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Setting the Stage
The Birth of the Progressive Impulse, 1893–1900

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By 1890, sixty-three million people lived in the United States, the majority of them making their homes in small towns and rural areas, living life much as they had before the Civil War tore the nation apart. Farming, especially prevalent in the Midwest and South, outranked all other occupations. In the North, however, once the war ended, the trend toward industrialization that had begun before the war resumed and gained momentum. In the three decades following the conflict, industrial output in the United States tripled. Approximately five million Americans – or thirteen percent of the population – worked in one of the more than 350,000 industrial firms located mainly in the Northeastern cities. By 1920, census records officially classified the United States as an urban nation for the first time in its history.

On the Farm

For many Americans, life on the farm symbolized a peaceful yet productive way of life. By the turn of the century, crop

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production had soared. American farmers were producing more than twice as much cotton, corn, and wheat than they had in 1870. Surpluses and profitable crop prices improved the farmers' standard of living. "In the country," wrote Harvard University president Charles W. Eliot, "it is quite possible that a permanent [farm] family should have a permanent dwelling." While those who wrote about farming tended to highlight its positive aspects, in reality it was a demanding and risky business, one fraught with tensions.

Romantically perceived as a self-reliant people of plenty, American farmers were not immune from fluctuations in the economy. Expenses for supplies and animals continued to rise throughout the nineteenth century. Large and small farmers who wanted to increase or merely insure their output mechanized. While the use of farm machinery appeared to relieve farmers of some of the backbreaking physical labor, the purchase of new and replacement equipment put farmers constantly in need of cash and credit. As mechanization took hold, any profits from farming were spent on farm equipment, which took priority over household improvements.

In addition to the pressure to maintain status and power by mechanizing, farmers also had to compete with increasing commercialization. The 1910 federal census confirmed that family farms continued to dominate agricultural production, but the seeds of agribusiness had already been sown. In New Jersey and Maryland, commercial farmers employed seasonal migrant labor to pick beans, peas, tomatoes, blueberries, and cranberries. Increasingly, seasonal farm hands were unrelated, even foreign. Some migrant farm workers traveled from harvest to harvest their entire lives, living in shacks or tents without any benefits or ever owning land. The children of these nomadic workers suffered, too. Their parents' transiency meant that the young usually lacked both a stable home life and a proper education.

As industrial farms began to hire more employees, they introduced mass production and new management techniques to American agriculture. These more highly commercial farms raised vast quantities of agricultural products and sold them in

distant markets. Commercial farms relied on rail transportation supported by low freight rates, and the rise of these large-scale enterprises reflected the changes taking place in the larger American society.

No longer could ordinary Americans expect to move west to take advantage of the allegedly free and open space. In 1890, the United States Census Bureau had announced the disappearance of a contiguous frontier line. In his speech to a gathering of historians at the Chicago World's Fair in May of 1893, thirty-three-year-old University of Wisconsin professor Frederick Jackson Turner expounded on the significance of the frontier in American history: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development." While Turner's characterization of the West as the most democratic region of the nation came to dominate the American mindset for the next half century, it did not accurately portray what the Western experience meant for the majority of Americans, especially Native Americans, many of whom were forced onto reservations in the West during the Trail of Tears in the 1830s and who would not even be granted U.S. citizenship until 1924. By 1900, many of the roughly 250,000 Native Americans were farmers. A small number of Indians farmed their own land in the same way as did whites, but most Indians tried as best they could to continue communal land use practices on tribal reservations. Displaced from their ancestral lands and marginalized by mainstream society, Native Americans suffered in silence.

White farmers in the Northeast generally inherited family land that had passed down through several generations. Farm families at the time were typically nucleic, consisting of a husband, a wife, and their children. Small family farmers tried to use local labor whenever they needed extra help. Regardless of the kind of farming in which the family was involved, the long production process required the cooperation of each family member. Farmers coped with challenges by maintaining strong bonds within their families and communities. Kinship ties facilitated the exchange of labor, machinery, and financial assistance. No matter how

geographically isolated their land was, farmers and their families were rarely alone.

Despite the rapid pace of change around them, the work routines of farm families changed little over time. To the casual observer, it seemed like men made the decisions when it came to deciding what type of crops to grow or when to purchase equipment, while women kept the family going on a daily basis. However, Nancy Gray Osterud's study of farm women in New York's Nanticoke Valley, *Bonds of Community* (1991), revealed that by virtue of the degree of cooperation required to run a successful farm, men and women crossed over the boundaries of gender roles to assist each other more than historians initially realized. In other words, farm wives participated in decision making at all levels.

Women's days were hard and long, but their work was not considered as important as their husband's, primarily because women's efforts were not always associated directly with income-producing labor. What was being grown or raised dictated the kind of work demanded from women. For example, since dairy farming, and more specifically, the chores associated with maintaining large herds of cows and milking them, was so intense, women as well as children had to work on the farm. Growing corn, on the other hand, required less care latter in the season, once the plants reached a certain height. Farm women's domestic labor almost always entailed preparing food, washing clothes, and spring cleaning, essential but arduous tasks, especially in light of the fact that these chores required hauling wood and water into the home.

Life on the farm meant that the whole family, including the children, maintained the same daily schedule, waking before dawn to do early morning chores in the home or barnyard. Before heading off to the fields, the family, often joined by hired hands, ate a hearty breakfast of meat, eggs, potatoes, and porridge in cold weather or cereal in warmer weather. Coffee was the adult beverage, while the children drank milk. Farmers took a lunch break at around noon and then returned to the fields to resume their work until supper time. Most farm children attended

school during the day. They left for school after breakfast but had to walk or ride the long distance to town to get there. Country schools ran from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and tended to be small, one-room schoolhouses with instruction focused on recitation. Almost every "pupil" used William Holmes McGuffey's *McGuffey's Eclectic Readers*, which was heavy on morality and conformity, and idealized and extolled the virtues of seemingly uncomplicated rural and village life. Evening time after dinner was generally a quiet one, with children doing schoolwork, men reading a local newspaper or perhaps *Harper's* or *Atlantic Monthly* magazine, and women sewing or mending by the light of kerosene lamps. On weekends, community suppers and church socials were popular pastimes. Annual county and state fairs where members of farm families displayed their agricultural wares and handicrafts and competed for blue ribbons provided welcome diversions from the routines of rural life.

Turn-of-the-century farmers and their families grew most of what they needed or bartered among themselves, trading surplus food for manufactured products such as tools, medicine, and liquor. They also purchased from general stores where owners tried to avoid clutter by stocking groceries on one side of the store and dry goods such as tobacco, patent medicine, thread, thimbles, candy, and shaving implements and other toiletries on the other. Gloves, stocking caps, milk pails, and cooking pots hung from the ceiling. Store keepers sold kerosene and whiskey in the back of the store. Rural merchants sold new products by demonstrating them, installing wall clocks and telephones in their stores to prove their usefulness. Fall markets in the town centers in rural areas featured the surplus products of farm wives and daughters, homemade foodstuffs and crafts such as applesauce and sauerkraut, feathers for pillows, as well as brooms, soap, baskets, and potted plants.

In general, some farmers accepted and others resisted what historian Hal S. Barron's *Mixed Harvest* (1997) refers to as the second great transformation – the move from rural to modern life. The first phase of this transformation entailed the migration of former farmers to the cities, where, once settled, they sought

factory jobs. But even farmers who stayed behind on their farms were affected by modernization. Many became active consumers who ordered desired merchandise from mail-order catalogs rather than purchasing supplies and finished goods at the local general store. Despite their contributions toward meeting consumer demands, farmers saw their overall status in society decline. They formed farmers' organizations known as granges to strengthen social connections and to promote communitarian practices and, later, more formal farmers' alliances to facilitate cooperative buying and advocate on their own behalf in the open market. Eventually, those who spent their lives working the land sought a voice in politics through such alliances.

Those farmers who chose to migrate to the cities became factory workers alongside European agricultural workers who had crossed the Atlantic Ocean in search of employment or a new life. Regardless of their origins, new factory workers found promise in the possibility of steady pay and regular hours. Whether native- or foreign-born, former farmers exchanged the seasonal rhythms that had guided their work lives for the constant grind of industrial gears. Large industries like iron and steel manufacturing set the pace of their workdays. Nonetheless, former rural residents viewed Sundays off and freedom from the elements as tangible benefits of urban industrial life. As the rate of migration from farm to factory escalated, the number of Americans making their living from the land dropped dramatically. In 1870, farmers constituted approximately one-half of the American workforce. By 1920, farmers comprised only about one-quarter of it.

