

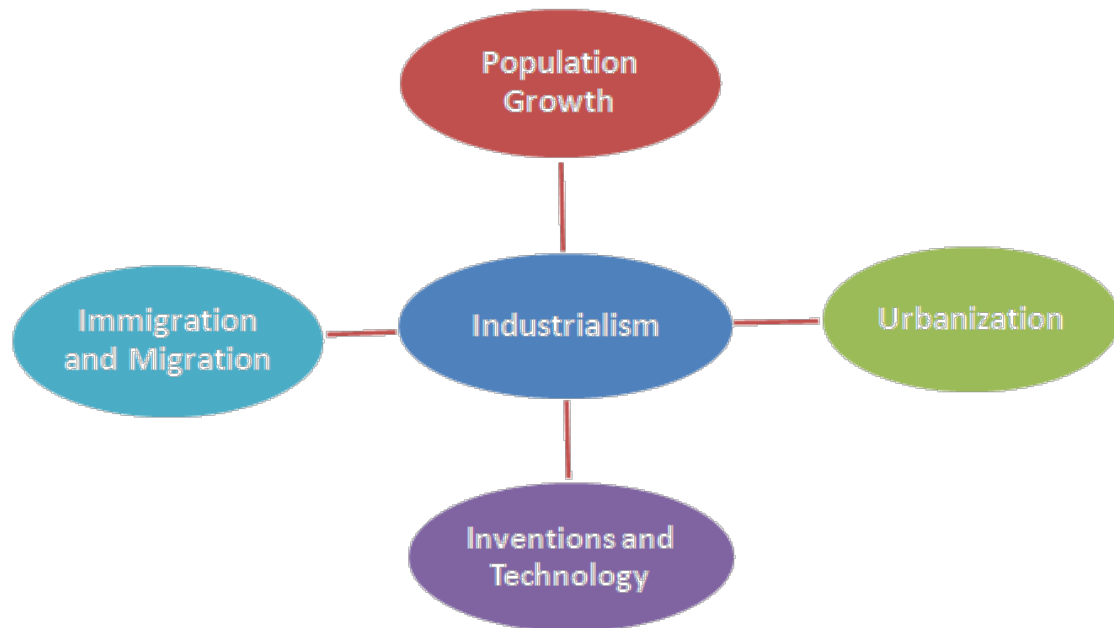
THE AMERICAN METROPOLIS



Postcard symbolizing Russian immigrants arriving in America

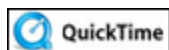
Unit Overview

The large-scale industrialization that began in the late nineteenth century had both positive and negative consequences for the United States. The need for labor attracted millions of immigrants to enter the country and encouraged African Americans to move to northern cities. The cities were unprepared for this massive influx of new residents and the problems associated with a rapid growth in population. On the other hand, technology and new inventions made the thriving, American metropolis a wonder to behold. At the same time, the promise of cheap tracts of land called settlers to move to the American West, but this caused the displacement of thousands of American Indians. Let's see how it all happened.




A Rush of Immigrants

During the first half of the nineteenth century, most immigrants came to the United States from western and northern Europe. They were often well-educated, had useful skills and spoke English. With the exception of the Irish, they were Protestant by faith as were most native-born Americans. By 1880, immigration had taken a very different trend. Most new arrivals from across the Atlantic were from southern and eastern Europe; they were poor, unskilled and limited in their knowledge of English. At the same time, Asian immigrants crossed the Pacific and arrived on the west coast where they, too, faced daunting cultural differences. This new wave of immigrants left behind conditions that could be described as difficult at best. They hoped to escape religious persecution, political repression, famine and a shortage of land. Some, known as **birds of passage**, simply wanted to earn money and to return to their homelands.




Wherever they came from, immigrants made the trip to America at considerable risk. Most traveled by steamship in cargo areas where conditions were unsanitary and crowded; they were also uncertain that they would be admitted to the United States when they arrived. The process at **Ellis Island** near New York City required a government inspection of documents and a physical examination by a doctor. Immigrants transported from Asia faced harsher questioning and lengthy detentions at **Angel Island**, often described as a run-down, inefficient facility. Chinese and other Asian immigrants sometimes expressed their disappointment and anger by writing **Tibishi** poems on the walls of the barracks there.

