



Chapter 16

Uncovering Problems at the Turn of the Century

What social, political, and environmental problems did Americans face at the turn of the 20th century?

16.1 Introduction

Jacob Riis, a photographer and journalist, took the picture of three homeless boys sleeping in an alley that you see on the opposite page. It is one of many arresting photographs that made Riis one of the most respected journalists in New York City in the late 1800s.

Homeless boys were a common sight in New York at the time. In his book *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis wrote about the conditions of the urban poor. In one passage, he described the boys who lived on the streets:

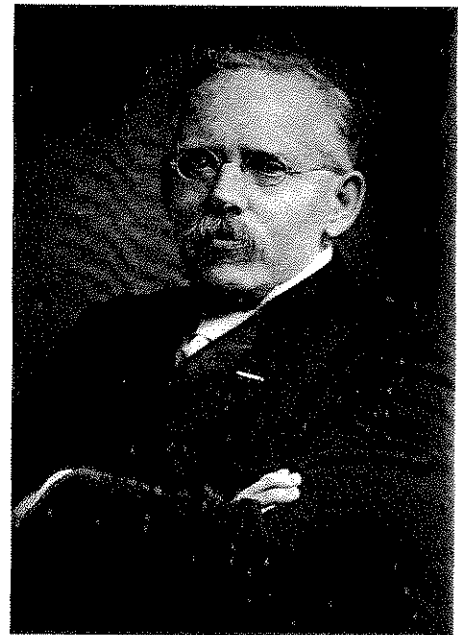
Like rabbits in their burrows, the little ragamuffins sleep with at least one eye open, and every sense alert to the approach of danger: of their enemy, the policeman, whose chief business in life is to move them on, and of the agent bent on robbing them of their cherished freedom. At the first warning shout they scatter and are off. To pursue them would be like chasing the fleet-footed mountain goat . . . There is not an open door, a hidden turn or runway, which they do not know, with lots of secret passages and short cuts no one else ever found.

—Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, 1890

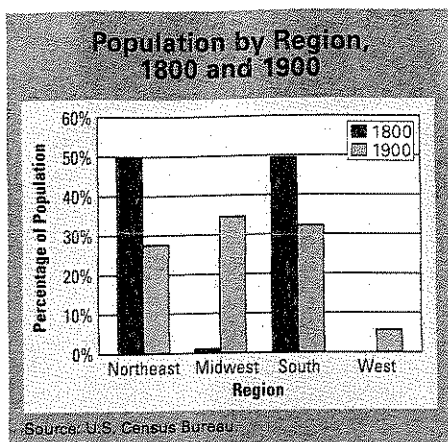
Riis was no stranger to poverty himself. He had arrived in New York as a poor immigrant in 1870 and had suffered through hard times. When he became a reporter, he dedicated himself to exposing the conditions of the poor.

Riis was one of a group of journalists known as **muckrakers**. President Theodore Roosevelt gave them that name because they “raked the mud of society.” They uncovered the nation’s problems and wrote about them.

In this chapter, you will read about the social, environmental, and political problems Americans faced in the early 1900s. In the next two chapters, you will see how reformers worked to solve these problems.



Jacob Riis was a Danish immigrant who became a photographer and journalist in New York City in the late 1800s. He documented conditions of urban poverty and published his work in the book *How the Other Half Lives*. Riis was one of a group of journalists known as muckrakers, who exposed the nation’s problems at the turn of the 20th century.



The U.S. population shifted to the West during the 1800s. As this graph shows, the percentage of people living in the Midwest and West increased substantially, while percentages in the North and South declined. Westward migration contributed to this shift, as did the rise of midwestern cities like Chicago and Cleveland.

16.2 The State of the Union in 1900

In 1900, the United States looked very different from a century before. Westward expansion had added vast new territory to the country. In addition, the rise of industry had stimulated rapid **urbanization**—the growth of cities—by creating jobs that drew rural residents and new immigrants to American cities. The United States had moved far beyond Thomas Jefferson’s vision of a nation of small farmers. It was becoming an urban, industrial society with an increasingly diverse population from around the world.

Settlement in the West: The Closing of the Frontier By 1900, the nation included 45 states and stretched across the North American continent. Americans had fulfilled what many saw as their “manifest destiny”—their right to expand across the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

This expansion was so successful that in 1890 a report from the Census Bureau announced that the “American frontier” was closed. This report said that most of the land beyond the Appalachian Mountains had been settled. Of course, there was still land available to settlers after 1890, but the popular notion of the “wide-open spaces” of the West was becoming an idea of the past.

Factories Increase Production Industrialization also brought changes to American life. Advances in technology, transportation, and communications helped fuel rapid industrial growth after the Civil War. American factory workers produced more goods much faster than anyone had ever thought possible. The numbers tell the story. In 1865, American industry produced \$2 billion worth of products. By 1900, that figure had risen to \$13 billion. In only 35 years, production had grown by more than six times.

More efficient machines and production methods made this increase possible. The textile industry was one of the first to mechanize. Mass production of

Chicago was founded as a small trading post on Lake Michigan in the 1840s. By 1900, it had grown into a bustling center of commerce and industry. With its lakeside location, Chicago was an ideal hub for railroad lines and shipping. This transport network made it easy to bring raw materials to factories and finished products to markets.



textiles had begun in New England before the Civil War. After the war, the industry spread to the South, where the use of modern machinery produced a boom in textile production. The iron and steel industry also thrived in the late 1800s. Between 1870 and 1900, production rose from about 3 million tons to more than 29 million tons.