City Life

As newcomers flocked to urban areas, they created a huge new demand for housing, one that landlords large and small tried to meet. Many urban homeowners rented out extra rooms and provided meals for extra income. Others opened boardinghouses to capitalize on the flood of newcomers to their respective cities.

Lodging houses in which a worker could rent a furnished room without meals for a week or a month sprang up. So-called flophouses, on the other hand, were typically run-down accommodations in which one could only rent a bit of space. Housing at all levels was in such demand that in extremely overcrowded slums, men rented beds where they could sleep for a nickel a shift, a different man "flopping" down on the same dirty bed shortly after the prior one rose. Eventually, two Protestant charitable organizations that tried to help urban working people, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) provided support by offering rooms for reasonable prices for single adults who moved to cities. Immigrants who came to the city as family units often found homes in tenements, where they shared sanitary facilities with other tenant families and cooked on a single burner. Apartment houses with private facilities, a suite of rooms on a single floor, electric lighting and appliances, and elevators were built for the most affluent families or single men.

Despite the trend toward multiple-unit residences, from 1870 to about 1910, many city dwellers lived in single family homes. Most working-class families lived in unpretentious "laborer's cottages." These houses were simply furnished, one-story dwellings with a parlor, a kitchen, and two bedrooms. Middle- and upper-class families preferred houses featuring ornate Victorian architecture. Those who could afford them had houses with formal parlors, separate dining rooms, and elaborate lawns and gardens. Front porches adorned almost every house regardless of the family's means. Electricity, running water, and telephone service became available to city residents by the late nineteenth century. Central heating was virtually nonexistent, and, because of their reliance on potbellied stoves, most Americans awoke to cold mornings (Figure 1.1).

While some optimistically viewed cities as the greatest hope for a democratic life, cities also seemed to breed conditions that alarmed middle-class Americans. Some worried about the many powerful interests that had muscled their way into local politics. Transportation and utility companies, public works contractors,



Figure 1.1 Poor women and children gathering coal from the coal yards in Chicago in the early 1900s. Chicago Daily News negatives collection, Chicago History Museum (DN0000522).

liquor dealers, and purveyors of assorted vices exerted their influence over the urban bosses who controlled the city's politics. At the same time, the large numbers of workers all in the same industry in cities such as New York, Chicago, and numerous others saw the rise of organized labor. As a result, cities experienced multiple, sometimes violent, labor conflicts and worker strikes. Finally, the arrival of so many people from different parts of the nation and the world in American cities gave rise to sharp racial tensions, as were evidenced in the first decade of the new century by deadly race riots that broke out in New York City, Atlanta, Georgia, and Springfield, Illinois. Further complicating urban problems, pollution and crime increased proportionally with urban density.

Urban residents wrestled with crowded and cramped conditions at home, but the world outside their doors hardly offered

them much respite. Smoke and soot, both by-products of industrial production, greatly affected urban air quality. Air pollution first surfaced in heavily industrialized cities like Pittsburgh and Chicago but later became a problem in other population centers such as Philadelphia and New York with the shift from the use of anthracite to cheaper, but dirtier, bituminous coal. Public health reformers were shocked by the disease-breeding conditions prevalent in virtually every neighborhood. Garbage such as food waste, wood and coal ash, and horse manure littered the streets. Outdoor privies bordered almost every thoroughfare, and inadequate drainage systems failed to carry away the sewage effectively. The constant noise from streetcars, factories, vendors, and the hustle of life on the streets only added to the unpleasantness of the urban environment.

In addition to the challenging physical conditions dwellers of increasingly crowded cities faced, some people also began to worry about the potential moral harm to urban residents. In late-nineteenth-century New York, the Bowery, an impoverished neighborhood on the Lower East Side, became synonymous with tenement slums. Viewed as a netherworld by many, the area was dominated by brothels, cheap saloons, gambling halls, and rooming houses that rented by the night. Large numbers of homeless persons roamed the streets. These downtrodden urban slums were considered dens of iniquity. The notorious Levee, a vice district in Chicago, housed "sporting clubs" of all kinds that attracted vulnerable newcomers. Twenty-Second Street in the Levee hosted entertainments ranging from the most extravagant brothels to small unadorned houses of prostitution located in boardinghouses and in the backrooms of saloons. Some enterprises provided male prostitutes for interested clients.

The Levee district's unscrupulous trade was so flagrant that Mayor Carter Harrison II appointed a commission in 1910 to investigate vice conditions throughout the city. The following year, the commission released its report entitled *The Social Evil in Chicago*, which prompted a flurry of reforms, including the closing of the Levee's most famous brothel, the Everleigh Club. Soon

afterward, the U.S. State's Attorney launched an attack on the Levee that quieted the once-thriving landscape of concentrated prostitution. As a result of anti-prostitution campaigns led by Protestant reform groups, officials around the country shut down red-light districts, which were usually located near the hearts of cities in hotels, railroad stations, rooming houses, and other nighttime leisure venues. With local government now monitoring public morals, urban police forces could concentrate on fighting crime. Police and fire departments, along with sanitation services, became part of a cadre of standard urban services in Progressive Era American cities.

Despite the downside of city living, it did offer some opportunities for immigrant residents in particular. In his early study of workers in ethnic communities, *Steelworkers in America* (1960), David Brody observed that various ethnic groups creatively carved out social networks that supported their own with churches, fraternal organizations, mutual aid societies, businesses, and religious schools. The literate among them read ethnic-language papers. Most first-generation immigrants spoke their native languages whenever they could.

Diverse immigrant groups clashed with each other and also with native-born reformers who tried to "Americanize" them. While the first generations of immigrants were reluctant to relinquish their native ways, nearly everyone seemed to take part in urban holiday revelry, especially on Christmas and decidedly American celebrations such as Labor Day and the (often rowdy) Fourth of July. Groups gathered in lodges and churches to link the celebration of American independence with their own notions of freedom, play, and ethnic pride. In 1894, President Grover Cleveland signed a federal law declaring Labor Day a national holiday. It became the only official worker holiday between the Fourth of July and Christmas.

To casual observers who avoided the poorest sections, American cities appeared to be vibrant centers of working-class culture. There were over 200,000 drinking establishments in the United States by 1897. In Chicago, saloons outnumbered

grocery stores, meat markets, and dry goods stores combined. By 1915, Chicago housed one saloon for every 335 people, and New York had one saloon for every 515 people. Many saloons catered to particular ethnic or trade-based groups. After long hours on the job, working men centered their social lives around exclusively male domains, including bars, fraternal lodges, and sporting events. Middle-class men preferred to drink at private clubs or in hotels, while working-class men flocked to neighborhood saloons. At the time, saloons provided a variety of services for their customers, from drinking and reading newspapers to keeping valuables in a safe or storing luggage in the basement. With their swinging doors and welcoming owners, they served as centers for local gossip, served food, and provided stages for local politicians. Saloon patrons concerned with their own public image could impress others by buying rounds of drinks for the house.

Turn-of-the-century women and children located their leisure activities in public spaces within close proximity of their homes. They were inclined to use the streets, their front stoops, and local parks for recreation and socializing. Most young children of immigrants attended public schools during the day. Many of these immigrant children would, however, leave school before eighth grade to go to work to help support their families. It was not unusual to see young children playing unattended on the streets while both their parents worked.

Settlement houses, neighborhood centers geared toward improvement, were springing up in immigrant ghettos where so-called settlement workers sought to create a sense of community by bridging the gap between classes and races. Workers tried to help Americanize recent arrivals, alleviate sources of distress, and improve living and working conditions. Many settlement workers had experienced the city and its problems firsthand. Others had read about urban injustices in newspapers and magazines. Most settlement house workers took their religion seriously, with religious sentiment playing an important factor in settlement and reform work.

Hard Times: The Depression of 1893

Caught up in the rush of modernity, Americans watched as towns swelled to cities. One by-product of rapid population growth meant ever-expanding markets. Extractives like coal and oil became increasingly important as raw materials in the production process and as fuel for industrial machinery, farm equipment, and electrical equipment, even as more efficient forms of energy such as electricity increasingly powered industry and commerce. Massive industrial expansion and diversification saw the production of American products create a new independence from European imports.