Ellis Island



America has power, but not justice.
In prison, we were victimized as if we were guilty.
Given no opportunity to explain, it was really brutal.
I bow my head in reflection but there is nothing I can do.
Tibishi poem from Angel Island



Although life was generally better for most people after their arrival in the United States, the dreams and high expectations of the immigrants were often difficult to match. Finding a place to live, getting a job and understanding an unfamiliar language presented huge challenges. Most immigrants settled in large cities like Boston, New York, Chicago or San Francisco where they were hired to fill the lowest-paying jobs and earned only enough to survive. As a result, they endured unsafe working conditions, long hours and poor living conditions. Due to discrimination and a desire to preserve their own culture, immigrants tended to live in sharply defined ethnic neighborhoods that grew up in every major city.

After its dedication in 1886, immigrants arriving in New York Harbor were greeted by the sight of the Statue of Liberty with its famous inscription: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to be free.” However, not all Americans agreed with the sentiment expressed by **Emma Lazarus**, the author of these words. Although industrialists enjoyed the

benefits of a cheap supply of labor, workers feared that they would be displaced by immigrants, who were willing to work long hours for lower wages. Some Americans, known as **nativists**, thought that foreigners were physically and mentally inferior to those born in the United States. The nativists also worried that immigrants represented a radical element with the goal of overthrowing American democracy and lobbied Congress to restrict the number of people entering the country. They were successful in convincing the Congress to pass the **Chinese Exclusion Act** in 1882. This law prohibited Chinese workers from entering the United States for ten years. American representatives also negotiated an agreement with Japan to limit the number of Japanese citizens moving to America. In 1897, Congress passed a bill to limit the entry of immigrants who were unable to read English, but President Cleveland vetoed this piece of legislation.

President Cleveland's Comments on the Veto of the Immigration Restriction Bill

The best reason that could be given for this radical restriction of immigration is the necessity of protecting our population against degeneration and saving our national peace and quiet from imported turbulence and disorder. I cannot believe that we would be protected against these evils by limiting immigration to those who can read and write in any language twenty-five words of our Constitution. In my opinion it is infinitely more safe to admit a hundred thousand immigrants who, though unable to read and write, seek among us only a home and opportunity to work, than to admit one of those unruly agitators and enemies of governmental control, who can not only read and write but delights in arousing by inflammatory speech the illiterate and peacefully inclined to discontent and tumult. Violence and disorder do not originate with illiterate laborers.

Go to Questions 1 through 13.

The Great Migration

Along with immigrants, African Americans hoped to find better opportunities in America's cities. In 1900, ninety percent of America's black population lived in the South, but increasing numbers moved to urban areas in the first decade of the twentieth century. For African Americans, the cities presented conditions that were even worse than those encountered by foreigners. Since they were turned away from employment in the manufacturing sector, black men and women took jobs as porters and domestic servants. They earned low wages and had very limited choices when it came to affordable housing. Race riots resulting from altercations

with mobs triggered by street altercations or rumors of crimes represented a very real urban threat to African Americans. For example, violence of this type took place in Atlanta, Georgia in 1906; it resulted in the deaths of twenty-four African Americans and wounded more than a hundred.



Jacob Lawrence's painting representing the Great Migration

As the twentieth century progressed, jobs in industry and manufacturing opened up for African Americans. During World War I, over 400,000 blacks moved into northern cities like Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit and New York as part of what become known as the **Great Migration**. Although they encountered considerable discrimination in housing, education and employment, African Americans found racism of a less repressive variety in the North. Wartime shortages also prompted Mexican Americans and women to enter the industrial workforce.

Go to Question 14 and 15.

The New American Metropolis

In the pre-Civil War era, cities were centers for finance and commerce with farms and small manufacturing firms located in the surrounding countryside. The largest urban areas were associated with harbors and trade. In the second half of the nineteenth century, cities also became sites for industry thanks to the development of the steam engine. Companies no longer had to depend on a source of water to operate machinery, and the industrial plants could also be

built on a much large scale. A business that employed thousands of workers suddenly created a small city, and older towns quickly became more industrial. Port cities, such as New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Boston, grew even larger because they served as entry points and offered an abundant source of cheap labor. Firms built industrial complexes on the outskirts of cities to take advantage of the labor supply and to utilize established transportation networks. By the turn of the century, New York not only served as the country's financial focal point but also became its largest manufacturing center.

City	1870	1900
New York City	942,292	3,437,202
Chicago	298,977	1,698,575
Philadelphia	674,022	1,293,697
St. Louis	310,864	575,238
Boston	250,526	560,892

The quick rise in urban populations created a number of problems. Simply getting people from place to place was a major dilemma, but the challenge was met by the application of innovative technology to the transportation industry. In 1887, **Frank J. Sprague**, an engineer who had worked for Thomas Edison, designed the **electric trolley car**. This soon became the primary method of transportation in most American cities. When these lines extended into outlying areas, middle class Americans had the option of moving to the suburbs and commuting to work. However, these electric trollies created even greater congestion in the inner cities, and engineers looked underground for a better solution. In 1904, New York completed a subway line that ran the length of Manhattan and proved the value of a high-speed, underground train. The **subway** system made rapid transit a reality.