As factory production increased, businesses looked for new ways to sell their products. One method was the mail-order catalog. Companies like Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck and Company published and distributed catalogs offering goods of all kinds, from hardware and tools to clothes and appliances. They took orders by mail and shipped the products by railroad and canal to customers around the country.

Other companies, like Macy's and Marshall Field's, opened department stores in major cities. These large stores sold a variety of goods and even offered services, like childcare, all under one roof. Smaller chain stores like Woolworths established branches across the country to serve more Americans in the towns and cities where they lived.

Cities Attract Masses of Newcomers The United States was becoming an increasingly urban nation. In 1800, only 6 percent of Americans had lived in cities. By 1900, nearly 40 percent lived in urban areas.

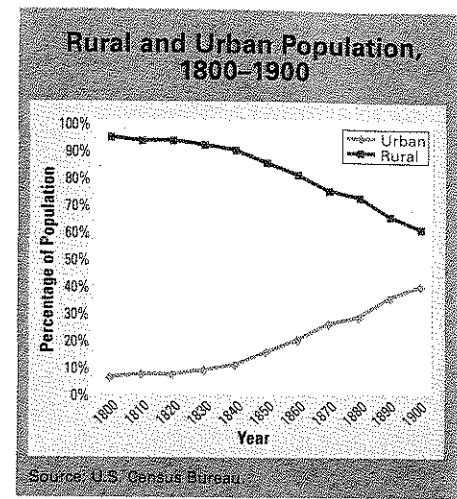
City residents included many newcomers. Most immigrants settled in cities because they could find work and mingle with others from their homelands. African Americans were also beginning to move from the South to northern cities, seeking equality and opportunity. Other new arrivals were rural residents from the North, who moved to cities in large numbers in the late 1800s.

Jobs were the most important attraction in cities, but other features also drew migrants. Cities had many amusements for people to enjoy when not working. Theaters presented popular dramas and musical comedies. A type of theater called vaudeville was especially popular for its lively combination of music, comedy, and dance. Circuses were another common form of entertainment, as were spectator sports like baseball and football.

Cities had other modern attractions. Department stores took up whole city blocks and were so impressive that people called them "palaces of merchandise." Cities also boasted broad avenues lined with the mansions of wealthy residents. In some cities, steel-framed skyscrapers rose above downtown streets, reaching heights of 10 stories or more. These modern buildings become symbols of American progress and prosperity.

The Census Reveals an Increasingly Diverse People Between 1870 and 1920, at least 12 million immigrants arrived in the United States. By 1910, a majority of the population in key cities like New York, Chicago, and Cleveland consisted of foreign-born residents and their children. Over half of the nation's industrial labor force was foreign born.

By the turn of the century, immigration from different parts of the world was changing the face of American culture and society. New waves of immigrants from southern Europe and Asia were joined by immigrants from Mexico and Canada. All of these newcomers added their customs and languages to the nation's mix of cultures.

