Party (NWP):** Organization founded by Alice Paul in 1916 to work for women's suffrage. They used more aggressive tactics to spread their message.

**Carrie Chapman Catt:** Leader of the NAWSA in the early 1900s. She succeeded Susan B. Anthony and saw the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

**National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage:** Organization in the early 1900s which fought against the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.



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# AMERICAN D R E A M ACHIEVABLE?

The Gilded Age was a time when Americans made tremendous leaps forward in business. We became an urban nation. We reformed our government and expanded voting rights. We were compassionate. We were readers and our writers helped us understand both the good and the bad in society.

However, it was not a happy time for everyone. Thousands of poor suffered in terrible conditions. Fleeing poverty in other nations did not guarantee wealth in this one. Immigrants faced polluted, dangerous cities and long work for little pay. Horatio Alger may have written novels that celebrated the American Dream, but not everyone was able to make that dream come true. Many Americans simply were poor their entire lives.

The idea that hard work would lead to upward social mobility and success ran directly counter to the Social Darwinists who argued that success was a matter of survival of the fittest in the same way that animals and plants in nature thrived or failed. Humans and businesses were no different. The strongest were successful, and success was a sign of superiority. Dreams had nothing to do with it.

What do you think? Is the American Dream achievable?



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