



# 20

## Post-Civil War Thought and Culture

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**A**mericans transformed their world in the generation that followed the end of the Civil War. No corner of the nation, no aspect of daily life was left untouched by changes in transportation, in finance, in technology, in the organization of work, and in the production of food. For many, these changes were summed up in the powerful symbol of the railroad. As a young boy in the 1870s, William Allen White witnessed the arrival of the railroad in his pioneer Kansas town. He recalled that it brought to an end “a rather competent civilization.” From his child’s point of view, “it meant that homemade sleds and little homemade wagons would pass; that the bows and arrows which boys made by seasoning hickory behind the stove and scraping and polishing them with glass, would as an art disappear forever out of the life of American boys.” Yet it is not clear how Americans *perceived* and *responded to* such changes. Were they welcomed as progress, or feared as destructive of accustomed ways of living?

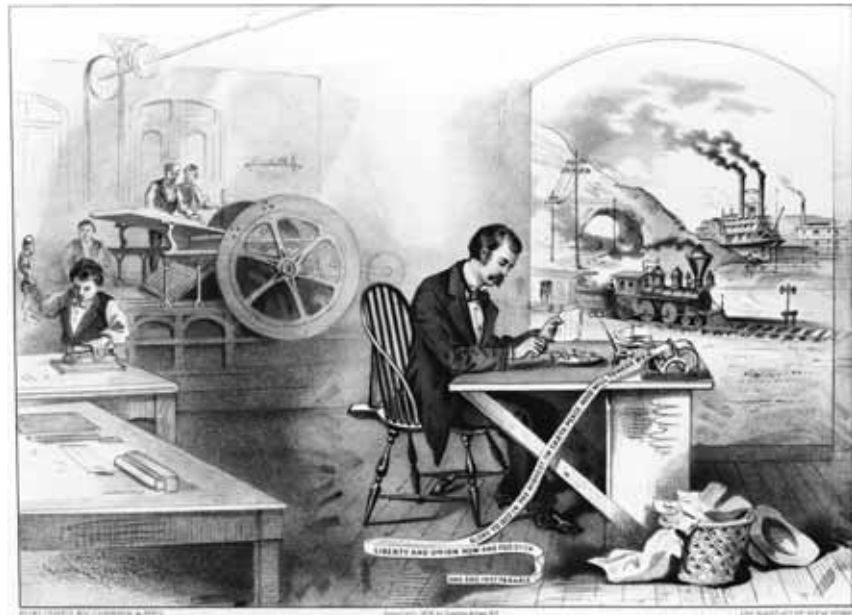
New forms of transportation, communication and trade created technological bonds that brought the United States ever more closely together in a material sense. Despite the expectations of many, this union did not translate directly into uniformity in ways of thinking or living. In fact, the post-Civil War period saw increased cultural diversity among the inhabitants of the immense nation. Immigration, of course, brought to America people from new regions of Europe, who practiced different religions and followed different customs. The nation’s economic development also brought greater occupational diversity, which often encour-

aged differences in points of view. Furthermore, the transformation of America's cities into giant metropolitan areas magnified already-existing cultural differences between city, town and rural people. It was, in short, a time of widening divergence in the thinking and the ways of life among the peoples of the United States.

This diversity was sometimes hard to see, however, because the postwar period marked the increasing prominence of *metropolitan*, or the national- and urban-oriented, culture that had taken shape in the North during the Civil War. Representing the interests and values of mainly urban people and organizations whose outlook was primarily national rather than local or regional, this metropolitan culture celebrated the virtue and the inevitability of increasing centralization and homogenization in American life. Its spokesmen extolled corporate giants like Carnegie and Rockefeller as agents of progress and proclaimed the coming dominance of values of rationality, efficiency, productivity, and national power. Although the national media gave greatest play to these metropolitan ideas, many Americans continued to adhere to other values, emphasizing the continuing importance of local distinctiveness, decentralization, and democratic decision-making.

## NATIONAL CULTURE AND FAITH IN PROGRESS

The tension between centralization and localism had a long tradition in American life and thought, but the growing power of national corporations brought it into greater prominence in the later nineteenth century. The conflict was also highlighted by advances in the technology of printing. Beyond immediate face-to-face conversation, print was the medium for the exchange of ideas in nineteenth-century America, where nearly all adults were able to read. Publishing books, magazines and newspapers was a business like any other, subject to economic and technological forces. It was, at the same time, the source of income for a large number

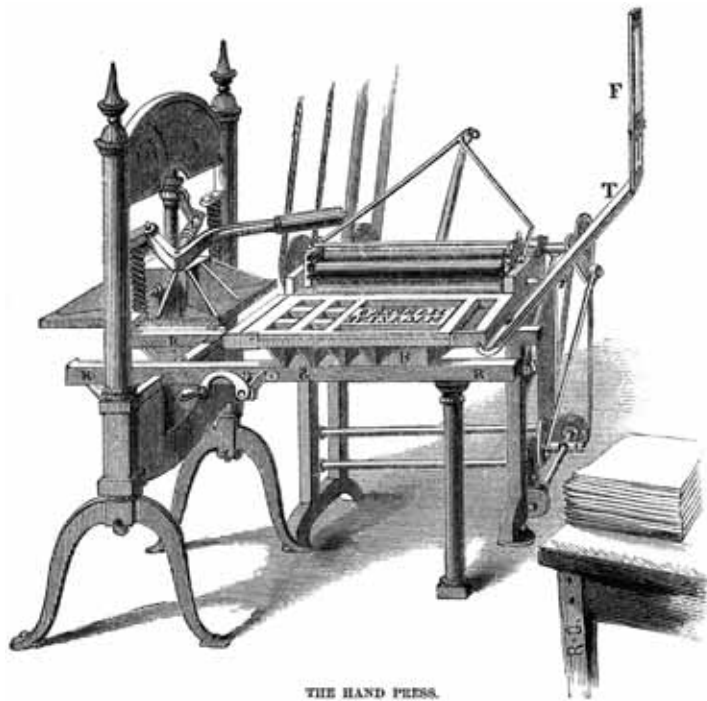


**THE PROGRESS OF THE CENTURY.**  
THE LIGHTNING STEAM PRESS. THE ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH. THE LOCOMOTIVE. THE STEAMBOAT.

**Progress** The popular lithographic firm Currier & Ives in 1876 printed this icon extolling some of the inventions that had transformed nineteenth-century life: the steam press, the electric telegraph, the steamboat, and the railroad. Notice also the thick black smoke belching from the factory. In the nineteenth century that was always a symbol of jobs, prosperity, and progress. It would take a century for such a smokestack to evoke automatic thoughts of pollution and disease.

of writing men and women, and the principal means through which Americans as a nation expressed and debated their ideas.

Just as they were becoming centers of the nation's financial institutions, the cities of the Northeast grew in their influence over national publishing after the Civil War. Tensions between North and South before the war had hindered the emergence of a truly national reading audience — *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, after all, had been a runaway bestseller in the North, but was banned in the South. After the war, large publishing firms in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia took advantage of the national market made possible by the expanding network of railroads by adopting ever-larger and faster steam driven printing presses. These, along with new methods of manufacturing paper, continually lowered costs and made printed materials available to more people. Prominent book publishers such as Scribners and Harper Brothers launched national magazines in which they featured serial versions of their books. The continued growth throughout the late nineteenth century of the circulations of national magazines makes



**The Old Ways** While the steam press was considered one of the nineteenth century's symbols of progress, local newspapers were printed on hand presses like the one in this 1865 engraving from *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Type had to be set by hand, and every sheet was individually printed by laboriously turning the crank.

it possible to think for the first time in terms of a truly national medium.

### ✎ *Publishing: National and Local*

Yet there were limits to the penetration of this national press. Unlike the nations of Europe, the United States was too large and decentralized in the nineteenth century to have national newspapers. In the emerging metropolitan areas, however, the great concentration of population made possible the emergence of cheap daily newspapers that appealed to a broad cross section of the population. To get the latest stories to newsboys on the streets before their competitors, they employed ever more powerful presses and experimented with new typesetting machines to turn out more papers in the shortest possible time. Buttressed by advertising revenues from the burgeoning urban department stores (see Chapter 19), these daily newspapers attracted a diverse readership by means of illustrations, sports stories, special sections for women and children, and (by the end of the century) comic strips.