Technology further stimulated industrial development. Innovative Americans, ranging from backyard inventors to college-educated engineers, developed new machines and created new and more efficient production processes. These inventions facilitated the growth of major industries including steel, oil refining, farm machinery, locomotives, canned food, machine tools, cigarettes, cameras, rubber, and automobiles. Railroad expansion opened new areas to agriculture and linked formerly isolated regions to broader national and international markets. This unprecedented growth, however, was soon interrupted by the fourth and final economic "crisis" of the nineteenth century.

On May 3, 1893, just two days after the World's Columbian Exposition (the Chicago World's Fair) opened in Chicago, the stock market collapsed, intensifying an economic downslide that had started in February. The Philadelphia and Reading Railroads fell to the crisis, followed by the country's leading manufacturer of rope and twine, the National Cordage Company. Amid rumors of stock fraud and other corrupt practices, other railroads, including the Erie; Northern Pacific; Union Pacific; and the Acheson, Topeka, and Santa Fe, failed. Approximately 500 banks and 16,000 businesses, including one-third of all railroads, went bankrupt. By November, economists began to call attention to the unemployed in the nation's three largest cities: approximately 100,000 people in Chicago; 85,000 in New York; and 50,000 in

Philadelphia. Unemployment figures well above ten percent would continue to plague the nation for the next several years.

Urban laborers were not alone in their plight. Farmers' situations grew increasingly precarious. By 1890, approximately thirty percent of farmers had mortgages and were in debt. In 1893, crop prices plummeted along with the economy. Many Americans lost their farms to foreclosures and tax sales. Business owners felt the pinch too. Some manufacturers blamed federal monetary policies that caused inflation and high tariffs on imports for their woes. Others faulted the lavish spending of the Cleveland's administration for their troubles. A few even pointed to the diversion of millions of dollars to the World's Fair to explain the reason for the economic downturn.

The Depression of 1893 marked the starkest economic crisis confronted by Americans to date. When it struck, a greater number of Americans were earning wages than ever before in the nation's history. They used their wages to purchase goods with cash. More Americans were now susceptible to economic forces completely beyond their control.

As the depression deepened, workers around the country suffered. Tens of thousands lost their jobs. The unemployed relied heavily on the kindness of family and friends. Local sources of relief like public assistance and charities offered only marginal aid. Not all Americans were willing to help others. Followers of Social Darwinism believed charitable acts interfered with the natural course of selection – weeding out the weak or unfit. In their minds, hard economic times heightened the competitive environment in which only the "fittest" would survive – the rest would perish. A countervailing, yet increasing popular school of Protestant thought known as the Social Gospel, which sought to attend to social ills by promoting a civic consciousness, supported not only benevolent acts by individuals and voluntary agencies but government action to both alleviate the plight of the unfortunate and prevent future crises.

Just when many had given up hope, almost inexplicably, in late 1897, the economy began to surge. Sales at the New York Stock Exchange skyrocketed, wheat exports soared, and railroads

turned profits. With credit becoming widely available once again, factories began to rehire, and new firms sprang up. With the help of investment bankers, the businesses that survived the depression consolidated, helping to create more powerful amalgamated corporations. As the economic climate prospered, unemployed Americans went back to work.

Businesses: Small to Large

From the debut of his first novel, *Ragged Dick* (1867), Horatio Alger established a new genre of fiction that heroicized young street urchins living in poverty in large, urban centers teeming with industry. With uncommon courage and moral fortitude, Alger's young protagonists struggled against adversity to achieve wealth and acclaim. The hero in *Ragged Dick*, as in other "city stories," started out as an ambitious shoeshine boy who, with hard work and a little luck, rose from poverty to a respectable middle-class position as a postal clerk. Intended as success manuals for boys, Alger's stories became bestsellers. By the time he died in 1899, Alger had written approximately 100 novels set in New York City. Alger's contemporary, William Dean Howells, capitalized on another version of the self-made-man theme with *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1895). Born into a poor farm family, the entrepreneurial Silas Lapham becomes a millionaire from his success in the paint business. Howells's novel was one of the first to focus on the rise of an individual businessman. Both Alger and Howells popularized the "dime store" novel motif of rags to riches that soon pervaded American culture.

Small businesses evolve

In *A History of Small Business in America* (2003), historian Mansel Blackford contends that small businesses were the mainstay of the American economy throughout the Civil War era. Virtually all of the corporate giants started out as small businesses and many small businesses remained sole proprietorships. Until the

1880s, the business of America was small business. As the meteoric growth of large influential enterprises such as railroads, manufacturing corporations, and banks came to dominate a new economic order in the land, businesses had to adjust their basic structures to meet growing demands: some of them had to fight merely to stay in business, while a few of them grew very large.

The retail trade provides a good example of the evolution from small business to large business. Irish immigrant Alexander Turney Stewart pioneered the idea of the department store in the mid-nineteenth century. Stewart started as a linen seller in New York City but quickly diversified to supply customers along the Erie Canal with the merchandise they needed to settle in the hinterlands. In the 1860s, using money inherited from his grandfather, he opened a store on Broadway in New York and catered to urban shoppers by expanding his dry goods inventory to include ready-to-wear clothing and a variety of nonperishable goods. He appealed to women by offering clothing imported from Europe displayed on models at fashion shows. He also started a mail-order business.

Stewart's ingenuity set the model for future department stores. Retailers followed his lead and began to buy goods directly from the factory. They departmentalized their merchandise. Starting in Philadelphia in an abandoned railroad depot, John Wanamaker built branch stores in other cities, paving the way for the rise of chain stores including Filene's in Boston, Marshall Field's in Chicago, and Macy's in New York. Wanamaker realized that the more time shoppers spent in his store, the more they would buy. Seeking to transform the shopping experience, Wanamaker introduced store advertising and electric lights and installed an elevator and restaurant in his store. To attract more affluent shoppers, he pioneered the concept of the money-back guarantee and the price tag. Wanamaker catered to the immigrant market before other large store owners. He drew on practices reminiscent of European marketplaces by placing cheaper merchandise in basement bargain bins, hiring sales clerks versed in immigrant tongues, and letting customers haggle for their purchases.

Rowland Macy was the fourth of six children born into a Massachusetts Quaker family. After opening four unsuccessful dry goods stores in Massachusetts, Macy moved to New York City to open a store in 1858. He added "fancy" consumer lines to dry goods, including clothing and toiletries. Macy eventually sold silverware, china, flowers, books, stationery, and household appliances. The red star that Macy had tattooed on his hand while he was working on a whaling ship as a teenager in his native Nantucket became the store's trademark. He eventually expanded his store and moved it to the main shopping district in Manhattan, taking only cash until the 1950s.

The expanded size and increased variety gave rise to what Wanamaker called "the New Kind of Store." These department stores resembled architecturally designed bazaars. They were lit with skylights and chandeliers, adorned with displays in plate-glass windows, and contained restaurants, a postal service, ladies' lounges, restrooms, gardens, and libraries. By the early twentieth century, these "consumer palaces" became the first choice for urban shoppers. Three- and four-story department stores in city centers became the symbol of urban mass markets.

Other merchants capitalized on the concept of chain stores. The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (later renamed A & P) became one of the first chain grocery stores. It opened in 1869, the same year as the transcontinental railroad. The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company arose from the partnership between George Huntington Hartford and George Francis Gilman. Using Gilman's connections as a grocer and son of a wealthy ship owner, Hartford purchased coffee and tea from clipper ships on the docks of New York City. By eliminating middlemen, the partners were able to sell their wares at "cargo prices." The partners soon expanded across the country, using promotions and giveaways of crockery and lithographs at new store openings to attract customers. By 1900, there were over 200 A & P stores nationwide. The company's success was largely due to its innovative strategy of offering savings and incentives to the consumer. The store kept its management costs low and did not extend credit to customers. Its "club plan" offered an additional one-third dis-

count for customers who formed clubs to make bulk mail-order purchases. By 1886, hundreds of such clubs had been formed. The company pioneered the idea of private labels and house brands; Great American Tea introduced its own inexpensive tea and coffee blends, including the popular "Eight O'Clock" blend.

Frank Winfield Woolworth started his Woolworth's store as a "five-and-dime" drug and variety store in 1881 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where shoppers could buy inexpensive items like crochet hooks, watch keys, and baby goods on impulse. Woolworth, who had worked as a dry goods clerk, had tried several times before in his native northern New York to open novelty stores but failed. His vision of selling specialty and novelty items for under a dime proved so successful that he opened a store in England. Within a few years, Woolworth became a millionaire, controlling more than 600 stores. In 1910, Woolworth commissioned a 792-foot Gothic-style skyscraper on Broadway in New York City to serve as his company headquarters.

