

CHAPTER
8

Summary

TELESCOPING THE TIMES *Life at the Turn of the Century*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW *As the twentieth century begins, American culture changes due to new technological advances, cultural forms, and mass media. Some Americans, though, protest discrimination that denies them rights.*

1 Science and Urban Life

MAIN IDEA *Advances in science and technology helped solve urban problems, including overcrowding.*

Technological advances began to meet the nation's need for communication, transportation, and space. One advance was the use of steel frameworks to build tall buildings. Skyscrapers made cities grow vertically; streetcar lines helped them grow horizontally. People could now live in one part of a city and work in another. Soon transit lines linked cities and suburbs into larger areas. To avoid congestion on the streets, some cities built elevated train lines. Steel bridges joined sections of cities across rivers.

Urban planners made cities more livable by designing parks and recreational areas. One of the most extensive was Central Park in New York City. Both Boston and Chicago grew by following carefully laid-out plans.

Technology also improved communications. Orville and Wilbur Wright of Dayton, Ohio, built their first airplane. The government quickly adopted the new technology to transport mail across the continent. As the number of people who could read quickly increased, publishers printed more and more books, magazines, and newspapers. Improvements in papermaking, printing, and typesetting helped spur this growth as well.

Another invention made pictures, rather than words, more accessible. With George Eastman's camera, millions of Americans were able to take pictures as a hobby. Journalists used cameras to capture news as it happened.

2 Expanding Public Education

MAIN IDEA *Reforms in public education led to a rise in national literacy and the promotion of public education.*

Reformers aimed to improve public education. Not all children attended school, and most of

those who did left after four years. In the latter decades of the 1800s, many states passed laws requiring children from 8 to 14 to attend school for anywhere from 12 to 16 weeks every year. Teachers did not always emphasize academic subjects, however, and relied on rote memorization and physical punishment. African-American children—especially those in the South—suffered from a lack of schooling.

The number of schools increased. Kindergartens grew from 200 in 1880 to 3,000 in 1900. High schools saw an even greater increase. The high-school curriculum expanded to include courses preparing students for industrial and office jobs.

While African Americans were blocked from attending school, the children of immigrants were welcome. Some immigrants hoped the schools would “Americanize” their children. Many adult immigrants attended school at night to prepare to become American citizens and to learn English.

Just over two percent of young people attended college in 1900. Most came from wealthy or middle-class homes. Still, the last two decades of the 1800s saw a tremendous growth in the number of colleges. The curriculum changed, too, as universities began to pursue research in science and technology and formed professional schools in law and medicine.

Some colleges were established to offer higher education for African Americans. They provided opportunities for only a small percentage of people, however. In 1895, W. E. B. Du Bois became the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard.

At the dawn of the 20th century, millions were getting an education, although racial discrimination remained a thorn in the flesh of American society.

3 Segregation and Discrimination

MAIN IDEA African Americans lead the fight against voting restrictions and Jim Crow laws.

By 1900, southern states restricted African Americans' right to vote, weakening their political power. One law required voters to be able to read. Another put a tax on voting. A third disallowed voters if they, their fathers, or their grandfathers could not vote before January 1, 1867—the first day that African Americans could vote. All these laws were passed specifically to take away blacks' right to vote. The Supreme Court allowed these laws to remain standing.

The southern states also passed Jim Crow laws that segregated whites and blacks into separate facilities. When Homer Plessy was denied a seat on a railroad car, he sued, but the Supreme Court ruled separate facilities legal.

Racial etiquette—customs—restricted the rights of African Americans even when laws did not. Booker T. Washington argued that blacks should not insist on full equality—which whites, he felt, would resist—but work for economic security. Ida Wells crusaded nationwide to end lynching—hanging people without trial. African Americans in the North faced discrimination as well.

Mexican Americans, especially in the Southwest, faced similar discrimination. The railroads hired them to build new lines but paid little. Landowners forced workers to work to repay debts, a system called debt peonage that the Supreme Court ruled against in 1911.

The Chinese population in the West grew until 1880, and white workers felt threatened by competition from Chinese workers. Congress responded to their pressure in 1882 by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act. It prohibited further immigration from China.

4 The Dawn of Mass Culture

MAIN IDEA As Americans had more time for leisure activities, a modern mass culture emerged.

Shorter work weeks meant more leisure time, and Americans found new ways to use that time.

Many city dwellers enjoyed trips to amusement parks. Cycling and tennis became popular sports as well. Those who did not wish to exercise watched professionals play sports. Boxing and baseball became two popular spectator sports.

The rise in literacy contributed to an expansion of cultural vistas for ordinary Americans. Other advances fostered mass entertainment, including new media technology, such as motion pictures, and improved mass-production printing techniques.

Art galleries, libraries, books, and museums brought new cultural opportunities to more people. By 1900, at least one art gallery graced every large American city. Americans were also entertained by the new newspapers. To increase sales, publishers often presented the news in sensational style.

While serious novelists addressed concerns of contemporary society, many readers enjoyed the more popular dime-store novels.

Another change was in the sale of goods. Cities developed shopping areas that concentrated many retail establishments in certain areas. Huge department stores arose that offered consumers a wide range of goods to purchase. National chains developed as some retailers created stores in many sites, offering goods at lower prices. To persuade consumers to buy these goods, retailers and manufacturers spent large amounts of money on advertising.

To reach rural consumers, some companies sold their goods through catalogs. They were helped by the U.S. Post Office, which began delivering packages to rural people in 1896.

Review

1. What technological changes at the turn of the twentieth century affected American life?
2. How did education change in the late 1800s?
3. What discrimination was faced by minority groups in the late 1800s?
4. What evidence of modern mass culture can you find near the turn of the twentieth century?