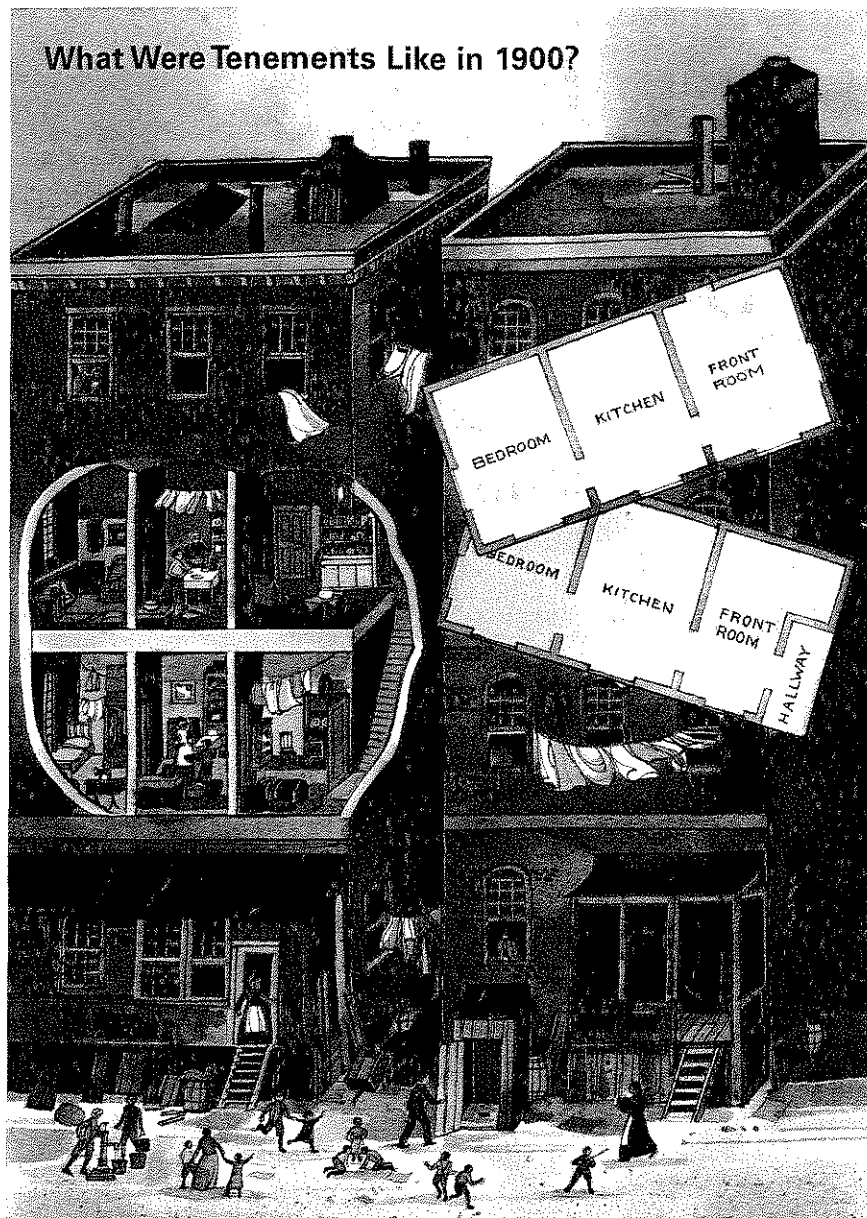


In the 1800s, many Americans moved from rural areas to urban centers. They were drawn by jobs and other opportunities in the cities. As the graph shows, the percentage of Americans living in urban areas rose from 6 percent in 1800 to almost 40 percent in 1900.

16.3 Poor Living and Working Conditions

While many Americans enjoyed the benefits of urban life in 1900, cities and city dwellers also suffered from serious problems. Many urban residents lived in poverty and labored under backbreaking conditions. They may have been tempted by the many goods generated by mass production, but most could not afford them. Even those who did have the money had no guarantee that the products were safe or reliable. Through their writings, muckrakers like Jacob Riis sought to expose these and other problems of urban life.

What Were Tenements Like in 1900?



Tenements lined the streets of poor neighborhoods in New York City in the late 1800s. Tenement residents lived in very cramped conditions. A typical tenement might house 200 people, with 9 or more residents in each small apartment.

Conditions in the Slums Many of the urban poor lived in slum tenements. They were crammed together in shoddy apartment buildings that housed four families on each floor. Each family had a very small living space. In Jacob Riis's book, a typical tenement is described as "one or two dark closets, used as bedrooms, with a living room twelve feet by ten."

Not only was each tenement crowded, but the buildings themselves were packed together. Some slum neighborhoods were among the most densely populated areas in the world. New York's Lower East Side, for example, housed 450,000 people in 1900. That amounted to more than 300,000 people per square mile. In contrast, New York City as a whole housed around 90,000 people per square mile.

One reason for poor living conditions in cities like New York was that the urban **infrastructure** was inadequate for such a large population. Infrastructure refers to the facilities and equipment required for an organization or community to function. It includes roads, sewage and power systems, and transportation. A number of muckrakers blamed city governments for failing to provide adequate infrastructure and services.

Lack of fire protection was one serious problem. At the turn of the century, many city roads and sidewalks were constructed of wood, making cities virtual firetraps. One historian described American cities of the day as "long lines of well-laid kindling." Much of Chicago burned to the ground in 1871, and much of San Francisco burned after the 1906 earthquake.

Cities also suffered from sanitation problems. By 1900, many middle-class homes had running water and indoor plumbing. These amenities reduced the incidence of disease in some neighborhoods, but they increased the amount of wastewater that cities had to remove. City engineers developed sewer systems to do the job. In poorer neighborhoods that lacked indoor plumbing, however, the waste often ended up on the streets. As a result of poor sanitation, contagious diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia often spread quickly through crowded slums.

Problems in the Workplace Muckrakers also exposed terrible working conditions. By 1900, unskilled factory work had replaced most skilled manufacturing jobs. Many factory workers found their work boring and strenuous. One worker said, "Life in a factory is perhaps, with the exception of prison life, the most monotonous life a human being can live."

Factory work was also dangerous. Sharp blades threatened meatpackers. Cotton dust plagued textile workers. And fire posed a risk to nearly everyone who worked in close quarters in factories. Injuries could put workers out of jobs and throw their families into dire poverty.

Other workers, especially in the garment industry, worked at home for companies that paid them for each piece of work they completed. Many employers squeezed their workers by reducing the rate they paid per piece. Workers then had to work harder and faster to earn the same amount. It was common among immigrants for entire families, including children, to do piecework so that the family could make enough money to survive.

Unsafe Products: Buyer Beware Increased production meant that more products were available, but buying them was not always a good idea. Consumers often did not know what was in the products because the government did not regulate product quality.

Meat was one example. In his 1906 novel *The Jungle*, muckraker Upton Sinclair wrote about unsanitary conditions in meatpacking plants: "There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it." Sinclair reported that rat droppings, and even the rats themselves, often become part of processed meat. Canned goods were not regulated either. Toxic chemical preservatives like borax and formaldehyde contaminated many processed foods.

Many common medicines, like cough syrup, were also unregulated. Some products made ridiculous claims for curing illnesses, with the "cures" often involving narcotics. Medicine labels boasted such ingredients as morphine, opium, and cocaine. These substances were not prohibited, but their risks were becoming more apparent. Popular magazines told stories of consumers who believed that these medicines would cure their illnesses, only to fall prey to drug addiction.

Meanwhile, the growth of big businesses went largely unregulated, as monopolies took over many industries. Many Americans worried that small companies were being driven out of business and that monopolies were stifling opportunity. Muckrakers protested that big businesses were growing richer, while small businesses and the poor struggled even harder to survive.



The government did not regulate product quality or safety at the turn of the century. As a result, many medicines contained dangerous substances and made outrageous claims for curing illnesses.