In rural areas, mail-order catalogs – first Montgomery Ward's and later Sears and Roebuck – made buying vastly more convenient. Montgomery Ward made use of his affiliation with the Grange movement's supply house to offer mail-order supplies. Richard Sears was a railroad agent who got into the mail-order business in 1886. No longer having to trek to the nearest city to shop, even rural families could order finished goods from clothes to farm equipment from the pages of a catalog. Despite resistance by grocers and local merchants, virtually every rural family owned a Sears catalog, known colloquially as the "Farmer's Bible." They were so popular that schools often used them for math and geography lessons. By 1910, an estimated ten million Americans shopped by mail, buying products sight unseen with satisfaction guaranteed. Astute urban advertisers catered to an ever-growing immigrant market. Advertisers used postcards, newspaper advertisements, business cards, and free calendars to deliver their messages and to pique curiosity.

Fear of competition generated a great deal of tension between large and small businesses. Some shopkeepers tried unsuccessfully to lobby for the passage of laws restricting the growth of

department stores. Others like the entrepreneur William Wrigley, Jr., who initially were hard hit by competition from large stores, profited from the latter's innovations.

William Wrigley, at the age of thirteen, had proven himself a phenomenal salesman, one noted for his unfailing politeness peddling soap for his father's company in Philadelphia. After marrying Ada Foote in 1885, Wrigley decided to try his luck in Chicago, where he sold his own brand of scouring soap and baking powder to merchants. Part of his sales strategy was to include a free product with each sale. He tried umbrellas, cookbooks, and toiletries. Then, at some point, he included a free pack of Zeno chewing gum with each sale. When customers began to demand more gum, Wrigley decided to develop his own brand of chewing gum. After starting his own chewing gum company in 1891, by 1893, the Wrigley Chewing Gum Company introduced Juicy Fruit and Spearmint gum. Despite an economic downturn in 1907, he sustained his company with a $250,000 loan. Wrigley continued to concoct creative advertising schemes, and in 1915, he gathered addresses from all the published telephone books in the country and began a wildly successful marketing campaign sending a free package of gum to every household in the country. His profits in chewing gum allowed him to invest in the Chicago Cubs, and eventually he bought Catalina Island off the California coast.

A Confederate veteran who earned his medical degree at nineteen, Atlanta pharmacist and chemist John Pemberton developed an ingenious marketing scheme for his nerve stimulant and headache remedy, which had originally been based on a French recipe. He reformulated Pemberton's French Wine Coca, by substituting sugar for wine after Fulton County passed a prohibition law in 1886. Pemberton advertised his coca syrup by recommending that it be mixed with carbonated water to create a "delicious, exhilarating, refreshing, and invigorating" soda-fountain beverage but also as the ideal "temperance drink." Renaming his nonalcoholic drink Coca-Cola, he put his son, Charles, in charge of marketing it so that he could turn his attention back to the production of French Wine Coca when Atlanta

repealed the prohibition law in 1887. Pemberton sold the company in 1888, the year he died, and the new owner, Asa Candler, propelled the company to international success.

At the end of the century, Chicago attorney Adolphus Green decided to capitalize on recent advances in mechanization, railroad transport of products, and ready-to-eat foods. He founded the American Biscuit and Manufacturing Company which, through mergers, became the National Biscuit Company (later Nabisco) in New York. In the meantime, workers at the company used shortening to create Uneeda Biscuits, "a flakier cracker" soon to become the company's premier product. Green's law partner, Frank Peters, experimented with packaging. His moisture-proof cardboard box with sealed wax paper liners both kept the crackers dry and protected them from breakage. The company's owners agreed to assure their freshness by delivering the individual boxes of soda crackers directly to grocers who prior to this had sold loose crackers out of massive wooden barrels.

Nabisco launched the first million-dollar advertising campaign to promote sales of what quickly became a recognizable national brand. The crackers sold for five cents a box. The boxes with the little boy in a yellow slicker carrying a box of Uneeda Biscuits were one of the most successful advertising campaigns in history. His image permeated American culture when it appeared on toys and in cartoons and photographs. The use of the cardboard boxes gave a tremendous boost to the box industry. Food had been sold in cans since the 1880s, but Uneeda changed the way many foods and other items were packaged. This was the first advertising campaign to feature packaged, ready-to-eat food. Other food companies like Quaker Oats, which first debuted its product at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, would follow, packaging its cereal in a carton and advertising its trademark Quaker nationwide. The National Biscuit Company became a leader in food quality and the push for sanitation, and it advocated for legislation at the national level. The company was instrumental in lobbying to pass what became the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906.

Processed foods in sanitary sealed cans, boxes, or bottles labeled with brand names, made easily recognizable across the

country through advertising campaigns, transformed how Americans ate. While flour had been a processed food since the 1880s, its premixture with other ingredients as premade "mixes" began when St. Joseph, Missouri, newspaper editor Chris L. Rutt and his friend Charles G. Underwood decided to market pancake mix using surplus flour from a mill that they had purchased in 1888. They faced a glutted flour market and needed a way to use the excess flour from their mill. Drawing on the popularity of minstrel songs and vaudeville shows, Aunt Jemima Pancake Mix, named after a popular song, "Old Aunt Jemima," was introduced at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, paving the way for packaged mixes and puddings.

In Pittsburgh, the son of German immigrant parents, Henry John Heinz revolutionized the processing of food traditionally "put up" or "canned" at home. Heinz began his career by growing vegetables in his mother's garden at a very young age. As a teenager, he established a list of faithful customers who appreciated the young man's polite sales approach. After marrying at the age of twenty-five, Heinz peddled bottled horseradish and celery sauce, which proved unsuccessful, but he restarted his efforts with the help of relatives by bottling ketchup in 1876. A combination of commercial farming, new canning methods, and advertising campaigns made him the largest food processor in the country by 1900. Along with a few other successful food entrepreneurs, Heinz worked toward the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act.

Philip Armour was born on a farm in Upstate New York and spent time in the goldfields of California and worked at a packing plant in Milwaukee before renting a hog-packing plant with his brothers in Chicago in 1872. They purchased a plant in 1874. They used what Henry Ford referred to as a "disassembly line" that used all parts of the animal. Armour's methods proved profitable but resulted in massive pollution and unsanitary practices. He considered himself a philanthropist, yet his largely immigrant workforce lived and worked in squalid conditions, much like those depicted in Upton Sinclair's now classic novel *The Jungle* (1906). Armour also detested labor unions and broke two strikes, one in 1886 and the second in 1894.

By 1915, due largely to health reformers' efforts, cereal produced by brothers John and William Kellogg and C. W. Post replaced the hearty but calorie-laden American breakfast. John Kellogg moved to Battle Creek, Michigan, with his Seventh Day Adventist family and at an early age began his work experience in his father's broom factory and later in a number of print shops. He eventually earned his medical degree from Bellevue Medical College (now part of New York University) in 1875. With his solid medical background, Kellogg became the medical superintendent of the Adventists' Western Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek and immediately began to reform it to "a place where people learn to stay well." He began to test the "Battle Creek idea" regarding the effect of diet, exercise, correct posture, fresh air, and adequate rest on the health and fitness of individuals. His successful program had roots in the Adventist principles of vegetarianism and temperance. John and his brother experimented with processing wheat meal into a food for sanitarium patients and stumbled upon the idea for toasting the dry flakes. William Kellogg kept experimenting by adding sugar and eventually toasting corn. After a falling out with John over this addition, in 1906 Will opened Battle Creek Toasted Corn Flake Company. Kellogg's Cornflakes became extremely popular with Americans looking for a quick, convenient breakfast.

Charles William Post was also considered a pioneer in the packaged food industry. After attending what is today the University of Illinois, Post became a manufacturer of agricultural machinery. In 1891, inspired by a visit to the Battle Creek Sanitarium when seeking a cure for work-related stress, Post founded the Postum Cereal Company. In 1898, Grape Nuts made its debut as a cure for appendicitis, consumption, malaria, and loose teeth.

Across the country small- and medium-sized businesses continued to compete alongside large enterprises. Some smaller manufacturing firms managed to survive by making specialized products. For example, in Philadelphia, basic cloth production was taken over by large mills, so smaller textile mills turned almost exclusively to producing high-quality cloth. Many other

small businesses such as restaurants, laundries, saloons, newspapers, and companies that produced clothing, jewelry, lumber, leather, and furniture, continued to fare well and were not immediately threatened by competition from large businesses. Most small businesses remained single-owner proprietorships or partnerships.