Meanwhile, other newspapers and magazines proliferated throughout the country, using less advanced

and cheaper printing machinery to communicate with smaller, more specialized audiences. Every hamlet boasting a population of a hundred or more had at least one, and often two or three, weekly and biweekly newspapers that published local news. Lacking economies of scale, smaller newspapers were printed in short runs on small, hand- or water-powered presses. The cost of setting up such a print shop was relatively low, and it was possible for individuals and groups to establish journals to represent their particular perspective. The telegraph, which quickly came to be controlled by the Western Union monopoly, distributed fast-breaking national and international stories, but it was expensive. Most of the news and commentary in smaller papers was copied from paper to paper, while state and local stories were covered by local reporters. These smaller publications co-existed with the new national mass-market publications, meeting the special needs of foreign-language immigrants, African Americans, and religious organizations as well as rural readers. They made it possible for sub-cultures to thrive despite the prominence of the metropolitan-based national media.

Thus a pattern of increasing centralization at the national level and diversification at the local was in part a reflection of the contrasting implications of developments in communication technologies. It is important to keep both patterns in mind when considering how post-Civil War Americans responded to the changes around them. Moreover, though the postwar period was an age of print, it was also the last great age of public speaking in American history. As they had in the decades before the Civil War, men and women still turned out regularly to be educated and entertained at public lectures by well-known writers and ambitious local leaders alike. Like Emerson with his famous essay "Self Reliance," many men and women of letters made handsome livings traveling about the country delivering their famous lectures repeatedly, just as musicians today are expected to perform hits from their latest albums. Orators may have expressed popular attitudes, but they also aimed to touch their audience's emotions through their performances.

The historian's difficulty in describing precisely what ordinary people thought is complicated by the growing recognition that, even when Americans *read* the same nationally distributed books and magazines, they often *interpreted* them in different ways, according to personal contexts and concerns. Hence, we cannot assume that even a best-selling book was a simple,

straightforward reflection of the convictions of a broad segment of the American people. Instead, it might have been successful because it was able to appeal in different ways to different audiences. In exploring American thought and culture, then, we must look to see ideas expressed not only in what people read but also in their actions.

### ☞ *Modern Metropolitan Culture: The Growing Authority of Science and Progress*

Despite these reservations, it is possible to say that the defining feature of the emerging national culture of post–Civil War America was an exuberant faith in progress. In responding to the myriad changes they saw around them, Americans could draw on several traditions of thought about the nature of change over time. In many cultures, any alteration in accustomed ways of doing things is perceived as threatening, representing a decline from time-honored standards. Since the Renaissance, some social observers had argued that civilizations followed a cyclical pattern of rise and decline analogous to the human life-cycle. A third possibility, the idea that change was part of a continuous process of improvement, or *progress*, was relatively new, taking root among Enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century and becoming more general in Europe and the United States only in the nineteenth.

#### FAITH IN PROGRESS

Christian beliefs had played a part in the general acceptance of the idea of progress, as periodic religious awakenings in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were seen by many Protestant evangelicals as signs of the approaching millennium. On the other hand, other mid-nineteenth-century revivalists like Dwight Moody (see Chapter 18) gave greater emphasis to the Book of Revelation's predictions of great turmoil and destruction before the final triumph of Christ. Such revivalists took a much more pessimistic view of the direction of change in America.

Many Americans blended religious thought with more worldly perceptions of the changes taking place around them. They viewed the impressive expansion of white settlements across the continent, the founding and growth of towns and cities, the conversion of once-open lands into fruitful farms and mines, and the increasing productive power of manufacturing enterprises as obvious evidence that history followed a progressive, or upward path. For many in the antebellum

North, slavery had represented a tragic mistake that stood in the way of the nation's progress. The war eliminated it, and many viewed the suffering war brought as atonement for slavery's sin. Afterward, the idea of progress became firmly entrenched in the national culture as the expansion of productive forces seemed destined to continue indefinitely.

Science actually had relatively little to do with the impressive material changes taking place, but it gained in popular respect because many assumed that it was responsible for progress. Although few understood scientific method, many believed that as the world became more "modern," people would abandon irrational superstitions and let themselves be guided by the findings of science. It is commonly thought that the new Darwinian interpretation of evolution was instantly perceived as a challenge to traditional Christian ideas of Creation, but most of those who were aware of Darwin's new theory in the immediate postwar period did not see it as incompatible with religious belief.

Since the eighteenth century, leading Protestant ministers such as Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards had pursued scientific research as a supplement to the study of scripture in understanding God's purposes for creation. Scientists and ministers alike asserted that evidence of His design could be found everywhere in nature. A generation before the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, however, the new science of geology called into question the accuracy of Biblical accounts of the creation and the age of the Earth. Religiously-inclined scientists responded in many different ways, but some evangelical researchers had no difficulty harmonizing their religious beliefs with the mounting evidence that change in biological forms had taken place over time. Darwin's principal argument, that changes in biological species occurred by means of the "natural selection" of new variations, offered an explanation for these changes. Some believed that the idea of natural selection challenged divine design, but a number of evangelical Christians, such as botanist Asa Gray, promoted Darwin's theory. He argued that the Bible should not be thought of as a scientific textbook, and pointed out that Darwin's theory did not explain *how* variations occurred in the first place. Divine design could be seen not only as compatible with natural selection but as necessary to give Darwin's theory coherence. "Natural selection," he wrote, "is not the wind that propels the vessel, but the rudder which, by friction, now on this side and now on that, shapes the course." The wind, for Gray, was God. In the early

debates over Darwin's theory, many of his most active proponents were religious men, including ministers; among those who attacked him were scientists who thought that there was not enough evidence for some of his conclusions.

During the rest of the nineteenth century, terms of the debate gradually shifted, not so much because of Darwin's ideas themselves but as a reflection of the nation's widening cultural differences. Many educated, predominately urban Americans accepted the theory of natural selection as part of a package of ideas about evolution. They did so because these ideas had received the stamp of scientific authority, and because they were consistent with a general perception that progress was part of God's design. On the other hand, for religious leaders who increasingly attacked Darwinism, the theories were in some ways symbolic of the growing power of science and of the general direction of change in postwar society. By upholding the authority of scripture, Darwin's religious critics declared their opposition to all that they saw as wrong with the Gilded Age.

It is important to note that Darwin did not argue that changes occurring through the process of natural selection were necessarily good or moral. Rather, it was the English writer Herbert Spencer who shaped the popular understanding of *evolution* as a word and a concept. He, not Darwin, coined the popular catch phrase "survival of the fittest." Largely self-educated, Spencer had worked as civil engineer on a railroad and as a magazine editor before taking up philosophical writing. His voluminous works attempted to apply what he thought of as the techniques of science to developing an all-inclusive philosophy based on evolution. (His methods actually owed more to the deductive reasoning of the idealistic tradition in philosophy.) After the appearance of the *Origin of Species*, Spencer set out to apply to all the sciences what he termed the "law" of evolution. For him, this meant that all forms of life gradually "progressed" from simple forms through a series of stages characterized by greater complexity, specialization and integration. He even compared human society to an organism, and argued that it was subject to the same forces of evolution. Although he believed that all societies must eventually decline and die, his assertion that Western civilization was just reaching a mature stage of development reinforced an optimistic attitude toward the direction of change.

Some Americans read Spencer's books, but many more were exposed to his ideas through populariza-

tions by disciples such as John Fiske and Edward Livingston Youmans. Fiske noted similarities between the idea of natural selection and traditional Calvinism: "it elects the one and damns the ninety and nine." But he insisted that in human society the progressive forces of love and idealism channeled the random operation of natural processes. Youmans founded the magazine *Popular Science Monthly* in 1872 to promote the latest scientific findings. He proclaimed Spencer's ideas of cosmic evolution as "a great and established fact" that accounted for everything we see around us. Moreover, Youmans asserted that science was vastly superior to religion in affording self-understanding: "Human beings should be studied exactly as minerals and plants are studied, with the simple purpose of tracing out the laws and relations of the phenomena they present."

Ultimately, Spencer's ideas were so far-reaching and indeed so vague that they could be and were used to justify a wide range of social agendas in Europe, Asia, and the United States. In America, his belief in the inevitability of progress helped to mute the pessimism inherent in Darwin's own interpretation of natural selection, and as we shall see, his opposition to government interference in the economy was trumpeted by critics of specific regulations. But it must be said that overall Spencer's ideas and slogans such as the "survival of the fittest" did not so much influence postwar Americans as provide useful ammunition for debates over the direction of change. Invoking Spencer did, however, enable a wide range of social commentators to lay claim to the prestige of "science."