Architects also found new ways to take advantage of limited space by designing the **skyscraper**. The use of plate glass, steel girders and elevators permitted construction to expand upward rather than outward. The first American skyscraper, the ten-story Home Insurance Building, was planned by **William Le Baron** and built in Chicago in 1885. This inspired other American architects, and the concept caught on. The fifty-five story Woolworth Building opened in New York in 1913 and marked the beginning of the city's famous skyline. The cityscape also changed dramatically when dim gaslights were replaced with brighter electric lighting.

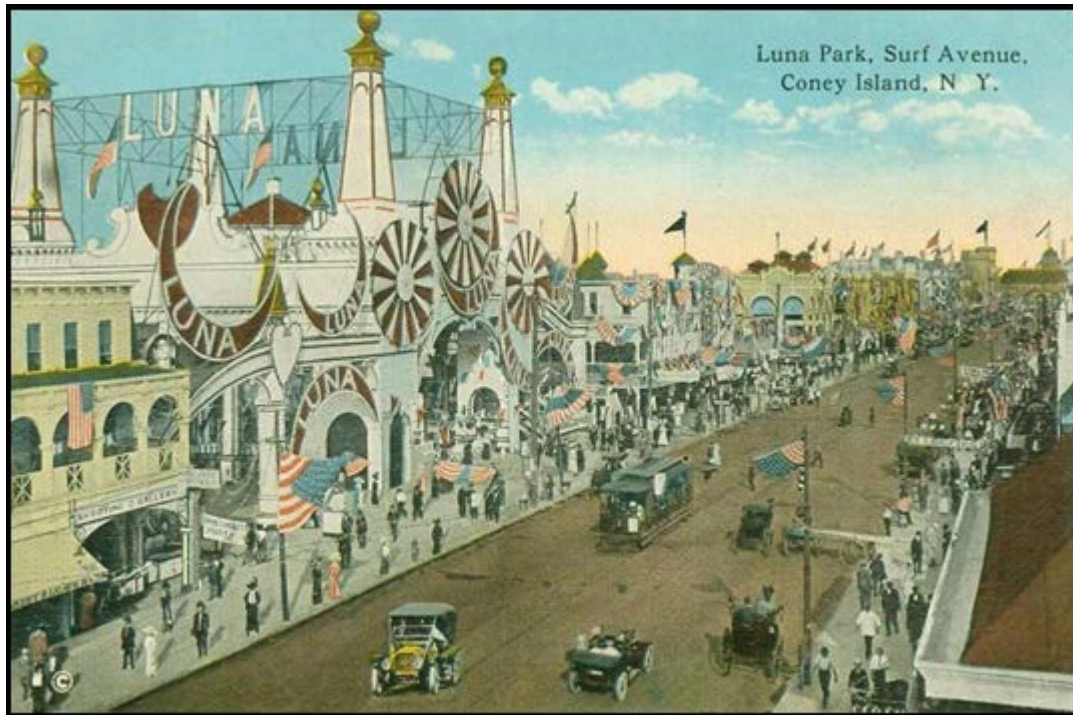


The Woolworth Building: 1913

Although a number of urban problems were corrected by technological advancements, others remained more difficult to solve. Unregulated industrial expansion and a lack of city services produced poor air quality, dirty streets and accumulated trash. Workers that earned low wages could not afford to live far from their places of employment, and this left them with very few choices for housing. To conserve space and increase profits, landlords constructed five- or six-story structures called **tenements**. These buildings often held as many as twenty families in tiny, cramped apartments. Crowded conditions led to health risks, high infant mortality rates, increased crime and the rise of urban gangs.

In spite of their drawbacks, urban industrial centers were exciting places to live. For a nickel or less, the city offered a wide variety of entertainment. **Vaudeville** produced live shows that presented skits, musical acts and magic tricks. Early movie theaters, referred to as **nickelodeons**, offered short films that moved audiences to laughter or tears, but the great amusement parks, such as Coney Island outside New York and Willow Grove near Philadelphia, became the most popular attractions. The Ferris wheel, the roller coaster and the merry-go-round delighted city dwellers, who arrived by trolley or ferry boat to escape the inner city. The music business also thrived, especially in New York's song-publishing district or **Tin Pan Alley**. The influence of

African American music with its syncopated rhythm and uneven beat created **ragtime**, the most popular musical genre of its day. This style also brought about new dances like the Bunny Hug and the Grizzly Bear. The contrast between the positive and negative aspects of city life at the turn of the century help to explain why many still refer to the era as the Gilded Age.