While many single-owner proprietorships, partnerships, and family-owned businesses operated uninterrupted, a number of small businesses did fail in the face of corporate growth. Corporations could establish sales and distribution networks that broke merchants' reliance on small distributors. A prime example of success gained through the use of these modern marketing techniques is the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Isaac Singer did not invent the sewing machine, but his firm dominated the industry due to Singer's use of door-to-door marketing. Singer offered an installment plan to working-class families so that they could make a series of affordable payments on their purchases. Singer salesmen hawked their products in urban neighborhoods as well as trekked into the countryside to appeal to remote rural residents. Sales to farmers' wives accounted for much of the Singer Company's early success. Singer would also be among the first to market his products by advertising internationally. Office machine and farm equipment manufacturers learned from Singer's innovative techniques that effectively outmaneuvered the competition and captured the market.

Big business

Historian Glenn Porter, in *The Rise of Big Business* (1992), asserts that in the aftermath of the Civil War, "the nation remade itself to accommodate the requirements of the modern corporation." While some might disagree with Porter's assessment, all would agree that big business played a major part in transforming the United States from an agrarian society to an urban, industrial nation. Beginning in the 1880s, the completion of national railroad and telegraph networks and the development of energy

technologies, including coal and oil, opened the door for the ascendency of huge corporations.

As the first corporations, railroads developed complex accounting procedures and business practices. To create a system of synchronized nationwide schedules, railroads adopted four standard time zones. By 1899, six railroad lines controlled ninety-five percent of all the railroad tracks in the United States. Through consolidation by combination, they had grown past the point of a big business into a trust. Railroads and telegraph companies were marked by a separation of power between a board of directors who set policy and professional managers who developed production plans with goals for manufacture and marketing. The board of directors controlled the capital – money and materials – and established the policies that guided the firm. Bankers often sat on boards and influenced corporate direction by loaning them money and thereafter placing restrictions on them. Separate ownership and control is perhaps the most striking feature of big business.

Some business owners modeled themselves after banker and investor Andrew Mellon, who bought up enormous blocs of securities to gain control of both the Gulf Oil Company and the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). Professional managers synchronized the corporate workplace and supervised the workforce. With sanitized precision reflected in what the business world came to consider proper attire, blue serge suits with tie and white-collar shirt, the managers summarized progress in organizational charts.

Certain businesses, like John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil, initially grew through "horizontal integration," the control of most or all of the supply of a single commodity or product, in his case kerosene, which, among other things, powered all the gas lamps in the nations. Rockefeller, who hailed from Richford, New York, learned the value of saving money from his mother, a disciplined and religious farm wife. Rockefeller's father provided little guidance for his son, the elder Rockefeller frequently away from home, on the road hawking a "cure" for cancer that he sold for as much as twenty-five dollars a treatment. As a farm boy doing chores for local farmers and raising turkeys for his

mother, the young Rockefeller had saved fifty dollars, which his mother persuaded him to lend to a local farmer. When the farmer paid him back after a year with seven percent interest, Rockefeller learned a valuable lesson – he would let his money work for him rather than becoming a servant working for money.

After the family moved to Cleveland, Rockefeller attended a business college for a short time and at the age of sixteen secured his first job as an assistant bookkeeper for a produce shipping firm. He impressed his employers with his diligence and ability to broker complex transportation deals. Eventually, Rockefeller opened his own grain shipping firm at the age of twenty with a neighbor. Soon thereafter, Rockefeller saw opportunity in the new oil-refining industry and became involved in the processing and shipping in the nascent industry. He quickly became quite successful and bought out all of his competitors, coming to control all of the kerosene production in the nation. If Americans needed kerosene, after 1863, when Rockefeller consolidated his horizontal control of the kerosene market, their only choice was to buy it from a Rockefeller-owned company. Rockefeller went on to monopolize the entire American oil industry.

Other industries that produced food, chemicals, machinery, oil, and metals emerged in capital- and energy-intensive areas. Northeastern industries in particular were amenable to high-volume standardized production. These industries tended to integrate "vertically," meaning that they tried (and in many instances succeeded) to control all the aspects of the production and sale of a product, from the supply of raw materials to the manufacture, sales, and distribution of the final product. Some factory owners went as far as coordinating their own tanker fleets to sell their products internationally.

A number of businesses such as railroads, steamships, urban traction (electric streetcars and cable cars), communications (including telephone and telegraph companies), electric lighting, chemicals, petroleum, coal, and the insurance industry began to reach beyond national borders in the 1890s. Coca-Cola and the United Fruit Company are early examples of American companies that started to market their products and invest millions of dollars in

Canada and Mexico to cushion their profits during the Depression of 1893. Companies that constructed one or more foreign plants by the early twentieth century included DuPont, Ford Motor Company, General Electric, and Gillette. By 1917, due largely to U.S. involvement in industry as part of the World War I effort, giant manufacturing firms were concentrated primarily in areas of metals, food processing, transportation equipment, machine making, oil refining, and chemical products.

Mergers and monopolies

On the eve of the Depression of 1893, the United States produced more timber and steel, refined more oil, packed more canned meat, and extracted more gold, silver, coal, and iron than all of its competitors. There were several reasons for this brisk economic growth. First of all, corporations needed a stable and orderly environment in which to flourish. With the exception of isolated labor strikes, the economic climate of the United States met this need. Additionally, the legal structure in the U.S. accommodated the early growth of big business, for there were not yet any regulations in place that checked the growth of businesses. In cases of labor unrest, governmental authorities sided with the employers. Lastly, as business historian Alfred Chandler contends, American businesses thrived because of homegrown resources. But business leaders were also willing to borrow capital and ideas from abroad. Charles Alfred Pillsbury went to Europe and brought the industrial steel dough roller back to his mill in Minneapolis, making his flour popular internationally, and soon-to-be steel magnate Andrew Carnegie imported Henry Bessemer's steel process, the first inexpensive industrial process that allowed the mass production of steel from molten pig iron, from England. Business leaders networked. They exchanged patents, attended expositions and fairs that displayed new products, and read trade and technical journals.

The "merger movement," which began around 1895 and lasted about a decade, accounted for a significant portion of unfettered corporate growth. In their quest for market control,

companies bought out competitors and went from big to bigger. When U.S. Steel merged with 158 companies into one organization in 1901, American business began exchanging the entrepreneurial model, one man running the show for a corporate model, with control in the hands of a board of directors.

Labor

Accounts of Progressive politicians and reformers who tamed robber barons, cleaned up cities, purified politics, and paved the way for social welfare fill the pages of early books on Progressive history. Throughout most of the last century, however, students interested in studying workers' lives during the Progressive Era were hard pressed for sources. Labor history did not emerge as a formal field of study until the 1970s. Moreover, when scholars finally did begin to write about workers and their experiences, they focused primarily on native-born men in the organized trades. African American, Mexican American, and women workers received only scant attention. Labor historians quickly realized that most workers – white or otherwise – were simply too busy working long hours to compose memoirs of their lives. Minority workers, many of them illiterate, were relegated to history's most obscure shadows.

While investigative journalists of the era, known at the time of their rise as "muckrakers," cast the first light on workers' experiences, it is only in recent decades that scholarly studies have included workers as actors in what labor historian Melvyn Dubofsky in *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865–1920* (1996) calls "the drama of reform." The whims of employers and the fluctuation of the open marketplace came to dictate workers' lives. Workers suffered throughout the Depression of 1893, during which the national rate of unemployment spiked in 1894 and remained high for the next three years. In the first year of the depression, the AFL. the nation's largest labor organization, estimated that the number of unemployed workers exceeded three million, and AFL leaders encouraged mass demonstrations

of the jobless. The hard times forced AFL President Samuel Gompers to suspend his belief in voluntarism, which held that workers should not rely on the government for support on the shop floor but should strive to be self-sufficient. During the summer of 1893, Gompers asked the city of New York to provide direct cash relief for its unemployed workers. By the end of the year, the AFL demanded that the federal government issue $500 million in paper money to fund public works programs. The calls went unheeded.