16.4 Problems with the Environment

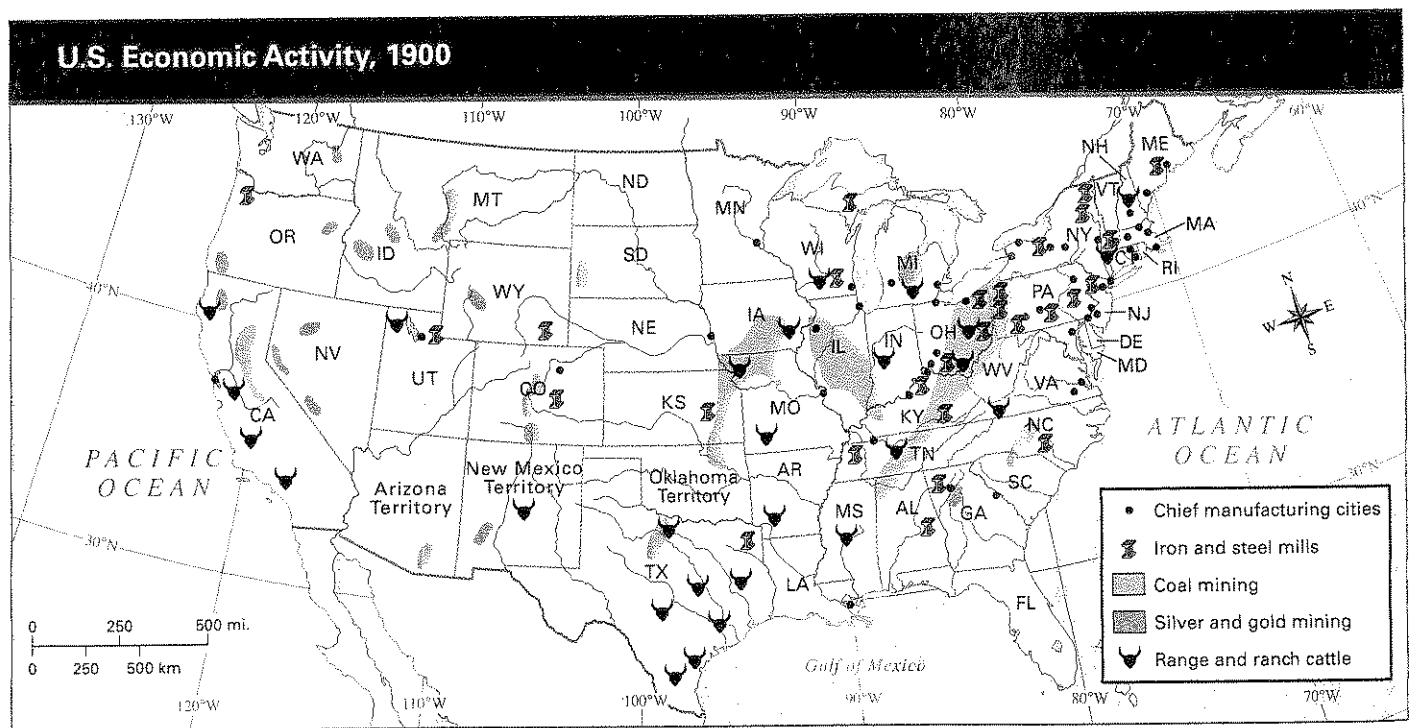
By the turn of the century, urbanization and industrialization were transforming not only American society but also the natural environment. Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman who had visited the United States in 1831, noted that Americans seemed to think nothing of remaking nature for the sake of progress. He observed that in the process of building towns, they could destroy forests, lakes, and rivers and “not see anything astonishing in all this. This incredible destruction, this even more surprising growth, seems to [them] the usual process of things in this world.” By 1900, Americans had settled much of the country and exploited many of its natural resources. Doing so enabled tremendous economic growth, but it also came at a cost to the environment.

Changing the Landscape As the 20th century began, economic activities had significantly changed the landscape. Forests were one example. Farmers cleared trees to plant crops, and loggers cut down large areas of woodland. The government encouraged logging by selling large plots of land in the Northwest for the lumber they could provide. By 1900, only a fraction of the country’s virgin, or original, forests were still standing.

Ranching also transformed the landscape. Before settlers moved onto the Great Plains, buffalo had roamed across the region and grazed on its abundant grasslands. By the time the buffalo returned to places they had grazed before, the grass had grown back. But the cattle and sheep brought in by ranchers grazed the same area over and over, without moving on. As a result, they stripped the land of its natural vegetation and left it more vulnerable to erosion.

The United States had a mixed and growing economy by 1900. Most industry was concentrated in the East and the Great Lakes region. Mining and agriculture, however, were spread across the country.

Extracting Natural Resources The landscape was also transformed by *extractive industries*, businesses that take mineral resources from the earth.



By 1900, mining companies were using explosives and drilling equipment to extract silver, copper, gold, iron, coal, and other minerals. Meanwhile, oil companies drilled deep to pump petroleum out of the ground.

Coal and other minerals were required to fuel industry. Factories burned coal to heat water to make the steam that powered machinery. The country was particularly rich in coal. Between 1860 and 1884, the amount of coal mined per year increased from 14 million tons to 100 million tons.

Mining was dangerous and also harmed the environment. Workers risked being buried alive if a mine caved in, and many got black-lung disease from breathing coal dust day after day. Mining scarred the land, leaving open shafts, slag heaps, and polluted streams behind. Unlike today, the government imposed no environmental regulations on mining companies.