In discussions in the major national media, science superseded religion or morality as the most authoritative basis for argument. In the early part of the century, proponents of change, whether westward expansion or moral reform, had been most likely to invoke divine sanction, as in the case of "Manifest Destiny." By the end of the century, it would be more common for the spokesmen for the new corporations and the educated urban middle classes to proclaim that "immutable natural laws" supported their positions. Such appeals were considered vastly more hard-headed and realistic, powerful attributes in postwar culture. Writing in magazines of opinion like the *North American Review*, published in Boston, and the *Independent*, from New York, such commentators as Yale economist William Graham Sumner asserted that the new power of giant national corporations only reflected the process of natural selection in economic life. Interference with the operation of these natural "laws" by means of dem-

ocratic legislation, he insisted, would only slow progress. Yet, even as he relied upon the scientific prestige of Darwin's ideas, Sumner applied them inconsistently. His view of "fitness" in human beings, for example, was not a matter of inherited traits but of the conscious willingness to work hard and delay gratification.

#### WRITING FOR "THE BEST MEN"

Such journals of opinion did not have a wide readership, but they both reflected and guided the thinking of their educated urban, upper middle-class audiences, what they described as "the best men." The weekly newspaper *The Nation*, for example, was influential despite the fact that its circulation never exceeded 12,000. This did not trouble its opinionated editor E. L. Godkin, who professed no intention of mixing with common folk on the "democratic plan," but envisioned his readership as "thoughtful, educated, high-minded men — gentlemen in short." Bostonian Charles Eliot Norton declared that *The Nation* stood, with "Harvard and Yale Colleges," as "almost the only solid barriers against the invasion of modern barbarism and vulgarity."

*The Nation* was established in 1865 to stand "independent of mere party politics, and upholding sound principles of loyalty and nationality." It promoted the cause of a unified national economy and culture, even as it paid greatest attention to events and institutions in New York City. Initially, its Radical Republican backers hoped to use it to promote the cause of civil rights for the freedmen in the South. But as it became clear after the war that New York's working men were intent on using democratic means to promote laws in their interests, the journal quickly converted to laissez-faire principles. This was an easy transition for Irish-born Godkin, who had been schooled in classical political economy in Belfast. He denounced the rising influence of working-class and ethnic voters in New York politics and advocated measures such as immigration restriction and civil service reform (see Chapter 21) to protect the influence of the cultured classes. A fear of radicalism aroused by riots in New York and the short-lived Commune in Paris in 1870-71 soon colored his perception of all politics in America. George William Curtis, editor of *Harper's Weekly*, also shifted abruptly from government intervention to laissez-faire. Largely in response to local developments, these metropolitan editors attempted to redefine the domain of legitimate political debate, reducing its territory by invoking the higher authority of "natural economic laws."

In fact, many men of wealth in the Northeast fol-

lowed the same pattern. One of *The Nation's* wealthy backers, John Murray Forbes, was a Boston financier who controlled the vast Burlington Railroad system in the Midwest. He watched with alarm in the early 1870s as Midwesterners began to complain about his railroad's discriminatory rates. One of his chief executives was his cousin Charles Perkins, who similarly denounced all local efforts to regulate railroad rates as "communistic" interference with "the Natural laws of trade." Their friend Bostonian Charles Francis Adams was a frequent contributor to *The Nation* and president of the Union Pacific Railroad — and son and grandson, respectively, of former Presidents John Quincy Adams and John Adams. He argued that protective tariffs contradicted divinely ordained economic laws, and warned, "When you meddle with eternal laws, you are more likely to mar than help, and if you mar, you must undergo the punishment." He noted darkly in 1884 that the tendency for government interference that had begun with protectionism had even now inspired a Massachusetts law providing free school textbooks!

#### SOCIAL DARWINISM AND THE ROOTS OF LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM

Despite such grim pronouncements, many if not most Americans continued to support government involvement in many aspects of their lives, particularly at the state and local levels. Nor was there anything approaching consensus on the question of whether, in economic matters, progress was more helped by greater concentration or open competition. In fact, it is hard to say precisely how widespread or influential was what critics later termed "Social Darwinism." The idea of evolution itself gave rise to contradictory policies. One of the few business leaders who made a careful study of Darwin and Spencer, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie (see Chapter 18) argued in "Wealth," a famous essay in the *North American Review*, that growing economic inequality was inevitable and "essential for the progress of the race." He concluded that "the Law of Accumulation of Wealth, and the Law of Competition," however unjust, were "the best and most valuable of all that humanity has yet accomplished." Yet, in direct contradiction to the pronouncements of Sumner and Adams, Carnegie urged that the wealthy had a moral duty to use their resources "for the public good," by establishing institutions such as public libraries to enable the poor to help themselves. Through wise philanthropy, he concluded, wealth could become a "potent force for the elevation of our race."

The career of Henry Ward Beecher (1818-1887), the most famous minister in the United States in the decades following the Civil War, reflects the somewhat muddled response of urban, middle-class Americans to ideas of evolution. Son of Lyman Beecher, one of the leading figures in the Second Great Awakening (see Chapter 8), and brother of novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, he had inherited the mantle of leadership of New England Protestantism. Beginning his career in the Midwest, he moved in 1847 to Plymouth Church in the growing middle-class suburb of Brooklyn, New York, where he gained national attention as an abolitionist. A dynamic and eloquent preacher who exerted a strong emotional appeal over his audiences, he was in demand throughout the nation as a lecturer, but also spread his ideas through a best-selling novel *Norwood* (1867) and numerous published collections of sermons.

Beecher was much attracted to the idea of evolution. He played a major role both in popularizing Darwin and Spencer and in integrating evolutionary concepts into liberal Protestant theology. Insisting that both science and religion were evolutionary, he proclaimed to clergy troubled by Darwin, “you must be sure to meet the Lord when He comes in the air, when He moves in the providences of the world, when He is at work in natural laws . . . when He is shining in great scientific disclosures.” In *Evolution and Religion*, a collection of sermons published in 1885, Beecher provided a moving and accessible explanation of natural selection, adapted to his American audience, that concluded, “Design by wholesale is grander than design by retail.”

In part, Beecher was convinced that Protestantism must embrace science in order to keep pace with change in the modern world. In an 1872 speech to Yale theological students he argued that ministers must be educated in the new social sciences in order to retain the allegiance of “the intelligent part of society.” He continued:

I think that our profession is in danger, and in great danger, of going under, and of working effectively only among the relatively less informed and intelligent of the community. . . . The study of human nature is not going to be left in the hands of the church or the ministry. It is going to be part of every liberal education, and will be pursued on a scientific basis.

Less defensively, he also stated that study of a “science of management” provided ministers with knowledge of human nature that could serve as a practical



**Henry Ward Beecher** The most esteemed Protestant preacher in post-Civil War America foreshadowed, both in his theology and in his personal life, many of the crises that twentieth-century Christianity would face.

professional tool. “You must know what men are in order to reach them, and that is part of the science of preaching.”

Beecher also embraced the idea of evolutionary progress because it enabled him to promote doctrinal change while still honoring the stern Calvinism of his ancestors. His famous 1873 sermon “Through Fear to Love” applied evolution to the field of morality. He asserted that some people, particularly in the cultured

✧ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**“Wealth,” 1889**

*Steel magnate Andrew Carnegie wrote this essay as he grappled with what to do with the financial returns from his industrial enterprises. He concluded that “the surplus wealth of the few” was best put to use in creating public institutions like libraries and schools, “the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise.”*

The problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth, so that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich

and poor in harmonious relationship. The conditions of human life have not only been changed, but revolutionized, within the past few hundred years. In former days there was little difference between the dwelling, dress, food, and environment of the chief and those of his retainers. . . . The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us to-day measures the change which has come with civilization. . . .

The price which society pays for the law of competition, like the price it pays for

cheap comforts and luxuries, is also great; but the advantages of this law are also greater still, for it is to this law that we owe our wonderful material development, which brings improved conditions in its train. But, whether the law be benign or not, we must say of it, as we say of the change in the conditions of men to which we have referred: It is here; we cannot evade it; no substitutes for it have been found; and while the law may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department.

classes, had reached a “higher plane” where a primitive morality based on fear was being replaced by a morality of love. By smoothing over the “harsh,” “rigid,” and “gloomy” doctrines of original sin and future punishment, Beecher sought to make religion more acceptable to his middle-class urban congregation of more than 3,000. Similarly, the principal theme of *Norwood* was that because God was present in Nature, religious truths were more approachable through intuition and feeling than through reason. Ironically, by shifting the foundation of religious experience from doctrine to sensibility, he ceded the realm of reason to science, leaving his authority as a minister dependent on his ability to stir his listeners’ emotions. At this he was highly successful, for the members of Plymouth Church remained devoted to him despite a widely publicized trial in 1875 for adultery with one of his parishioners that ended in a hung jury. Notwithstanding the national notoriety of the scandal, he remained a popular spokesman for liberal Protestantism until his death in 1887.