Some, like Ohio businessman Jacob S. Coxey, went even further. In the spring of 1894, Coxey, the owner of a successful silica sand company, amassed an "industrial army" of unemployed men to march on Washington, D.C., to demand "employment for every man able and willing to work." The job-creation scheme that Coxey proposed relied on the federal funding of public works to provide jobs for the jobless. Onlookers cheered Coxey and his men as they marched through industrial towns on their way to Washington. Coxey's followers (who numbered fewer than 500 by the time they walked into the Capital) were met by about 1,500 U.S. Army troops. Neither President Grover Cleveland nor Congress responded to Coxey's demands. Instead, police arrested Coxey for trespassing, and the marchers disbanded. Although the government failed to respond in the manner Coxey had hoped, his demonstration did force the government and the public to take notice of the situation. A young observer at the time, sociologist Thorstein Veblen saw significance not in the size of the effort but in the demand for relief dispensed by the federal government. Veblen agreed that the government had a basic responsibility for its citizens' welfare, a radical notion at the time. After serving twenty days in jail, Coxey returned to Ohio, where, as the economy picked up, his support dwindled.

Coincidently, the depression began to lift in 1896, just as prospectors discovered gold in Alaska's Klondike River. The depth and duration of the economic downturn had, however, left workers "bewildered" by the changes that they experienced in the modern workplace. In addition, the simultaneous advent and adaption of technology meant that the sheer pace of life

intensified. Synchronized clocks, first introduced at the Fair, were adopted by factories, schools, and even churches. Once back on the job, low wages, long hours, and unsafe workplace conditions topped the workers' list of concerns. Workers lacked even basic safety nets like unemployment insurance if they lost their jobs or workers' compensation if they were hurt or permanently disabled at work. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, working men and women embarked on a long road to improve their situation.

The workplace in transition

Between 1880 and 1900, the ranks of gainfully employed workers in the United States rose by 12 million. The number of workers employed in agricultural pursuits declined, while the number of workers in the garment and tobacco industries doubled. In addition to the increase in the sheer numbers of workers pushing through the factory gates, the rhythm of work changed drastically. For workers who left family farms to venture into the factories or who traveled to the United States onboard a steamship, the slow natural pace of rural life under the sun quickly gave way to the roar of machinery under the glare of artificial lighting. Rather than looking at the sun to keep time, workers had to punch a time clock. In a strange place, surrounded by unfamiliar faces, many workers were directed to learn to perform a sole, monotonous task, one that they performed repeatedly from the time they "clocked in" until the time they "clocked out."

Tensions in the workplace revolved around the workers' desire to control their labor and the managers' efforts to control the workforce. Bosses had little patience for "greenhorns" – newly arrived immigrants who did not understand the expectations of the modern workplace. They were especially irked by the newcomers' diverse ethnic and religious practices. Foremen pushed immigrants to Americanize: learn English, speak it on the job, and strive for efficiency. Likewise, those workers who moved into cities from the country felt alienated.

By the end of the nineteenth century, "sweatshops" employed larger numbers of workers than ever before. Manufacturers provided the raw materials, designed the clothes, and marketed the final product, but manufacturers handed over the actual assembling of the ready-to-wear garments to contractors. The contractors would rent a workspace in a tenement, equip it with sewing machines, and hire approximately ten to twenty workers, usually female immigrants. Each worker performed a specific job. Manufacturers paid contractors a set price for each garment produced, so workers were in turn paid a "piece rate" based on how many finished garments the shop turned out. In the interest of making the highest profits possible, contractors "sweated" their employees by forcing them to work long hours at low wages (Figure 1.2).

New York City quickly came to dominate garment production. Manufacturers in New York benefitted from advances in



Figure 1.2 Lewis Hine photograph of sweatshop workers just finishing their week's work at 87 Ridge Street, New York City, 1908. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, National Child Labor Committee Collection (LC-DIG-nclc-04456).

transportation, the introduction of commercial-grade machinery, and the specialization of labor. The 1904 opening of the subway system gave workers, even poor ones, a way to commute to their jobs. In turn, the garment industry modernized, moving uptown and consolidating its workforce in larger factories that housed more and faster sewing and cutting machines. Rather than stitching together the whole garment, sewing-machine operators specialized in sleeves, lapels, pockets, buttonholes, and cuffs. In Chicago, a center for the production of men's clothing, manufacturers competed in the open market by producing higher grades of garments using finer material and quality workmanship. Hart, Schaffner and Marx, one Chicago firm, also pioneered a national advertising campaign to promote the image of ready-to-wear garments.

The struggle to organize

In 1877, the same year that Reconstruction ended, the United States experienced its first truly national strike when railroad workers rose up to protest continuous wage cuts in Martinsburg, West Virginia. The strike spread from the railroads to the factories and mills and across the country from Baltimore, Maryland, to San Francisco, California. The use of federal troops by President Hayes against the workers provided the impetus for a more powerful working-class movement that tipped power in favor of the industrialists: their businesses continued to grow; they made alliances with government, and technological advancements that could do the work of one or more persons undercut workers' power. Workers suffered major defeats at the hands of business owners, and labor issues would continue to fester during the coming Progressive Era.

At various times throughout the late nineteenth century, workers acted collectively to try to improve their situations. One of them, the 1886 Haymarket Riot in Chicago's Haymarket Square, proved a dismal failure for labor. It began as a work stoppage on the part of McCormick Reaper workers to protest workplace conditions and secure an eight-hour day. The Noble

and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor (KOL), a predecessor to the AFL, promoted "one big union" an inclusive workers' association to which all workers, regardless of skill, could belong, organized a rally in support of the workers' cause. The rally on May 1, 1886, ended peacefully, but two days later, there was a clash prompting police to fire into the crowd, fatally wounding four workers. The next day, a second smaller crowd organized by anarchists and radicals to protest the shootings at the hands of the Chicago police assembled in Haymarket Square. At one point, someone tossed a bomb into a group of policemen, killing eight of them. Police responded by firing wildly into the crowd, killing eight and wounding about 100. A number of the anarchists and radicals were rounded up and indicted for conspiracy. Although to this day no one is sure who threw the bomb, all eight of those charged were convicted. One committed suicide, four were hung, and the remaining four were pardoned in 1893 by Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld. The Haymarket Affair or Haymarket Massacre, as it came to be known, caused the public to label all members of labor unions and their organizers, even those of the rather innocuous KOL, the largest organization in the country at the time, as radicals or anarchists. Indeed, Haymarket dealt a severe blow to organized labor's reputation, which was further damaged over the next decade with the nationally covered Homestead Steel Strike in 1892 and the Pullman Palace Car Strike in 1894.

In June 1892, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie left the country for an extended vacation in his native Scotland, leaving his manager, Henry Clay Frick, in charge of his twelve-mill Homestead steelworks near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Carnegie aimed to employ a compliant and inexpensive labor force numbering almost 4,000 workers. Frick directed his energy toward breaking up the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, a union of about 700 skilled craftsmen trying to organize under the auspices of the AFL. Later that same month, Frick built a barricade to lock the union workers out and called in replacement workers, whom strikers derisively call scabs. He also

employed 300 armed guards from the Pinkerton Detective Agency. A battle between the locked-out union workers and the Pinkertons ensued on July 5, killing about a dozen men on both sides and injuring many more. Although the Pinkertons eventually retreated, the conflict dragged on for six months and workers in other Carnegie mills in Pennsylvania struck in sympathy. Finally, at the Carnegie Company's persuasion, the state militia was called in by the governor of Pennsylvania to end the strike. Even though the workers failed to gain any of their demands, they learned a hard lesson about the overwhelming power of capital and were now wary of businessmen's newfound influence on the government at the state level. The bold and brave call for industrial unionism in the steel industry gave rise to a more grandiose idea of industrial unionism throughout the country. For a few weeks, newspaper coverage of the violence at Homestead did much to turn public opinion to the side of labor. However, within a few weeks after the strike ended, Alexander Berkman, an anarchist who had no known connections to the union, tried to assassinate Henry Frick in his New York City office. Although Berkman shot Frick twice and almost killed him, Frick recovered and the general public renounced the labor movement.

Two years later, in the midst of the depression, workers initiated a strike in Pullman, Illinois, where George Pullman, the manufacturer of passenger rail cars that featured sleeping berths, had built a model company town. Under the Pullman system, workers at his Palace Car Company, lived in company-owned housing, attended company-sponsored churches, and sent their children to Pullman-operated schools. Rents in Pullman were approximately twenty-five percent higher than in neighboring Chicago. When Pullman cut wages by as much as forty percent but did not reduce rent or utility rates, a committee of workers tried to discuss the matter with him, but rather than engaging in discussions, he fired three of the workers. The workers appealed to Eugene Debs of the American Railway Union (ARU) for help. Debs's union issued a passionate call for a nationwide boycott against all railroads that used Pullman cars on their lines.