Oil drilling also took its toll on the land. The first commercial oil wells were drilled in Pennsylvania. By 1900, oil extraction was underway in Texas and California as well. But finding oil was difficult. Developers often drilled deep in search of black gold, only to come away empty-handed. Whether successful or not, they left the earth torn behind them.

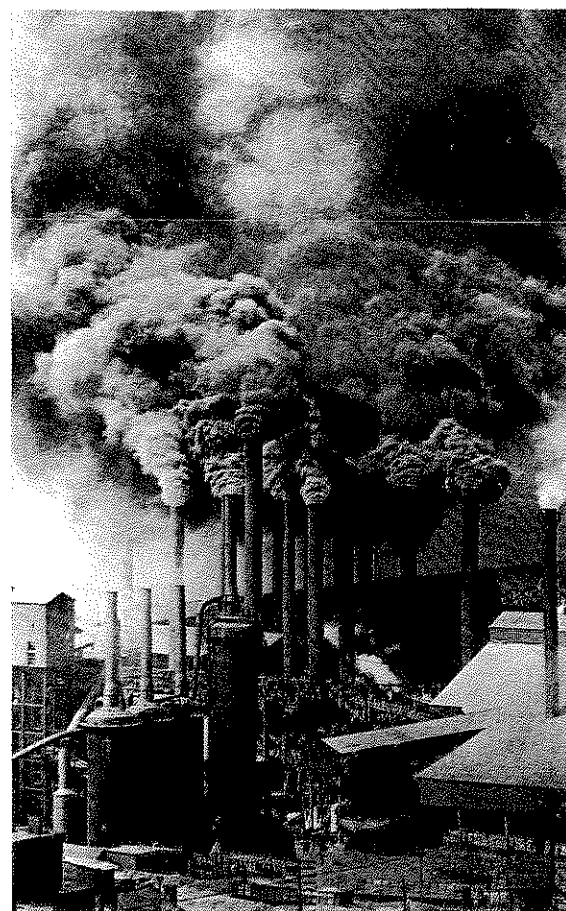
One historian explained that most Americans in the 1800s believed that "the river was waiting to be dammed . . . the prairie was waiting to be farmed, the woodlands to be cut down, and the desert to be irrigated." In other words, most people saw no problem with exploiting the environment and took no notice of the harm being done to the natural landscape.

Polluting Water and Air Economic activities were also polluting the air and water in urban areas. In some cities, factories belched so much black smoke that it was difficult for people to breathe. In 1881, angry residents of New York City reported that the air smelled like sulfur, ammonia, kerosene, acid fumes, and phosphate fertilizer.

Pittsburgh, a steelmaking city, was known for being particularly filthy. The air was so polluted that it soiled everything. The people who lived closest to the steel plants suffered the worst of the pollution, but it affected those living outside the industrial center as well. One historian has written, "People's hands and faces were constantly grimy, clean collars quickly acquired a thin layer of soot, and the . . . coal dust gave clothes hung out in the weekly wash a permanent yellow tinge."

Another pollutant came from animals that lived in cities. Horses pulled carriages, and pigs roamed the streets eating garbage. Animal waste was often left where it landed, producing a foul stench and a serious disposal problem. According to one estimate, the 15,000 horses in Rochester, New York, left enough waste in a year to cover an acre of land with a layer 175 feet high.

City water was also polluted. In some cities, household sewage and industrial pollutants were simply released into nearby water sources without regard for the consequences. Other cities did try to avoid contaminating their drinking water. In Chicago, for example, engineers reversed the flow of the Chicago River so that sewage and factory waste would not flow into Lake Michigan. Some cities developed reservoirs to keep drinking water separate from wastewater. In some cases, rivers that were in the way or became too much of a health hazard were simply paved over.



In most American cities at the turn of the century, factories released their smoke directly into the air. There were no government controls on air pollution. Here, factories belch smoke in Pittsburgh. In Chicago, the smoke grew so thick at times that people could see only one block ahead of them.



In American cities, political leaders called bosses handed out favors and money to their supporters. Bosses helped immigrants in need. They also dispensed city contracts to businesses that paid them off. The size of the party boss in this cartoon symbolizes his power.

16.5 The Politics of Fraud and Bribery

Another problem at the turn of the century was political corruption. In 1902, the muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens published *The Shame of the Cities*, a book on corruption in city government. The book exposed the rampant fraud that plagued cities throughout the nation. Steffens reported that politicians spoke openly about accepting bribes. “I make no pretensions to virtue,” one politician said, “not even on Sunday.”

Corruption served the interests of dishonest politicians and those who bribed them, while weakening the political influence of average Americans. In short, it distorted and undermined democracy.

Political Machines and Bosses By 1900, many cities were controlled by **political machines**. These organizations consisted of full-time politicians whose main goal was to get and keep political power and the money and influence that went with it. Machines were usually associated with a political party. Party politicians joined forces to limit competition, while increasing their own power and wealth. At the top of this corrupt structure was the political boss, who controlled the machine and its politicians. Perhaps the most infamous of these bosses was William “Boss” Tweed of New York’s **Tammany Hall** machine, who in the early 1870s cheated the city out of as much as \$200 million.

Political machines exercised control at all levels of city government, down to the wards and precincts that subdivided most cities. Ward bosses and precinct captains got to know local residents and offered them assistance in exchange for political support. They helped immigrants who were sick or out of work. As one New York City ward boss said, “I never ask a hungry man about his past; I feed him, not because he is good, but because he needs food.” This aid could take a wide variety of forms, including supplying a Christmas turkey or helping a grieving family by paying for a funeral. In exchange, residents agreed to vote for machine politicians at election time.

