

CHAPTER
7

Summary

TELESCOPING THE TIMES *Immigrants and Urbanization*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW *The population rises as immigrants supply a willing workforce for urban industrialization and a political base for many urban politicians. Abuses in local and national government prompt calls for reform.*

1 The New Immigrants

MAIN IDEA *Immigration from Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, and Mexico reached a new high in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.*

Between 1870 and 1920, about 20 million Europeans immigrated to the United States. Many of them came from eastern and southern Europe, which had not provided large numbers of immigrants before. Some, like Jews, fled religious persecution. Others escaped economic hardship. Some were leaving Europe full of ideas for reform and political freedom.

About 300,000 Chinese immigrants came from 1851 to 1883. Thousands of immigrants came from Japan as well. From 1880 to 1920, about 260,000 immigrants came from the Caribbean. Many Mexicans also came to the United States. About a million immigrants came from 1910 to 1930 to escape political turmoil in Mexico.

Most immigrants traveled by steamship, riding in steerage—the cargo holds below the ship’s waterline. Conditions were cramped, with little light or air, and unclear. Many people suffered from disease. Those who arrived in New York were processed at Ellis Island. The process, which took about five hours, determined whether they could enter the country or had to return.

Asian immigrants arriving on the West coast were processed at Angel Island near San Francisco. Conditions were more unpleasant than at Ellis Island, and the processing was stricter.

Once in the United States, immigrants felt confused and worried by the new culture. Many settled in communities with other immigrants from the same country to feel more at home. They also formed organizations to help each other.

While immigrants were arriving in great numbers, anti-immigration feelings spread among some Americans. During the depression of the 1870s, many workers feared they would lose their jobs to Chinese immigrants, who accepted low wages. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act,

banning all but a few Chinese immigrants. The ban was not lifted until 1943. The United States and Japan reached a “Gentlemen’s Agreement” in 1907 and 1908 under which Japan restricted migration to the United States.

2 The Challenges of Urbanization

MAIN IDEA *The rapid growth of cities forced people to contend with problems of housing, transportation, water, and sanitation.*

Most of the new immigrants moved to the nation’s cities to get work in the growing industrial economy. It was also cheaper and more convenient for them to live in cities. By 1910, immigrants made up more than half of the populations of 18 different cities. Many settled in neighborhoods with others from the same country—even from the same province.

As city populations rose, overcrowding sometimes resulted. Another movement helped swell urban populations. As efficient machines increased farm production, they also cost farm jobs. As a result, many people moved from farms to cities. About 200,000 of these new urban dwellers were African Americans leaving the South for Northern cities. They hoped to escape racial violence but found prejudice and low wages in their new homes as well.

The growing cities had many problems. There were housing shortages, and many urban property owners converted single family homes into multi-family apartments. These solutions often placed people in crowded conditions, full of filth and disease. Growing populations created transportation problems as well. As the cities continued to grow, the transit systems could not always keep up.

City officials also had difficulty obtaining enough clean water. Cities began to clean and filter the water and insist on indoor plumbing, but these steps spread slowly. Removing waste and garbage was another problem.

By 1900 most cities had full-time professional fire departments. But the lack of water made fires very dangerous—and reliance on wood as a building material gave fires fuel to burn. Both Chicago, in 1871, and San Francisco, in 1906, suffered very devastating fires. Another problem of the growing cities was crime.

Some social reformers pushed to improve life in the cities. The Social Gospel movement held that Christians had a duty to try to reform conditions. Some reformers created settlement houses. These community centers aimed at helping the poor, especially immigrants. Run mostly by women, they offered schooling, nursing, and other assistance.

3 Politics in the Gilded Age

MAIN IDEA *Local and national political corruption in the 19th century led to calls for reform.*

The large populations of cities provided an opportunity for a new political force—the political machine controlled by a boss. A machine was a group that controlled a political party. By giving voters services they needed, the machine won their votes and controlled city government.

The city boss controlled the whole machine—and the city government. Bosses controlled jobs in the police, fire, and sanitation departments. They controlled the city agencies that granted licenses to businesses. They controlled the money used to fund large construction projects. Many bosses were first- or second-generation immigrants, and they understood immigrants' concerns. By helping to solve immigrants' problems, they won loyalty.

Political machines could point to many accomplishments. As they gained power, though, some individuals became corrupt. Some used illegal methods to win elections. Others abused power to become wealthy. Since the bosses controlled the police, they were seldom pursued. The Tweed Ring of New York was one of the most famous examples of corruption among city officials. Boss Tweed and

many associates were finally convicted of various crimes.

Corruption reached national politics. For many decades, presidents had given jobs to loyal party workers in what was called the spoils system. As a result, some workers were not qualified for their jobs. Others used their positions to get money.

Reformers wanted to end these abuses. They proposed a civil service system in which government jobs would go only to those who proved they were qualified.

President Rutherford B. Hayes took some steps to reform the federal government. This aroused the anger of some members of his own party. These Stalwarts, as they were called, opposed any changes. The next president, James Garfield, favored the reform movement, and he was shot and killed by an unbalanced Stalwart. His successor, Chester Arthur, pushed through the Pendleton Act of 1883. It created the Civil Service Commission to give government jobs based on merit, not politics. The act helped reform the civil service. However, some politicians now turned to wealthy business leaders for campaign money. As a result, some corruption continued.

Another issue was how high to make the tariff, or tax on imported goods. Business leaders and Republicans wanted high tariffs so they could cut foreign competition. Democrats favored low tariffs. Under Republican presidents Benjamin Harrison and William McKinley, the tariff was high. Under Democrat Grover Cleveland, the tariff was lower for a short period.

Review

1. Where did immigrants come from in the period from 1870 to 1920?
2. What problems arose in the growing cities?
3. What role did political machines play in cities?
4. What led to the call for civil service reform?