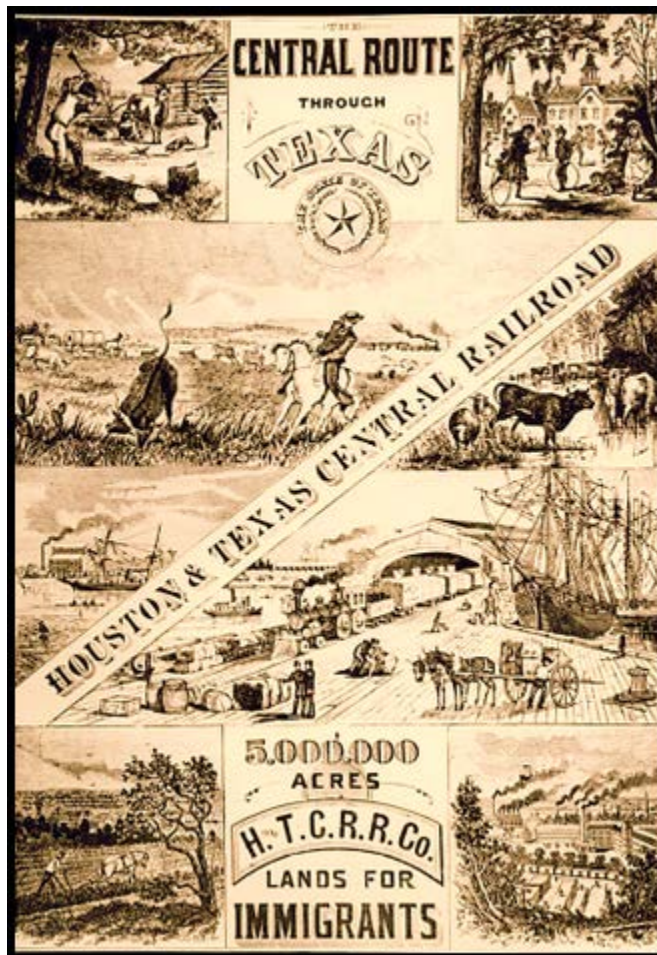
Postcard from Coney Island

 QuickTime Ragtime, Minstrels and Early Jazz

Go to Questions 16 through 20.

Moving West

Massive numbers of immigrants arrived in the United States in the late nineteenth century, but many people also migrated to the American West during the same era. The **Homestead Act**, passed by Congress in 1862, encouraged settlers to move into the lands across the Mississippi River by offering acreage at a cheap price. This appealed to farmers and ranchers, who were able to send their products to the eastern and western coasts through the ever-expanding railroad network. The discovery of valuable mineral resources also drew thousands to this region.

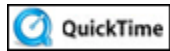


Advertising Poster for the Houston & Texas Central Railroad

As new territories were organized, clashes between the settlers and American Indians were inevitable. To make matters worse, the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad destroyed the natural habitat of the bison. The trains also brought cars filled with hunters who killed the animals for sport. Since many tribes depended on the bison for survival, this was viewed as a serious threat. Although many tribes did settle peacefully on reservations, others, such as Cheyenne, Sioux, Apache and Great Plains Indians, put up a strong resistance against the U.S. Army in a series of battles collectively called the **Indian Wars**.

Although the Indians won some impressive victories, such as the defeat of General George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876, the tribes were eventually forced onto reservations in the Dakotas, Oklahoma and New Mexico. Official federal policy was to assimilate the Indians into mainstream culture as quickly as possible. This led Congress to pass the **Dawes Act** in 1887. The reservations were divided into parcels consisting of 160 acres, and these were given to the heads of Indian families. The intent was to encourage Indians to become

individual farmers. Any remaining land was to be sold by the United States government; the funds would, in turn, be used to pay for the education of Indian children. Although it was promoted as a great humanitarian effort, the Dawes Act destroyed the traditional communal base of Indian life and resulted in the loss of most Indian lands.



Rising Tensions

Go to Questions 21 and 22.

What's Next?

Industrial growth throughout the southern states inspired what became known as the New South. However, the New South resembled the Old South in terms of political and social attitudes. The equal rights promised to African Americans through the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments did not become a reality, and nativist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, increased in membership. Would the states continue to be able to circumvent federal law? How would the Supreme Court respond? The next unit will explore these and other questions. Before moving on, review the names and terms in this unit; then, complete questions.

Go to Questions 23 through 30.