In some ways, the political machines worked for the good of city dwellers, particularly immigrants. At a time when the national and state governments did not provide such benefits as welfare for unemployed workers, local political machines filled the void.

Corruption in Local and State Politics Although political machines provided aid, they also stifled opportunity for many citizens. Political bosses controlled access to city jobs, such as employment in the police and fire departments or on construction projects. With a good word from a boss, a poorly qualified person could land a job in place of a capable applicant.

The political machine also controlled business opportunities. To get a city work contract, a company often had to donate to the machine’s reelection campaign. Many businesses also paid politicians to keep the city government from interfering with their activities. Such payoffs became part of the cost of doing business. Muckrakers called them bribery.

The political machines profited from urban entertainment, both legal and illegal. In exchange for a payoff, the boss could clear the way for such illegal activities as gambling. Even legal businesses such as baseball teams and

vaudeville theaters paid the machine. Some political bosses saw these payments as informal taxes. They used some of the revenue to help those in need, but they made sure they profited themselves.

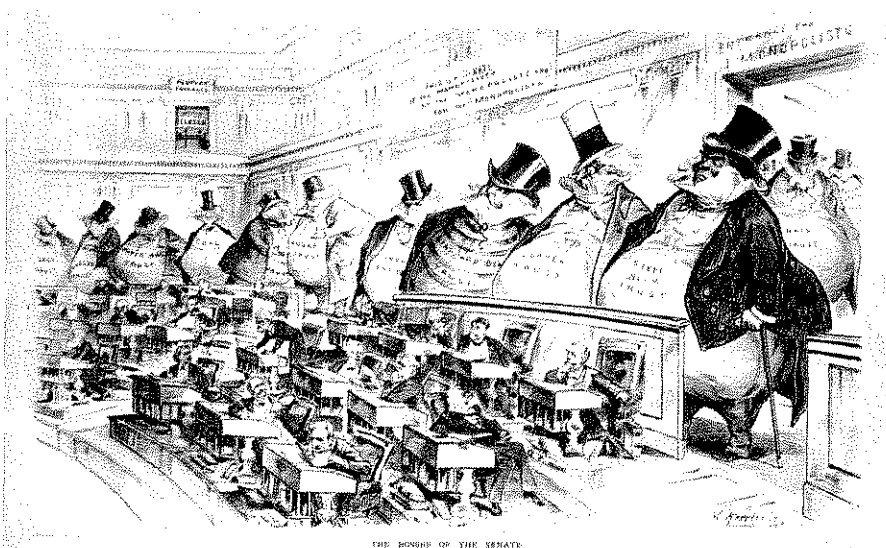
To keep control, political machines rigged local elections. Average citizens had little influence in choosing candidates, and the machine frequently used fraud to win at the polls. Candidates might pay citizens for their votes or stuff the ballot box with phony votes. By controlling elections, political machines maintained their grip on American cities.

At the state level, corrupt politicians tied to powerful industries, such as railroads and mining, controlled many state governments. In passing legislation that favored big business, state legislatures and governors often ignored the needs of average citizens.

Corruption on the National Level The national government also suffered from corruption. For example, the Constitution gave state legislatures the power to choose senators, but corporations often bribed state legislators to elect their favored candidates to the Senate. The Senate became known as the Millionaires Club because many of its members were wealthy men with close ties to powerful industries.

In both the House and the Senate, politicians received campaign contributions from big business in exchange for passing favorable legislation. The railroad monopolies, for example, frequently gave company stock to members of Congress who passed laws that strengthened the railroads. Other businesses also gave money to lawmakers who worked to limit competition.

Politicians frequently engaged in **patronage**—giving jobs to friends and supporters. Some of these jobs went to unqualified people. In 1883, Congress passed the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act to limit patronage. The **Pendleton Act** set guidelines for hiring **civil service** employees—nonmilitary government workers. It set up a civil service commission to administer exams to new applicants for government jobs. The jobs covered by this test had to be specified by the president. Over the years, most presidents have agreed to expand the number of specified jobs. Most civil service jobs are now based on merit.



In the late 1800s, the Senate became known as the Millionaires Club because so many senators got rich on contributions from big business. This 1890 cartoon, titled "The Bosses of the Senate," shows tiny senators completely overshadowed by bloated trusts and monopolies. The sign at the back of the chamber reads, "This is a Senate of the Monopolists by the Monopolists and for the Monopolists!"

