

Chapter 3: The Development of Industrial America

Section 1: The Triumph of Industry

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, coal and steel production skyrocketed, railroads expanded, and new inventions, such as the light bulb developed by Thomas Alva Edison, emerged. There were many reasons for the explosive growth, including the nation's physical geography, millions of immigrants from Europe and Asia filling the labor market, and government policies encouraging business. Industrialization brought a higher standard of living for many. Cities grew. Improvements in transportation and communication made mass consumerism possible.

At this time, large corporations dominated the American scene. These corporations and their owners amassed huge fortunes. John D. Rockefeller gained control of the oil industry. Andrew Carnegie grew rich from the sale of his steel business. Industrialists also established trusts. Small businesses complained about the dangers of monopolies, where single corporations controlled entire industries.

Carnegie and others developed explanations to defend their business methods and massive accumulation of money. Social Darwinism argued that life consisted of a struggle in which only the fittest survived. Carnegie developed a doctrine known as the Gospel of Wealth, which called on those who had accumulated wealth to share their riches for the betterment of society.

In contrast to rich owners, industrial workers labored long hours for very low pay. They had no health benefits and no vacation time. To improve their conditions, workers formed unions. The Knights of Labor sought broad social reforms. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) focused on specific issues, such as wages, working hours, and working conditions.

Workers and big business often clashed violently. The Haymarket Riot in Chicago began when someone threw a bomb that killed a police officer. Government authorities reacted by rounding up eight anarchists, political radicals opposed to any form of government.

In 1892, steel workers went on strike in Pennsylvania. Carnegie and his partner were able to crush the strike. Two years later, a nationwide strike erupted against the railroad company. By the time the strike ended, federal troops had been sent to protect the railroads.

Section 2: Immigration and Urbanization

There were two great waves of immigration in the United States, during the 1840s and 1850s and between 1880 and 1920. Immigrants came to the United States to find work and for the promise of more political and religious freedom than in their native lands. They contributed to American culture and economy in many ways.

Starting in 1892, the vast majority of European immigrants landed at Ellis Island, just outside New York City. Government clerks asked the immigrants a series of questions. If authorities believed that the newcomers posed a risk to public health, they would demand that the immigrants return to Europe. From the early 1850s to 1882, hundreds of thousands of Chinese immigrants came to the West Coast,

mostly to work as laborers on the new railroads. From 1910 to 1940, most Asian immigrants disembarked at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. They experienced much harsher conditions than those of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. Some waited months or even years before processing and questioning came to an end.

Both foreign-born immigrants and American-born farmers migrated to cities. City planners used new technologies, such as electric streetlights, to make life better. New forms of transportation allowed cities to expand. These new forms of transportation made the first suburbs (residential areas surrounding the cities) possible. Poorer residents who could not afford to live in the new suburbs lived in densely populated urban ghettos, or areas where one ethnic or racial group dominates. One of the biggest problems facing urban dwellers was overcrowding. Rapid growth led to a shortage of housing. Immigrants crowded into subdivided homes called tenements. These tenements often housed twenty families each.

Industrialization and urbanization gave rise to a growing middle class. Industries generated a demand for white-collar workers. Big businesses hired salesclerks to sell their goods. They hired managers to supervise their workers. These workers had enough money to purchase items that in the past only the elite could afford. The growing middle class supported higher education and the arts.

Section 3: The South and West Transformed

After the Civil War, southerners developed a new mixed economy. Textile mills were built, the timber industry expanded, and railway construction boomed. With all the advances, problems persisted. Lack of capital meant heavy borrowing from northern bankers. African Americans were slowly stripped of the political and civil rights they had gained after the Civil War. The sharecropping system brought hardships. Landowners gave the sharecropper a place to live, seeds, and tools, in exchange for a share of the harvested crop. Landowners and merchants often cheated sharecroppers.

The end of the war also unleashed a huge wave of migration to the West. Even before large numbers of farmers and ranchers migrated west, hunters had already started to undermine the Native Americans' way of life by decimating the great buffalo herds that roamed the Plains.

In the post-Civil War period, the federal government forced the Plains Indians to move to reservations, or public land specifically reserved for them. Although some Native Americans moved to reservations without a fight, others decided to defend their land. The Battle of Little Bighorn and the retreat of the Nez Percé tribe are examples of Native American resistance.

The United States enacted the Dawes Act in 1887, which sought to prompt Native Americans to assimilate, or to be absorbed into the main culture of American society through land ownership and the opportunity to become citizens. The act failed to achieve its goal.

In the middle decades of the 1800s, the discovery of gold and silver attracted miners to the West in hopes of making a fortune. Farmers and ranchers came to the West in hopes of owning their own land. The transcontinental railroad opened the West to economic development.

At the end of the Civil War, approximately 5 million head of cattle roamed freely in Texas. These cattle, along with the demand for meat back east, led to the great cattle drives. Beginning in the late 1870s, cattlemen began raising steers on the northern plains where the herds could feed on the open range—a vast area of grassland owned by the federal government—and then they could ship the steers from nearby railroads without the difficulty of the long drive.

Section 4: Issues of the Gilded Age

The period during the late nineteenth century is often referred to as the Gilded Age, implying that under the glittery, or gilded, surface of prosperity lurked troubling issues. One issue that troubled the nation was the persistence of racial inequality. The southern states passed laws that separated blacks and whites. These laws were known as Jim Crow laws. During this same period, Mexican Americans struggled to keep their lands in the Southwest. Asian immigrants, especially the Chinese, faced discrimination, too. Women experienced both gains and setbacks during the Gilded Age. The fight to gain a women's suffrage amendment stalled, but educational opportunities for women grew.

Corruption plagued government during this period. Graft, or bribery and corruption, touched many aspects of public life.

After a federal employee assassinated President James Garfield, the Pendleton Act was passed. This law created a civil service system for the federal government. Individuals who wanted to work for the government were required to take an exam and were then given a job based on their performance on the exam. Both Republicans and Democrats favored a monetary policy called the gold standard.

Farmers faced complex problems. The prices paid for crops declined significantly. At the same time, farmers built up debts that they found difficult to repay. Government monetary policies contributed to both of these trends. Farmers formed various political organizations to address their problems. Farmers from the South and the West formed the People's Party, or the Populist Party.

William Jennings Bryan was the Democratic and Populist candidate for the presidency in 1896. In one of the hardest fought campaigns in American history, he fought for the American farmer and denounced Republican monetary policies, namely the gold standard. Bryan failed to win a state outside of the South and the West. As a result, William McKinley, the Republican candidate, won the presidency. Yet, the Populist movement had an impact on the political system. A number of Populist proposals, such as the graduated income tax and the direct election of senators, later became law.