The boycott, along with sympathy strikes involving a quarter of a million workers in a total of twenty-six states, halted the nation's railroad traffic by midsummer. In the meantime, the General Managers' Association, composed of twenty-six Chicago-area railroads, ordered the dismissal of any worker who refused to report to work. The probusiness Cleveland administration allowed mail cars to be attached to the trains so that strikers who halted most of the U.S. mail traffic were charged under a federal injunction that barred interference with mail delivery. Attorney General Richard Olney, who served on the boards of several railroads, obtained a sweeping injunction against the strikers in the federal court system. Federal troops and state militia were called out in six states. Violent clashes between the troops and strikers resulted in the death of at least fifteen workers. In an unlikely move, AFL president Samuel Gompers urged the workers belonging to AFL affiliates to return to work. Debs and his ARU associates landed in jail.

Within five years, the ARU dissolved. For his part, Debs emerged from the clash as a hero among working-class Americans, joined the Socialist Party, and went on to run for the presidency four times. In the three labor conflicts at the end of the century, the employers, with the aid of the authorities, defeated the workers' efforts. The condition of working people would not begin to improve until the government began to step in on the side of the employees instead of the employers.

The Noble and Holy Order of the KOL rose from ashes of the nation's first labor federation, the National Labor Union, by the late 1860s to become the largest labor organization in the country by the 1870s. Founded in secrecy in 1869 by nine Philadelphia tailors and led by Uriah Stephens, the KOL defied characterization and openly supported the concept of industrial unionism. Welcoming almost all workers regardless of occupation, gender, and presumably race meant that the 1880s membership of the KOL was estimated at nearly one million members. Under President Terrance Powderly, the Knights barred Chinese workers, and their constitution excluded all such "parasites" as gamblers, lawyers, bankers, stockbrokers, and liquor dealers. The Knights'

goals included abolition of child labor, wage equality for women, integration of black workers, and the institution of a graduated federal income tax. Their Knights' most profound legacy would lie in their call for the eight-hour workday.

Within a decade, the Knights quickly fell out of favor, largely because labor's reputation had been damaged as a result of the labor conflicts. In addition to the Knights helping to organize an abortive strike against Jay Gould's southwestern railroads, they led the general strike on Labor Day, May 1, 1886, which ended in the violent and disastrous Haymarket affair. Blamed for the violence, the Knights disbanded.

As the Knights succumbed to public pressure, the AFL, led by cigar maker Samuel Gompers, emerged. This new organization appealed exclusively to skilled white men who were willing to work for large corporations. The workforce changed over time so that "skilled" workers generally came to mean those who were skilled in types of work associated with the factory workplace. As the Depression of 1893 ended, the demand for collective action by workers intensified and membership increased in both traditional and radical labor unions. The AFL numbered 447,000 members in 1897 then doubled in size to boast almost 868,000 members by 1900.

Working women

By 1890, one in four women in the nation's largest urban areas worked for wages. Historians of American women agree with Alice Kessler-Harris's assertion in *Women Have Always Worked* (1981) that poor minority women have always worked, regardless of marital status. The majority of working women did not, as was commonly assumed, work for "pin money" – extra money to be spent on life's luxuries – but out of economic necessity. Many worked as machine operators in textile plants and commercial laundries, as retail clerks in department stores, and as kitchen or counter help in restaurants. Male employment tended to be concentrated in the "hard industries" like railroads, construction, metal working, and mining.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, clerical work became one of the most rapidly growing areas of employment for women. Before 1870, the typical business office was small and staffed exclusively by men, but by 1900, one-third of all office workers were mostly young, native-born, white women. Since typewriters were a fairly new invention and had no historical tie to either sex, women took advantage of the opportunity to learn to operate the machines in high school, business schools, or even in classes at the local YWCA. The money in clerical work was good, and since male office clerks were expected to work their way up to become executives, women filled the constant and growing need for clerical workers in the industrial bureaucracies and as civil servants for the government. In addition to typewriters, women learned to operate Dictaphones, mimeograph machines, and adding machines. A white shirtwaist (blouse) worn with a black skirt was considered practical office wear for female clerks. Hair worn in an "updo" completed the look. Artist Charles Dana Gibson immortalized this style in his illustrations that featured the "Gibson Girl" (Figure 1.3).

Women's workforce participation varied by ethnic and racial group. For example, unmarried Polish women in Buffalo, New York typically took jobs in factories or in private homes as domestic servants, while their counterparts from southern Italy tended to become agricultural workers or took in "homework," paid industrial labor performed at home. Female homework allowed women to remain at home where they could work, supervise their children, and perform the household chores that their husbands expected of them. Women homeworkers often gathered in a single sunlit apartment in which they could keep each other company while performing the monotonous handwork. One of the best-known photographers of the era, Lewis Hine, photographed entire families working around the kitchen table assembling artificial flowers, shelling nuts, or doing the finish sewing on garments.

Until 1900, when household technology began to displace them, more women worked as "private household workers" than in any other occupational category. About one-third of all working



Figure 1.3 Drawing from 1903 by artist Charles Dana Gibson entitled "The Weaker Sex" shows four young "Gibson Girls" observing a diminutive man through a magnifying glass. One woman is about to poke him with a hat pin. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division (LC-DIG-ppmsc-05887).

women largely earned their living as domestic servants. In this category, white native-born women were replaced by Irish immigrants and later by African American women from the South. In Philadelphia by the late nineteenth century, ninety percent of all African American women who worked outside the home did so as domestic servants.

In addition to race and ethnicity, marital status tended to determine women's workplace participation. Many Progressive Era Americans felt that married women employed outside the home had overstepped their domestic boundaries. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin's study of Italian women in Buffalo, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880–1930* (1982), revealed that the married women almost always helped supplement the family's income doing work deemed acceptable by their husbands

either by taking in boarders or by doing seasonal work in canning factories.

By the early 1900s, the Victorian attitude that married women belonged at home gradually began to recede, as an increasing proportion of wives joined the workforce. In 1890, fewer than five percent of married women worked for wages, but by 1920, that percentage had doubled. The historical reality is that working women have always endured lower wages and fewer opportunities than men. Skilled male workers founded unions to demand higher wages and a shorter workday, but those unions took little interest in organizing or recruiting female members.

African American workers

Since the 1970s, historians have chronicled the Great Migration – the mass migration of African Americans from the South to industrial cities in the North and West that began in the pre-World War I years. With their routes predetermined by the railroads, for decades, millions of poor blacks came up out of the poverty-stricken sharecropping South to places like Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Detroit, and even as far west as San Francisco. At the turn of the twentieth century, ninety percent of all blacks lived in the South. By 1920, one-half of all American blacks lived in northern or midwestern cities.

Once in the North, blacks did not necessarily escape prejudice and discrimination, yet the new arrivals did manage to free themselves from the ever-present threats of lynching and the convict-lease system that haunted them in the Jim Crow South. New scholarship contained in Isabel Wilkerson's *Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (2010) reveals that southern blacks who risked migration were not as illiterate or destitute as many scholars once believed. Surprisingly, the migrants generally experienced higher employment rates and more stable families than northern-born blacks. While the relocated African American men found only a few menial jobs open to them, African American women had an easier time finding domestic work and eventually factory jobs in the North. Life in

the North also presented more educational opportunities for black children. Historians have speculated that because African American workers were for the most part absent from the industrial arena until after World War I, white Progressive reformers – men and women – paid little attention to them regardless of their sex. Some middle-class black women did become active Progressive reformers and founded their own race-specific organizations to end segregation and lynching. They too, however, seemed to ignore the plight of black wage workers.

Immigrant workers

Between 1880 and 1920, more than twenty million immigrants entered the United States. By 1900, immigrants comprised at least one-third of the population of Chicago, New York, and Boston. Newcomers from Scandinavia and Central Europe filtered west in search of farmland, while masses of unskilled European peasants, mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe, filled the factories, sweatshops, warehouses, docks, and freight yards of American cities. In small cities, different ethnic groups crowded together into a single neighborhood close to factories or railyards where immigrant men, often along with their children, found employment.