16.6 Social Tensions

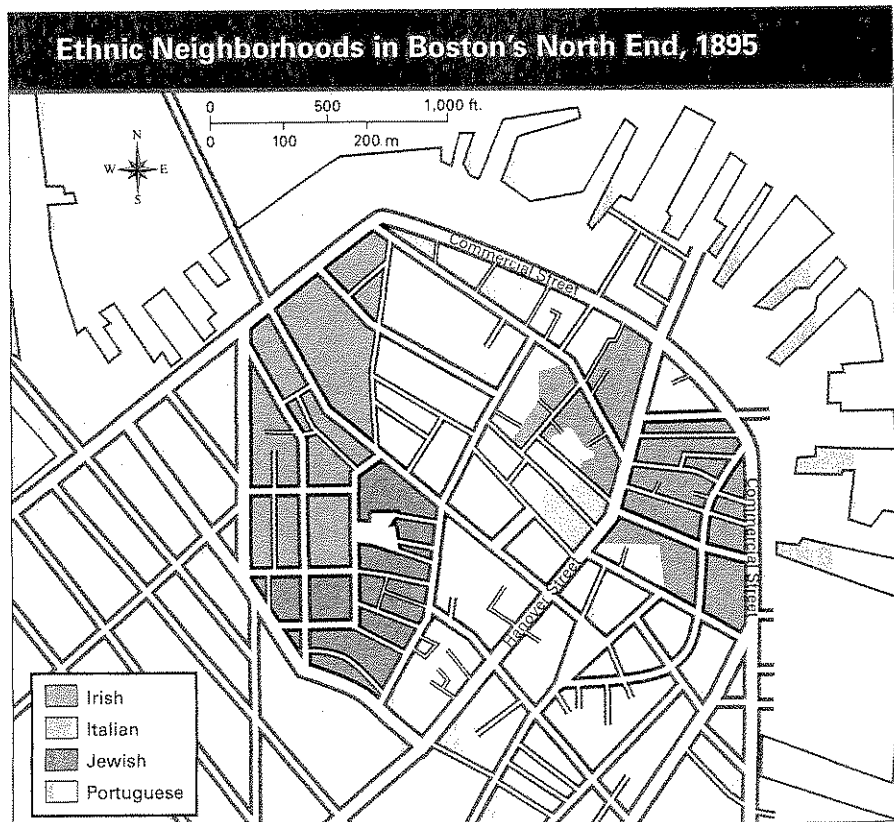
American cities in 1900 brought together many types of people in crowded and often difficult circumstances. As a result, social tensions increased. Many poor city dwellers resented the comfortable lives of the rich, while the rich often looked down on the poor as the source of urban problems. Many African Americans faced racism and violence as they struggled to improve their lives and claim their democratic rights. Women were also demanding greater opportunities and rights. Meanwhile, many American families feared that the stresses and strains of urban life were eroding traditional values.

Growing Differences Between Social Classes During the late 1800s, the gap between rich and poor grew wider. Between 1865 and 1900, a small percentage of Americans grew fabulously wealthy. By 1891, according to one estimate, there were 120 Americans who were worth at least \$10 million, an enormous sum at the time.

At the same time, the arrival of many immigrants swelled the ranks of the working class. Many workers found it nearly impossible to get ahead. Although wages increased gradually, the cost of living rose faster. So while the rich got richer, the poor continued to live in harsh circumstances. Many took lodgers into their tiny flats to help share the cost of rent.

Between the two extremes, the middle class expanded as a result of the rising productivity of the American economy. The growing middle class included doctors, lawyers, ministers, small business owners, merchants, and mid-level company managers.

Ethnic neighborhoods were common in American cities in 1900. Immigrants often clustered together, either out of choice or necessity. This map shows Boston's North End neighborhood in 1895. Note that four primary ethnic groups were crammed into this small area, each group occupying its own section.



By 1900, American cities were organized in ways that reflected class, race, and ethnic differences. The rich lived in mansions on streets like New York's elegant Fifth Avenue. Many Fifth Avenue residents also owned summer homes in places like Newport, Rhode Island. Their summer "cottages" were actually mansions resembling European palaces.

During this period, many middle-class families moved to comfortable homes in newly built suburbs. The men often commuted on streetcars, part of new urban transit systems. Members of the middle class tried to make their homes appear as elegant as the homes of the wealthy. Their houses often featured stained glass windows and fine furniture. Many also had reproductions of famous paintings hanging on their walls.

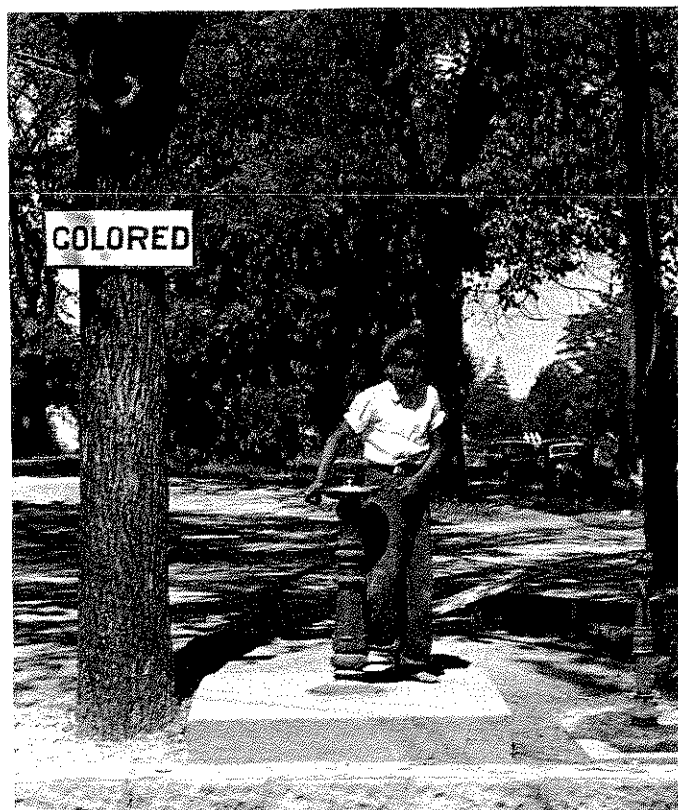
Working-class people remained in the cities. Immigrants tended to cluster together in ethnic neighborhoods, where they could maintain many of their old customs. Some immigrants, however, stayed in these areas because they were not allowed to live anywhere else. The Chinese in San Francisco were jammed together in one district known as Chinatown because they were barred from other areas. In cities like San Antonio and Los Angeles, Mexican immigrants lived in neighborhoods called *barrios*. African American migrants, too, generally lived in neighborhoods separated from other city residents.