✧ *Expertise*

Even for the urban middle classes, however, all change was not progress. The increasing availability of consumer goods could be unsettling as well as liberating, as upwardly mobile men and women sought to refashion their identities in a society of constantly changing values. Men struggled to build careers in the midst of economic fluctuations and evolving definitions of middle class work. Women, on the other hand, were charged with making homes out of the dizzying array of manu-

factured goods offered by the new department stores (see Chapter 19). As consumer goods became ever more widely available, status hierarchies were maintained by constantly shifting distinctions in taste, which the aspiring middle class woman must struggle to keep up with. Meanwhile, advertisers learned to subtly transform “luxuries” into “necessities” and to persuade readers that progress simply meant more of everything. For middle-class urban women, the shift from domestic production to shopping was greeted with concern in a Protestant culture that had long associated excessive consumption with moral danger. Reflecting the media’s ambivalence toward this new world of consumption, the *New York Times* reported a conversation between an English visitor and a Philadelphia matron. According to the *Times*, the Englishwoman noted that whenever she was “dull or cross,” she found solace in a half hour’s meditation at Westminster Abbey. The American woman smilingly reassured her, “Why can’t you do that in Philadelphia? — there’s Wanamaker’s!”

To address this unease with the pace of material change, the publishing world offered hosts of self-styled “experts.” Etiquette books promised to tell aspiring matrons how to act, dress and furnish their houses; advice books for men promised secrets to scrambling up the new corporate ladders. On a more elite level, writers for the genteel magazines proclaimed that the antidote for social disorder was “Culture” with a capital C. Through the careful study of great art and literature and the cultivation of good taste and high ideals, the rough edges of American materialism could be smoothed. To carry out this program, the postwar period saw the found-



ing of the great metropolitan art museums, opera houses and symphony orchestras. Similarly, men in the forefront of expanding higher education argued that their institutions would prepare a new elite of educated men and women to reclaim America's culture from vulgar materialism. Harvard's Charles Eliot claimed that the university represented "plain living against luxury."

#### THE RISE OF UNIVERSITIES AND PROFESSIONS

In fact, the development of a new form of higher educational institution, the research university, played a crucial role in the rising authority of scientific language and methods in post-Civil War America. Previously, hundreds of colleges had been established in towns and cities throughout the nation. Most were founded by religious denominations and heavily oriented toward a classical curriculum of Latin and Greek, moral philosophy, and rhetoric, and were intended principally to train young men for the ministry and for public life. Typically headed by formidable clergymen, who personally taught the capstone senior course on moral philosophy, antebellum colleges sought to pass on traditional values as defined by Christian doctrine and classical philosophy. Science received little attention. In fact, the pioneering scientific research of the antebellum period was most often done by independently wealthy gentlemen and other amateurs.

After mid-century, a number of related changes came to higher education. Within undergraduate education, the emphasis began to shift from the classics to the natural and social sciences. When the chemist Charles W. Eliot became the first non-minister to head Harvard in 1869, he expanded the elective courses that students could take and hired Spencer's popularizer John Fiske despite the misgivings of his trustees. Meanwhile, the Land Grant Act of 1862 enabled the states to establish publicly-supported universities designed not only to make higher education more widely available, but to promote research in practical areas like engineering and agriculture. In New York, Andrew Dickson White persuaded the wealthy philanthropist Ezra



GENTLEMAN MEETING A LADY.

**Etiquette, 1880s** Middle-class manners were exquisitely fine-tuned in the late nineteenth century. This illustration, from a popular manual of etiquette, shows how a proper lady and gentleman should gracefully acknowledge each other when they chanced to meet on the street: "either by bowing or words of greeting, a gentleman lifting his hat."

Cornell to support his vision of a university combining vocational education with the best features of the modern German research university. Although he met with fierce political resistance from denominational colleges, White succeeded in opening Cornell University in 1868. (White wrote a popular lecture, "The Battle-fields of Science," about the perennial conflict between "religious dogma" and free inquiry; translated into articles in *Popular Science Monthly* and later books, it helped foster the mistaken impression among historians that religious leaders had opposed Darwinism from the beginning.)

Beginning with Johns Hopkins University in 1876, new private universities were also established with graduate programs directly modeled on those in Germany. These were made possible by the benefactions of wealthy industrialists like Carnegie, Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, who supported the University of Chicago, and railroad tycoon Leland Stanford, who founded a university in memory of his son.

Such new and renovated institutions became cen-



**College Students** Two students relax in their room at Harvard in 1870. The detailed wallpaper, the ornate furniture, the framed pictures covering the walls — not to mention the suits and serious demeanors on the students themselves — all attest to a college experience quite unlike what most students today have.

ters for research in America, both drawing strength from and reinforcing popular faith in science. They were the seedbed for a new kind of middle class, one based upon possessing expert knowledge rather than owning a business. Implicitly and sometimes explicitly antagonistic to traditional forms of knowledge, the universities were dedicated to the discovery of new truths rather than the transmission of eternal verities. Complementing the natural sciences were new disciplines — sociology, economics, political science, psychology, anthropology — dedicated to the scientific study of human behavior. Although new scholarly

journals were founded to publish scientific research, leading academics like Sumner also reached a broad general audience through the metropolitan media. Their research had not yet moved beyond the comprehension of educated men and women, and they felt it a duty to offer their insights on current issues. Consequently, academics participated actively in media debates about politics and reform as well as education and religion.

The concrete result of this expansion was a striking increase in the numbers of young men and women with college education: in 1870 there were 52,000 undergraduates in the United States; by 1890 there would be 157,000. Although the proportion of college and university students never rose above 5 percent of their age group in the nineteenth century, this increase produced a generation with experiences and expectations

that differed from their prewar parents. For some, the university experience uprooted them from local ties and set them on careers that demanded geographical mobility, giving them a national perspective. Many academic researchers went a step further and were drawn into a widening international intellectual community among scholars throughout Europe, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand.

Meanwhile, the older denominational colleges continued to enroll thousands of students, drawn from a smaller geographical area and from within the ranks of the religious group. Often facing strong pressure to emulate the universities and abandon their traditional classical curriculums, many gradually adopted alternative B.S. degree programs and allowed some choices of electives. But even as they allowed students to emulate the larger institutions in organizing fraternities and football teams, they retained a religious framework that had been abandoned elsewhere. In the later part of the century, such schools became centers for the emergence of the Y.M.C.A. movement that embraced a more strenuous kind of religiosity, “muscular Christianity.”

Yet career paths for new college graduates were not clearly defined. The expansion of higher education itself created thousands of salaried positions for graduates interested in a career that combined intellectual activity with a sense of public service. Other college graduates, such as Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell and Ray Stannard Baker, drifted awhile after undergraduate and post-graduate training until they found important careers in journalism. They defined their work as applying the skills they had first learned in science laboratories to the investigation of social issues.

The increase in the college-educated population combined with the rising authority of science to transform professional work. During the Jacksonian period, egalitarian challenges weakened or eliminated laws regulating entry to the traditional professions — the ministry, medicine and the law — to the point where anyone could practice who gained a certain amount of knowledge through apprenticeship and who attracted sufficient clientele. In the postwar period, the prestige of scientific knowledge became a counterweight to democratic principles, by emphasizing the importance of specialized training and expertise. The movement toward the modern professional system began with the founding of the American Social Science Association in 1865. With the goal of establishing what one historian has described as “communities of the competent,” the ASSA brought together college graduates with more traditional elites in a number of northeastern cities. It promoted “scientific” reforms in civil service, charity and prisons. Then in the 1880s, more specialized groups like the American Historical Association and the American Economic Association were launched, marking a shift away from public policy issues and toward the kinds of technical investigations being done in the research universities.