In larger cities, specific immigrant populations – Poles, Italians, Russian Jews – clustered near one another in their own neighborhoods where they managed to maintain at least some aspects of their native-born life and culture. Local merchants spoke the native language, stocked food items that immigrant customers wanted, and extended credit to families. Peddlers hawked meats and produce from their pushcarts that appealed to the tastes of specific immigrant populations, particularly Jews and Italians densely packed in tenement neighborhoods. They sold goods and services ranging from clothes and brushes to dentistry. Here also, traditional religious practices could be reestablished. Ethnic fraternal orders including the Sons of Italy, Polish Falcons, and (Irish) Order of Hibernians provided health benefits and burial insurance in addition to camaraderie. Immi-

grants constantly relied on networks of friends and family to find jobs and housing.

While the earlier wave of immigrants from Northern and Western Europe, who began to arrive in the 1830s, had generally been welcomed by white native-born Americans, Southern and Eastern European immigrants were not. The latter often became targets of anti-immigrant sentiment, especially as particular ethnic groups developed monopolies over particular trades or services in the urban economy. Italians dominated construction jobs in excavating and tunneling; Eastern European Jews comprised the majority of the labor force in the garment industry; Poles and Central Europeans filled the steel mills and meatpacking plants; and Irish immigrants held longshoremen jobs on the East Coast. One xenophobic group that blamed the Depression of 1893 on competition from immigrant labor founded the American Protective Association, a primarily anti-Catholic organization, in 1894. Social workers and other Progressive reformers recognized the need to protect the vulnerable new workers at home, at work, and out in the streets.

A New Era Dawns

Although those who would become known in the future as the Progressives spent the majority of their time reacting to the ills they perceived around them, the nature of their responses has enabled historians to regard the era named in their honor as one characterized by optimism. By the early twentieth century, modernization had crept into virtually every aspect of American life. Nowhere could this be better seen than in the world of leisure. By the early 1900s, new forms of entertainment attracted millions of working-class people who spent their hard-earned money on commercial leisure. For the first time in history, workers could devote part of their days to patronize dance halls, nickelodeons, and other forms of entertainment. Boxing, baseball, and other sports grew from games, played by children and young adults, to tremendously popular big businesses.

Before movie houses were built, single-reel movies were projected in storefronts (vacant stores converted to temporary theaters) across the country by the end of the nineteenth century, but the idea of developing movies as a separate form of entertainment grew out of the penny arcade or amusement parlor. The kinetoscope, or moving-picture "peep" show, proved more popular with arcade goers than slot machines, fortune-telling machines, automatic scales, muscle-testing devices, or even phonographs in largely male commercial entertainment districts. Edwin S. Porter's film *The Great Train Robbery* became a huge hit from the time it previewed in 1903. John P. Harris and Harry Davis opened the first theater designed for the purpose of showing motion pictures in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, in 1905, using the seats from a closed opera house. Movies theaters, called nickelodeons, after the nickel admission price patrons were charged, were extremely popular in working-class tenement neighborhoods where immigrant mothers sent their children on Saturdays to watch silent movies all afternoon. One study estimated that in 1910, approximate one-quarter of New York City's residents attended movie theaters. Although "nickel madness" swept through urban areas in the early 1900s, the middle and upper classes at first did not patronize the movies out of concern for their respectability. Instead reformers tried to have theater owners' licenses revoked.

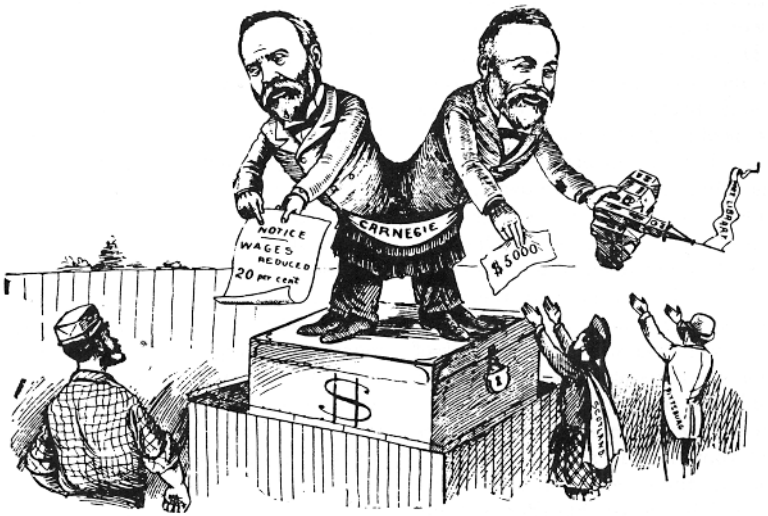
Vaudeville theater, descended from the minstrel shows and saloon burlesque of the prior century, became one of the most popular forms of American entertainment of the early 1900s. Tied to a central booking agency, the vaudeville circuit boasted over 2,000 theaters throughout United States and Canada. Highly paid performers used railroads to travel between the cities in which they played and booked acts over the telephone and telegraph lines. Performances consisted of nine acts that were played twice a day. The acts capitalized on sex appeal and humorous ethnic skits, with writers often referencing local and cultural values in cities and towns in their scripts. Ragtime, the so-called folk music of the American city, accompanied the popular productions. Ragtime melodies were well suited for

brass bands and energetic dances. The songs also provided lively and raucous lyrics suited to musical comedies on stage. In cities with large Jewish populations, Yiddish theater attracted large audiences.

In general, young immigrant workers were excited by the prospects of modern life in turn-of-the-century America. They began to patronize amusements aimed specifically at the younger working class. With their boardwalks filled with games and shows to the rides that were spectacular to the senses, amusement parks eventually began to cater to the middle class and became so popular that by 1919, there were more than 1,500 amusement parks in the United States. The parks offered a secure public meeting place that afforded young people a chance to escape for a few hours or a day the lack of privacy in the tenements. Young women and men previously allowed away from home only in large groups or accompanied by chaperones now began to date without supervision. The casual atmosphere at the parks freed adult minds from the stress of daily life and allowed imaginations to wander.

Many working-class Americans visited museums, libraries, and music halls on their days off. One of Andrew Carnegie's most tangible philanthropic efforts supported the building of free public libraries. With literacy rates on the upswing, more Americans than ever before could read and write. By 1900, approximately ninety-five percent of native-born whites, about ninety percent of immigrants, and almost half of all African Americans were literate. Carnegie wanted to provide access to education and opened more than 1,900 libraries across the country. A famous editorial cartoon of the day posits Andrew Carnegie as a Siamese twin with one-half of him building libraries and the other half cutting the wages of his workers (Figure 1.4).

Other behaviors began to change as well. Mass production not only employed tremendous numbers of workers but made consumer products such as canned milk and food, packaged meats, soap, cigarettes, cereals, and matches readily available for workers to purchase. Ready-made clothes, appliances, and radios rounded out the list. Henry Ford prided himself on the fact that his workers



FORTY-MILLIONAIRE CARNEGIE IN HIS GREAT DOUBLE ROLE.
AS THE TI GHT-FISTED EMPLOYER HE REDUCES WAGES THAT HE MAY PLAY PHILANTHROPIST AND GIVE AWAY LIBRARIES, ETC.

Figure 1.4 Cartoon of Andrew Carnegie representing the conflicting roles played by the wealthiest American capitalists, 1892. *Source*: "Forty-Millionaire Carnegie in his Great Double Role," *The Saturday Globe*, July 9, 1892.

could afford to buy the cars that they produced. Marketing became a science. Advertising professionals began to appeal to all types of consumers, including those of the working class, even the Americanizing children of immigrants.

In the closing decade of the nineteenth century, the country had learned a hard lesson. Ordinary Americans learned that a national slump in the economy translated into personal financial vulnerability. The mass protests, social and political radicalism, labor strikes, and violence that marred the final years of the century seemed, however, to be quickly forgotten in the dawn of the new century. Supported by an increasing number of Americans, a new generation of hopeful reformers emerged who would fundamentally change the relationship between the American people and the government. These were the Progres-

sives. The idea of direct government action that previously had been associated with modern, industrial societies in Europe contributed to the intellectual foundation for the broad-based movement that in the United States would come to be called Progressivism.

It would not be until the 1930s, however, when in the grips of the Great Depression, that the federal government under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) finally adopted policies that assumed some of the responsibility for working peoples' welfare inside and outside of the workplace. Several fundamental questions, then, beg answers. What changes had occurred between the 1890s and the 1930s to create the modern welfare state? And how much credit did the Progressives deserve for having created it? But before we can answer these questions, we need to answer the most pressing question of all: who were the Progressives?