Life for African Americans In the 35 years since the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, African Americans had made few gains in their struggle for equality. Many southern states had passed Jim Crow laws that segregated blacks from whites in trains, schools, hospitals, and other public places. Signs saying "White Only" and "Colored Only" told black Americans which waiting rooms they could enter, which bathrooms they could use, and where they could sit in theaters. Segregation affected nearly every aspect of public life in the South at the beginning of the 20th century.

In addition, by 1900 most African Americans in the South had been disenfranchised. Although the Fifteenth Amendment declared that voting rights could not be denied on the basis of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude," southern states found ways to bypass the law. Some state laws required potential voters to prove that they could read and write. These literacy tests often kept African American men from voting. So did poll taxes and property requirements. "Grandfather clauses" were another way to deny African American men the vote. Such clauses limited voting only to those men whose fathers or grandfathers had had the right to vote in 1867.

Violence against blacks was also common. Between 1882 and 1900, about 70 lynchings took place every year, mostly in the South. The victims were typically hanged or burned to death. In some cities, in both the North and the South, large-scale mob violence broke out against African Americans.

In response to racism, many African Americans fled from the South in the late 1800s. By 1900, more than 30 northern cities had 10,000 or more black residents. The number of black migrants from the South increased even more dramatically in the years that followed.



Jim Crow laws in the South segregated African Americans. This photograph shows a segregated drinking fountain. Such laws made it almost impossible for southern blacks to advance by isolating them and denying them opportunities to participate fully in American life.

Children often worked long hours for low wages. Lewis Hine, who documented conditions of child labor in the early 20th century, took this photograph of children picking cotton.

New appliances made available through mass production changed the lives of many middle-class and upper-class women. Washing machines, gas stoves, carpet sweepers, and other conveniences made housework easier. For some women, however, these appliances also gave rise to new homemaking expectations. Gas stoves, for example, were far easier to use than wood stoves. But as they became available, cookbooks began to feature more time-consuming recipes. Nonetheless, the new appliances helped many women find more time for social causes and charitable activities outside the home.

Some women had the chance to attend college, too. A number of women's colleges, like Vassar, Wellesley, and Bryn Mawr, had opened after the Civil War. By 1890, nearly half of all American colleges accepted women. But the number of women in college was still fairly small compared with the number training for such occupations as teaching and nursing.

As the 20th century began, most American women did not have the right to vote. Although a few western states had granted voting rights to women, there was still no women's suffrage at the national level. Women known as suffragists actively pursued voting rights.

Challenges for the American Family The American family also faced challenges at the turn of the century, most notably around the issue of child labor. By 1900, roughly one out of every five children between the ages of 10 and 15 was a wage worker. About 1.7 million children toiled in factories, sweatshops, and mines or worked in other nonfarm jobs such as shining shoes and selling newspapers. “Breaker boys” in coal mines often worked 14 to 16 hours a day separating slate rock from coal. Grueling workweeks could stretch to 72 hours, leaving child workers little time for anything else.



Lack of education was another problem. Although public education expanded in the late 1800s, working for wages kept many children out of school. By and large, African Americans had even fewer educational opportunities than whites. In the segregated South, schools for blacks were often of inferior quality. Some African Americans, however, gained useful vocational training at all-black colleges such as Alabama's Tuskegee Institute.

Many people saw alcohol as another obstacle to improving family life and society as a whole. Since the early 1800s, there had been calls for temperance, or moderation in drinking habits. By the late 1800s, the **temperance movement** had grown significantly. While some reformers emphasized moderation in drinking, a growing number wanted to ban alcohol altogether. Men who did not drink, they argued, were more likely to keep their jobs and to work hard to support their families. Many reformers believed that making alcohol illegal would help lift poor families out of poverty and improve social conditions in the cities.

In addition, many parents worried that city life was corrupting the morals of their children. They believed that urban entertainments such as vaudeville theaters, dance halls, and amusement parks contributed to immoral behavior by bringing young people together in questionable surroundings, unsupervised by adults. Many parents hoped that strong bonds within families and neighborhoods might protect children from the temptations of city life.

Summary

Americans faced social, political, and environmental problems at the turn of the century. Many of these problems were the result of rapid changes brought on by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration.

Industrialization The rapid growth of industry resulted in poor working conditions for many workers. Monopolies took over industries, squeezing out competition. Some companies also made unsafe products. Muckraking journalists like Upton Sinclair, author of *The Jungle*, worked to expose these problems.

Urbanization Cities grew rapidly with the rise of industry and increased immigration. The infrastructure in many cities could not meet the demands of a growing population. Many immigrants were crammed into poor ethnic neighborhoods, such as New York's Lower East Side, where they had few services.

Environmental damage Industry and urbanization produced air and water pollution. Ranching, logging, and extractive industries also damaged the natural environment.

Political corruption Political machines, like New York's Tammany Hall, fueled corruption in city government. Big businesses influenced state and national governments. Congress passed the Pendleton Act to clean up the federal government by creating a professional civil service.

Tensions in society A growing gap between rich and poor fueled social tensions. African Americans suffered racism and mob violence, while women also faced discrimination. The temperance movement tried to limit or even ban alcohol consumption. Social changes strained American families, and many people feared the loss of traditional family bonds.