The American Medical Association was one of the most successful of the new associations founded to strengthen professional boundaries. Although it had existed as an ineffectual trade group since 1846, the AMA seized upon the revolution launched in Europe in 1876, when Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch connected specific diseases with particular microorganisms, to argue that only scientifically trained physicians should be

## ✻ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### “The Status of Athletics in American Colleges,” 1890

*This 1890 Atlantic Monthly essay by Harvard professor Albert Bushnell Hart explained recent changes in college life. The popularity of athletics fostered more physically assertive norms of masculinity in the urban middle class.*

The chief seat of amateur sport is in the colleges. Here are assemblages of young men having unusual control over their own time; here is a strong feeling of *esprit de corps*; here,

out of the many players offering themselves, a first-rate team may easily be formed. . . . College authorities acknowledge, willingly or unwillingly, that athletic sports must be allowed and even encouraged. There is a growing sentiment that exercise is essential for the most efficient use of the mind. . . .

The first distinct result of athletics, as seen in the colleges, is a considerable increase in the average of bodily strength. The popular caricature of the college student is no longer the stoop-shouldered,

long-haired grind, but a person of abnormal biceps and rudimentary brains. As a fact, the most popular man in any college class to-day is usually a good student who can do something in athletics better than anybody else. The effect of this accepted standard of complete manliness is seen on men who never take part in athletic contests. The bodily vigor and health of students in the colleges have visibly risen in twenty years. . . . Experienced directors and trainers apply scientific methods of developing the body.

allowed to practice. Beginning in the 1890s, local AMA chapters gained in power and persuaded local governments to allow doctors themselves to restrict entry into the profession to those with scientific credentials. Similarly, the American Bar Association was founded in 1878 “to advance the science of jurisprudence.” In 1894 New York became the first city to set up a central examining board of lawyers to control admission to legal practice. Increasingly, lawyers were trained in universities instead of through clerkships. In 1870, only one quarter of new lawyers had attended law school; by 1910, two-thirds did so.

New professions also arose under the protective banner of science that came to epitomize, in the words of historian Thomas Haskell, “the very essence of the professional idea — expert authority, institutionally cultivated and certified.” Overall, 234 national professional associations were established between 1870 and 1900. Although rarely as successful in achieving control over entry into their occupations, these associations helped to establish standards of excellence and to defend their members’ jurisdiction against encroachment by workers in overlapping fields.

#### WOMEN AND PROFESSIONALISM

The rising authority of science and professionalism was to have mixed implications for the status of women in American society. The prewar women’s rights movement had drawn on equal rights ideology and Christian doctrines of the equality of all believers, but “science” as it was used in the late nineteenth century more often than not justified *inequality* between the sexes as well as between social classes and races. Darwinian theories

were often cited as “proof” for assertions that would be deemed highly unscientific today. For example, prominent Boston physician Edward Clarke announced in 1873 that women’s unique reproductive organs, the result of an evolutionary process of sexual specialization, were so delicate that they could be severely damaged by the mental exertion of higher education. Allowing young women access to college education, he warned, ran the risk of rendering them sterile and imperiling the very future of the nation. Although a number of women’s colleges, including Vassar and Bryn Mawr, were founded in the postwar period, and women were admitted to many of the new universities, the “scientific” theories of Dr. Clarke were reflected in physical education requirements and, in some cases, separate curricula for women.

On the one hand, some women were able to find jobs as well as training in the expanding universities, and a number of female researchers played significant roles in the development of such fields as psychology and anthropology. On the other, as social science disciplines evolved in the later nineteenth century, women would often be deemed less capable of theoretical work and relegated to more “practical” subfields. Women found positions more readily, for example, in the new professions of social work, education, and home economics, than in the more purely academic fields of sociology, psychology, and economics.

Nonetheless, participating in these emerging professions allowed college-educated women to play a larger role in public life. More than any other person, Jane Addams was responsible for the creation of the profession of social work (see Chapter 19). But her en-

#### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

##### Twenty Years at Hull House, 1910

*Having had the opportunity to gain a college education, many women like Jane Addams found little opportunity to use it. In her memoir, she described how, after years of seeking, she and friends founded a settlement house in Chicago modeled after Toynbee Hall in London.*

I gradually reached a conviction that the first generation of college women had taken their learning too quickly, had departed too suddenly from the active, emotional life led by

their grandmothers and great-grandmothers; that the contemporary education of young women had developed too exclusively the power of acquiring knowledge and of merely receiving impressions; that somewhere in the process of “being educated” they had lost that simple and almost automatic response to the human appeal, that old healthful reaction resulting in activity from the mere presence of suffering or of helplessness. . . .

It is hard to tell just when the very simple plan which afterward developed into

the Settlement began to form itself in my mind. . . . but I gradually became convinced that it would be a good thing to rent a house in a part of the city where many primitive and actual needs are found, in which young women who had been given over too exclusively to study might restore a balance of activity along traditional lines and learn of life from life itself; where they might try out some of the things they had been taught and put truth to “the ultimate test of the conduct it dictates or inspires.”

try into the field of public service came only after an extended period of inactivity and depression following her graduation from a women's college in 1881, as she attempted to fulfill the expected role of the well-to-do Victorian woman. Later, in *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910), she strongly criticized what she described as “the snare of preparation,” believing that pursuing personal “cultivation” kept young people from active participation in life. Through Hull House's work on behalf of its poor neighbors, Addams and a community of reform-minded women found a constructive role in society. They also provided social scientists such as John Dewey at the University of Chicago with a laboratory to investigate contemporary problems, which laid the groundwork for Progressive-Era reform programs.

### ∞ Pragmatism and Religion

For most of the postwar advocates of one variety or another of the new authority of science, they emphasized science as a superior form of knowledge, a source of “fact” far in advance of traditional “superstitions.” Only a few of the most perceptive thinkers of the late nineteenth century — particularly philosophers Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey — perceived that science offered more properly a “culture of inquiry” rather than a source of absolute knowledge. They understood that the achievement of modern science was a *method* of investigation within a community of researchers, where findings were always subject to further research and revision. But they did not, as popularizers claimed, offer the certainty of absolute *laws*. In addition, recognizing better than most the philosophical implications of the Darwinian account of random variation and natural selection, they envisioned a universe of chance and accident, offering neither solace of traditional religious doctrines nor new theories of evolutionary progress. They understood that the real meaning of Darwin's theory was that change was merely *change*, not progress.

William James, the best known of the three in the



**William James** The founder of modern American psychology, James was also one of the principle architects of the philosophical school known as Pragmatism. Altogether, he is one of the most formidable figures in American intellectual history.

late nineteenth century, first applied the name *pragmatism* to this perspective in 1907. But he had already exemplified the experimental approach in his previous psychological studies, including *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, in which he asserted that the reigning scientific rationalism was incapable of dealing with human spiritual life. Acknowledging that a personal conception of God was “incredible to our modern imagination,” James asserted that though spirituality should not be reduced to its physical manifestations, its truth could be judged from its effects, especially its ability to bring forth a “difference of emotional atmosphere.” As a young man, James suffered greatly from depression. At first he hesitated to undertake scientific

study, fearing it would rob him of “blind trust” in the universe, but he came to believe that the scientific worldview itself, seemingly so “rugged and manly” in its adherence to facts, masked a childish longing for certainty. As a scientist who thought through the implications of his own practices, he was too aware of the limitations of his calling to adopt the agnosticism that was fashionable among social scientists. He explained:

When I look at the religious question as it really puts itself to concrete men, . . . then this command that we shall put a stopper on our heart, instinct, and courage, and *wait* — acting of course meanwhile more or less as if religion were *not* true — till doomsday, or until such time as our intellect and senses working together may have taken in evidence enough, — this command, I say, seems to me the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave.

James attacked “the airy and shallow optimism of current religious philosophy” for glossing over the harsh realities of industrial society. But he insisted that theories of any sort, whether religious or scientific, should be seen as “instruments” and truth as “the practical consequences of acting on a belief.” Given those definitions, he embraced a heroic religious sensibility in which “all is well, in *spite* of certain forms of death, indeed *because* of certain forms of death — death

of hope, death of strength, death of responsibility, of fear and worry, competency and desert, death of everything that paganism, naturalism, and legalism pin their faith on and tie their trust to.” Not, in short, the kind of optimistic faith in progress preached by the national media.

## DISSENTING VIEWS OF PROGRESS

Despite the impression of increasing homogeneity and centralization conveyed in the national media, Americans’ lives became if anything more diverse during the postwar era. Even in this period of rapid urbanization, nearly three-quarters of the population of the United States in 1890 lived in rural areas or towns under eight thousand people. Although few Americans were untouched in some way by the economic and social changes of this period, responses of rural and small-town residents and of workers and immigrants in the cities differed in important ways from those of the dominant national culture. There was less agreement that all changes were signs of progress. Some vociferously resisted most changes as threats to their way of life, while others approached it warily, incorporating innovations in a piecemeal fashion and rejecting others. Above all, they sought to retain as much local control as possible over their everyday lives and refused to grant primary authority to the spokesmen of the urban, national culture.

### ∞ *Rural and Small-Town North*

Though defined by the Census Bureau as “urban” places, towns and smaller cities in the later nineteenth century were in many ways distinct from both the emerging metropolitan centers and the embattled farms. As the economic and social bridge between these worlds, small-town residents often saw themselves as occupying a happy cultural medium, without the backwardness of the country or the corruption of the city. Small-town leaders included merchants, small manufacturers and professionals who depended upon the surrounding countryside for their business. For them, progress meant an increase in population and trade, but increasing centralization of power in large corporations and faraway urban centers threatened their autonomy as much as that of neighboring farmers.

Small-town businessmen suffered from the dominance of big city merchants, largely because of the ad-

vantage their location — the result of consolidation in the great regional railroad systems — gave them over markets and transportation costs. The businessmen’s position was complicated by the fact that they had long been staunch advocates of progress, particularly when it came to improvements in transportation. For decades, local boosters in the Midwest tried to persuade farmers in their regions to approve bond issues to pay for new railroads by arguing that everyone gained from increased trade and property values. After the Civil War, however, these railroads came under the control of Northeastern financial groups like that led by John Murray Forbes, and began to discriminate in their rates against the very communities that had founded them. The railroad regulations first passed in the Midwest in the 1870s were described by their critics as “Granger Laws,” in an attempt to discredit them, but they were actually the brainchildren of local businessmen who had been feeling the withering effects of railroad rate structures since the Civil War.

Late in 1865, the Burlington, Iowa, *Hawk-Eye* predicted that “the West” could soon become the center of power in the United States:

Every careful observer must see that this great valley of the West is to be the seat of empire for the continent. . . . In the West lies the undeveloped wealth, material, mental, moral, and physical that is to control the future destinies of the Republic. The monopolies of Eastern corporations, manufacturing and transportation companies must give way before the irresistible march of improvement and progress in the West.

The answer, the editors thought, was not only to gain state aid for more railroads to compete with the monopolies, but to encourage economic diversification through the introduction of local manufacturing enterprises. “Sending our grain, wool, cattle, hogs, etc., East,” they noted, “and then bringing them back in the shape of woolen goods, boots, shoes, hats and caps, agricultural implements, steam engines, etc., etc., is a very expensive way of getting on in life.” Over the next half-century, this dream of economic diversification was blocked by the market power of industries in the Northeast and the Great Lakes region, but after the turn of the century manufacturing in agriculture-related industries such as meat-packing began to move back into the countryside.

By the 1870s, local business leaders in many Midwestern towns energetically lobbied their state legislatures

to outlaw the rate discrimination they believed stood in the way of “the irresistible march of improvement and progress.” In states like Illinois and Iowa, these efforts coincided with the mushroom growth of Granger organizations (see Chapter 21), whose members were also alarmed by the railroads’ power over their lives. But the interests of farmers and merchants sometimes diverged — farmers benefited from lower prices brought by mail-order purchasing and from lower rates offered for long-haul shipping that bypassed local merchants. Debates in the state legislatures centered less on *whether* to regulate railroads and more on *how*, from the standpoint of different economic and regional interests, to do it most effectively. In Iowa in 1874, for example, businessmen in cities along the Mississippi River wanted to set mandatory schedules of maximum rates in order to lower charges between themselves and interior points; the state Grange organization, on the other hand, supported a limited commission system that was also backed by railroad lobbyists. In public, railroad leaders denounced any form of regulation and attempted to stigmatize the movement by connecting it with agrarian radicalism. It was they, in fact, who dubbed the legislation “Granger Laws.” John Murray Forbes of the Burlington discounted criticism of rate discrimination as the product of the “slow agricultural mind.” E. L. Godkin wrote in *The Nation* that advocates of state regulation were guilty of “spoliation as flagrant as any ever proposed by Karl Marx.” Pro-regulation businessmen rejected charges of radicalism; they simply argued that the railroads were common carriers built with public funds and pointed to the long tradition of government support for the economic well-being of its people.

#### PRODUCERISM AND LOCAL RELIGION

In fact, small businessmen, farmers and workers alike challenged the economic theories that dominated the national media. Although regional, class, racial and religious differences often prevented effective political alliances among them (see Chapter 21), most members of these groups believed that there was indeed a “natural economy,” but one governed by the moral claims of the producer, not the workings of abstract “laws.” Though in favor of economic growth, they denied that the present path of increased economic centralization and inequality represented true progress. Instead they proposed the growth of a decentralized and balanced economy along the lines of the philosophy laid out by Philadelphia economist Henry Carey, which is often

termed producerism. Carey, who had been influential in the antebellum Whig party, refused to accept postwar academic economists’ distinctions between science and morality. His advocacy of the Greenback cause and rejection of the gold standard made him unfashionable in the metropolitan media, but he continued to publish works promoting the idea that society must be considered as a whole in the interest of maximizing true “happiness,” not simply aggregate “wealth.” He believed that a nation of small and medium-sized producers, though perhaps less efficient, would support a truly just, democratic, and stable society. It was the responsibility of a democratic government to enact policies, such as tariff protection and an abundant currency, to ensure the survival of such an economic system.

Meanwhile, religious culture was being reshaped in the small towns as well as the cities, but local religion followed a number of different, diverging paths. Although economic differences were less pronounced in the small towns than in metropolitan areas, every place had its local “gentry” of well-to-do merchants and farmers, doctors and lawyers and ministers of the larger churches. Its members were the people most likely to be affected by the cities’ changing intellectual climate, but diffusion of the new media was uneven. The son of one of the leading citizens in the village of El Dorado, Kansas, young William Allen White did not encounter national magazines like *Harper’s* and *The Atlantic* until the mid-1880s, when he was a college student in the larger town of Emporia. Even though he had not yet been exposed to the new evolutionary ideas, as a youth he was uncomfortable with public displays of emotion associated with evangelical religion. While a student at the Presbyterian College of Emporia, White and a friend formed a pact to resist the appeals of a Moody revival that swept through town. They “were scared stiff that it would get us and pledged ourselves to stand against it.” On summer evenings, he watched curiously at camp meetings attended by “the workers, the failing farmers, and their fading wives.” He was both excited and repelled by the “emotional upset, the hallelujahs and the imprecations to the Lord for forgiveness — all the outbursts of overwrought minds and burning hearts that made the spectacle so weird, so terrible, so fascinating.”

Jane Addams grew up in the village of Cedarville, Illinois, daughter of a prominent businessman who was not a church member even though he taught Bible class in the nondenominational community church.

Nearby Rockford Seminary, which she attended in the late 1870s, was known as “The Mount Holyoke of the West” because of its religious intensity. One of the few “unconverted” girls in the school, Addams was the recipient of “every sort of evangelical appeal.” She remained unresponsive to them, however, having adopted “a sort of rationalism” from her father and from an “early reading of Emerson.” Nonetheless, she was attracted to “an ideal of mingled learning, piety, and physical labor” formed from her reading of medieval history, an ideal that would find secular expression in her settlement house work. In fact, many other men and women like White and Addams who would play prominent roles in the turn-of-the-century Progressive movement were products of small-town or rural childhoods. Though they rejected what they saw as the narrow doctrines and unseemly emotionalism of evangelical Protestantism, their participation in Progressive reform programs was driven by a semi-secularized “religion of humanity” that had its roots in evangelical Protestantism.

#### CHAUTAUQUA

For others in the rural and small-town middle classes the issue was not secularization but how to respond to proliferating opportunities for amusement afforded by an expanding economy. The Chautauqua movement, which demonstrated the potential of blending piety and entertainment, illustrated the contained experimentation with change undertaken by many Americans. Over the nineteenth century, Methodism had grown to become one of the major Protestant denominations despite its bans on drinking, dancing, gambling and nearly all types of commercial entertainment. One reason was its inventiveness in creating alternatives to these forbidden activities. Methodists originated Vacation Bible School, for example, and held their camp meetings in attractive spots like Martha’s Vineyard and the Jersey Shore. They founded the Chautauqua Association in 1873 as a vacation camp to train Sunday school teachers. Located on the shores of spectacular Chautauqua Lake in western New York State, its two-week “institutes” offered lessons, sermons, devotional meetings *and* concerts, humorous lectures, bonfires and fireworks, plus access to a full range of recreational activities. One of its founders, Methodist minister John Vincent, explained that the institute’s organization of activities refused to distinguish between sacred and secular activity. His goal was “to turn all secular nature into an altar for the glory of God.” The enthusiastic re-

sponse soon broadened the Association’s audience far beyond Sunday school teachers, and for the next five decades hundreds of thousands of rural and small-town Americans made the pilgrimage to western New York to see many of the nation’s most prominent thinkers and doers, including six presidents.

The Institute’s ability to reconcile relaxation, religion and self-improvement was an example of the roundabout process by which many mainstream Protestants adopted a more positive attitude toward leisure in the late nineteenth century. Social Gospel leader Washington Gladden (see Chapter 19) recalled his joy at realizing as a twelve-year-old that salvation did not require “the sacrifice of baseball.” He remained convinced, however, that diversions must be “wholesome,” and “educational”; he distrusted purely commercial amusements and of course forbade any such activities on Sundays.

The movement quickly generated spin-offs, including smaller week-long institutes at attractive rustic sites throughout the Northeast and Midwest. The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle was set up in 1878 to provide materials for home-study groups that met in private homes. A monthly magazine, *The Chautauquan*, offered help in running these groups. Dedicated to “the Promotion of True Culture,” it described itself as a “high-class literary magazine adapted to the needs of practical people.” Those completing the study programs were invited to come to Chautauqua for a special “Recognition Day,” which for many men and women who were not able to attend high school or college represented a special moment of achievement. Although the standardized reading provided by the Circle might be seen as evidence of cultural centralization, *Chautauquan* editors were careful not to offend the norms of its rural and small-town readers. The Circle lists included safe “information reading” in non-fiction subjects like history, geography and art. Novels, still scandalous to some, were omitted, though *The Chautauquan* judged that individuals might read one or two “good novels” a year without damage to “a well-organized mind.” The egalitarian method of learning in the Circles, where members took turns presenting the assigned readings to the rest of the group, also ensured that the readings would be translated into terms that made sense within local perspectives. The overarching framework remained religious: members of the Vincent Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Club in Indianapolis, for example, heard Bishop Vincent himself deliver a lecture, “How to Grow Intellectually,” which



“emphatically pronounced that secret to be found in prayer.”

#### LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY REVIVALISM

The Moody revival that Kansan William Allen White resisted was part of the series of crusades conducted throughout the United States in the decades after the Civil War (see Chapter 19). Although revivalist Dwight Moody continued to believe in Biblical infallibility and premillennialism, he generally avoided controversial doctrinal issues in his sermons because his primary goal was to achieve conversions. He emphasized the love of God and kept his message simple: “Ruin by sin, Redemption by Christ, and Regeneration by the Holy Ghost.” He did not mention hellfire or God’s wrath, not because he rejected the doctrine of eternal punishment but because he thought it was not effective. He explained pragmatically, “Terror never brought a man in yet.” Instead, he offered sentimental music and “living truths for head and heart,” dramatized with “thrilling anecdotes and incidents, personal experiences, touching home scenes, and stories of tender pathos.” Moody was most interested in individual salvation, but he was ambivalent about the direction of change in America. At the least, the supposed progress of postwar culture offered new opportunities for sin. In a sermon on temptation, he identified the “four great temptations that threaten us to-day”: the theater, disregard of the Sabbath, Sunday newspapers, and atheistic teachings like evolution.

Others in rural and small-town America were more appalled by the falling away from true religion that they observed in the cities, and more willing to openly attack it. Before the Civil War, Jonathan Blanchard was an abolitionist ally of Henry Ward Beecher. Afterward, he continued the struggle to make America a “Christian nation,” but found a widening gulf between how he and urban ministers defined this idea. As president



**A Holiness Revival Service** A woman prays for the family of a convert at a late nineteenth-century holiness camp meeting. The Holiness Movement taught that, after conversion, believers could become, through the power of the Holy Spirit, entirely free from sin. Allowing women to preach was still unusual at the time this image was made.

of Wheaton College in Illinois and editor of a religious magazine, *Christian Cynosure*, he publicly attacked what he viewed as growing doctrinal laxity among Congregationalists. He was particularly vehement in his criticism of Beecher, noting, “If Mr. Beecher’s teachings are the gospel of Christ, what need had Christ to be crucified.” He ridiculed Beecher’s efforts to modify his Puritan heritage: “When he is about to assail some fundamental truth, held and suffered for by the Puritans, he always begins by proclaiming himself their descen-

dant.” By the end of the 1870s, Blanchard’s estrangement from the direction of the New England Congregationalism brought him into alliance with Moody and his Bible Training Institute in Chicago. Blanchard’s son Charles succeeded him as president of Wheaton in 1882 and cemented the transition to a new outlook that formed the foundation of modern fundamentalism after the turn of the century. Such critics of “progress” no longer hoped to redeem the entire nation but to preserve a saving remnant until the final coming of Christ. Among Charles Blanchard’s favorite texts was “Come out from among them and be separate.” Increasingly, he looked for true disciples of Christ among those whom progress had left behind, the very people whom the adolescent White had ridiculed.

The third “R” in Moody’s formula, “Redemption by the Holy Spirit,” reflected an increasing emphasis among some evangelical Protestants upon a direct personal experience of God’s grace. A number of parallel movements, including a separatist Holiness Revival among the Methodists, emerged in the postwar period to establish a tradition that after the turn of the century became known as Pentecostalism. Holiness teachings were spread through books, including Asa Mahan’s *The Baptism of the Holy Spirit* (1870), which illustrated a shift in focus from Christ to the Holy Spirit, and through camp meeting revivals such as those White observed. They were also fostered and spread by a series of conferences in both Britain and the United States, in which like-minded clergy and laymen from a number of different Protestant denominations developed new interpretations of sin and grace. These included the belief that the experience of holiness translated into “power for service,” which gave rise to a wide variety of philanthropic organizations in the cities that emphasized aid to the poor as well as evangelism. Such organizations were at least as numerous as those inspired by the more liberal Social Gospel spokesmen.

### ∞ *Negotiating Change in the Rural North*

In long-settled areas of the rural Northeast and Midwest, farmers had been integrated into a market economy well before the Civil War. The continued importance of the family farm and the local community, however, sustained long-held Jeffersonian beliefs in individualism, independence, and local autonomy. Farmers valued the relative freedom that agriculture allowed them, and continued to think of theirs as the most virtuous

way of life, not simply a way of earning a living. Moreover, they continued to believe that agriculture was fundamental to the virtue and well-being of the nation as a whole. In order to preserve it, they resisted changes that meant enlarging government, fearing both higher taxes — often hard for cash-poor farmers to pay — and interference from outside experts.

For example, throughout the nineteenth century rural roads were local institutions. They were maintained by the farmers themselves, through a system in which they paid off road and poll taxes with their own labor and use of their teams and equipment. Designed to meet local needs, the often-meandering and sometimes impassable system of country roads was the bane of the long-distance traveler. Rural voters rejected all efforts to centralize the system or shift it to a cash basis. They were nonetheless quick to adopt new technologies in the form of inexpensive patent road scrapers, introduced in 1879, which made possible improved roads without administrative changes. In the 1880s and 1890s, however, increased pressure for improved rural roads came from a new quarter: urban enthusiasts for the new sport of bicycling who wanted to escape into nature on smooth, permanent road surfaces. Represented by the nationwide League of American Wheelmen (generously funded by bicycle manufacturers), bicyclists agitated for the construction of macadamized (hard-surface) roads and a shift in authority to professional engineers at the state and federal levels. Farmers, who would bear the bulk of the costs of these vastly more expensive crushed-stone surfaces, adamantly opposed roads that they did not need. An 1893 Iowa farmers’ convention made their feelings clear: “We don’t want any eastern bicycle fellers or one-hoss lawyers with patent leather boots, to tell us how to fix the roads that we use.” The resulting impasse was not broken until after the turn of the century, at the dawn of the automobile age, when the states began to pay directly for paved roads.

Of even greater concern was the issue of country schools. Like the roads, these were governed locally in the nineteenth century by tiny subdistricts within each township, each run by an elected school board with the power to set taxes, establish curricula, and hire teachers. Here too rural residents wanted to keep costs low, but school issues were even more contentious because they aroused people’s anxieties about their children’s future. Many farmers feared that inappropriate schooling — anything going beyond the “three R’s” — would draw their children away from an agricultural way of



life; others wanted schools to prepare their children to succeed in a fast-changing world that might be vastly different from their own.

Beginning in Massachusetts before the Civil War, school reformers sought to eliminate the multitude of tiny districts in favor of township-wide systems. They hoped that larger districts would make it possible to hire better-trained and professionally certified teachers and superintendents and to purchase more modern materials. They also wanted to eliminate one-room schools in favor of larger buildings where students could be separated according to grades, and to establish high schools. Massachusetts farmers, however, resisted these changes as a threat to their ability to shape their

**One-room Schoolhouse** Rural schools faced many challenges in the late nineteenth century. One-room schoolhouses, like this one in Montana, made it difficult to separate students by grade. Large blackboards and new books were too expensive for many rural schools, which struggled to keep costs down. And parents often insisted that school calendars conform to agricultural cycles so that children could be available for farm work.

children's education. They wanted, for example, school terms to complement agricultural cycles, so that children could participate in farm work. To save money, they preferred the custom of having students furnish their own school books, which were often handed down within extended families, instead of adopting the newer standardized texts advocated by reformers. And they wanted to retain the one-room schools, not only

to keep their children closer to home, but because the buildings also served as community centers for their rural neighborhoods, hosting singing schools, debating societies, public lectures and religious meetings when school was out. In the patronizing characterization of a reform advocate, farmers viewed the large districts as “an entering wedge to centralization and despotism.” Opposing them, he reported, “backwoods orators in town meetings eloquently appealed to the memory of Patrick Henry and the heroes of Lexington and Bunker Hill”; they succeeded in fending them off for several decades.

Rural depopulation, however, accomplished what the reformers could not. As declining numbers of children made the tiny districts financially burdensome, they were gradually phased out. This happened first in Massachusetts in the 1880s, soon followed by the rest of rural New England. In the 1890s a subsequent push for school consolidation, or the merging of rural and town schools, was fought even more strongly through the Northern states generally. In many places in the late nineteenth century, the population of villages and towns grew faster than that of the farms even in agricultural areas, bringing to a head tensions between the competing perspectives of farmers and townspeople. Reform advocates were fortified by the increasing emphasis among postwar professional educators upon education as a means of socializing children into the broader world, defined in urban terms. Farmers opposed consolidation not only because the graded schools and high schools generally brought higher taxes, but because it meant transporting their children into town in hired hacks. A correspondent to the *Ohio Farmer* protested that this was “monumental stupidity. Instead of education we get jobbery and the minds of the children are fed upon false ideals and error.” Although they were able to block consolidation until after the turn of the century, the reorganization of rural schools was accomplished during the Progressive period by means of an all-out campaign by professional educators and state and federal agencies to solve what was officially defined as “the rural school problem.”

For many rural Americans in the second half of the nineteenth century, the schoolbooks handed down through generations of school children were most likely *McGuffey's Readers*. This was a series of six volumes of short stories, essays and poetry compiled by William Holmes McGuffey, a Cincinnati teacher, arranged in rising levels of difficulty. They were sold throughout the nation, but were ubiquitous in the Mid-

west; well into the twentieth century, autobiographers from that region assumed that their readers knew precisely what they meant when they wrote, as did William Allen White, that at the age of ten he was “in the second reader, but had read all the readers through to the fourth.”

Although the wide use of McGuffey's readers might seem another sign of standardization, in many ways it reflected a decentralized rural life that was knit together not by modern bureaucracies but by a set of shared general beliefs. The *Readers* were popular because they embodied a simple moralism and avoided offending the sensibilities of a diverse readership. (The *Readers* are, for example, still used today in Amish schools.) Their contents did not attempt to impart current information, but exemplified what were considered unchanging producerist values — assumed to be particularly prevalent among rural people — of hard work, practicality, and simple living. They extolled the greatness of all things American, but stayed away from partisan or regional issues. Family life was celebrated and the importance of obedience upheld, as in the popular poem “Casabianca,” where a young boy dies on a burning ship rather than defy his father's order to stay there until he returned.

Though farmers had adopted some mechanical aids to production, agriculture remained dependent upon nature in all its vagaries. They were less touched than urban Americans by the general atmosphere of material progress that encouraged secularization in religious thought. The *McGuffey's Readers* preached a generalized Christianity as the basis of a prosperous, orderly society. The *Sixth Reader* asserted:

If you can induce a community to doubt the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures; to question the reality and obligations of religion; to hesitate, undecided, whether there be any such thing as virtue or vice; whether there be an eternal state of retribution beyond the grave; or whether there exists any such being as God, you have broken down the barriers of moral virtue, and hoisted the floodgates of immorality and crime.

Published in 1857, these words were more a statement of the central place of religion than a comment upon developments in doctrine. They reflected the thinking of ordinary Protestant Americans through much of the century. Indeed, as late as 1905 a leading Baptist writer estimated that “the vast majority” of lay Bap-

tists throughout the country were simply unaware that there had been any change or challenges to orthodox theology.

The world presented in McGuffey's readers seemed to be entirely innocent of change. It was agrarian and small-scale, and the individual prospered or failed according to his own efforts. The city, on the other hand, was portrayed as the source of moral danger, where young men were routinely ruined by being tempted into such dissipated activities as dancing, card playing, and attending the theater, which led inexorably to drinking, gambling, crime, prison and early death. Although the reality of rural life in the nineteenth century suggests that people were not necessarily more moral or sober than urban residents, the ideals embodied in *McGuffey's Readers* fostered the perception that at basis the world was simple, sure and fundamentally unchanging. This was far different from the world manifested in the urban media.

### ↻ *The Distinctive South*

The wartime destruction of the Southern economy and its failure to recover fully afterward meant that most Southerners did not face the same kinds of cultural changes encountered by Americans in other regions. Despite the efforts of New South promoters (see Chapter 16) there were fewer and smaller towns and cities. Those that did develop, moreover, adopted fewer of the cultural manifestations of northern urbanism. The dominant tone of public life after the end of Reconstruction was set by rural creeds and customs of localism, self-sufficiency, and suspicion toward change.

Nonetheless, significant cultural changes did occur in the postwar South, although obscured by its isolation from the national media. For example, the giant camp meetings that had been an innovation of the region earlier in the century gave way to local revivals conducted outside the limelight of the national tours of prominent figures. Where antebellum evangelism had focused on individual conversion and avoided the kinds of social reform movements that were common in the North, it broadened after the war to include precisely these kinds of issues. Antebellum revivalists in the South, faced with the reality of slavery and a male code of honor that demanded aggressiveness and self-display, had been less successful in spreading the disciplined behaviors that were becoming the hallmark of the northern middle class. Men of all classes followed the lead of the planters in prizing hunting, horserac-

ing and cock-fighting, drinking, and fighting. After the war, southern churches provided a bulwark in a time of chaos. Membership in evangelical denominations grew dramatically. Moral legislation, once spurned because of its ties to abolition, now flourished. Most southern states passed laws allowing local bans on alcohol, swearing, cock-fighting, gambling, and sporting events on Sunday. Many of these recreations continued outside the law, and crimes of violence were more prevalent than in the North, but Protestant morality nonetheless had achieved a dominant position in the public culture of the South.

Organized in their own denominations, African American churches played an even more prominent role in the postwar period. (See Chapter 16.) In the face of violent suppression of nearly all efforts at self-determination, ministers of black churches were de facto leaders of their community, charged with caring for the material and spiritual well-being of their flocks. Despite the racial separation of the churches, the centrality of musical expression in African American spirituality presented an important doorway of influence into national white culture. Jubilee songs, first sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers as they traveled throughout the United States and Europe to raise funds for all-black Fisk University in Nashville, introduced northern white audiences for the first time to African American spirituals, albeit somewhat altered and “smoothed” to suit white tastes. Fisk students were



**The Fisk Jubilee Singers** The nine original members of the Jubilee Singers from Fisk University pose in this 1871 photograph. Notice the singers' proper middle-class dress. They were the first internationally acclaimed African American singers, introducing “slave songs” to the world and preserving this fine music from extinction. They also gained legitimacy in white eyes by singing classical European music.

trained to sing classical and popular music of the day, but tour organizers quickly learned white audiences were fascinated by spirituals. Billed as a “healthful pleasure,” Jubilee concerts drew men and women who were generally wary of commercial theater. Other African American colleges soon followed suit, and white revivalists introduced spirituals into their meetings. By 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois would complain in *The Souls of Black Folk* that “the mass of ‘gospel’ hymns which has swept through American churches and well-nigh ruined our sense of song consists largely of debased imitations of Negro melodies made by ears that caught the jingle but not the music, the body but not the soul, of the Jubilee songs.”

Despite their differences, neither white nor African American churches in the South experienced the kinds of economic and social conditions that fostered change in the urban North. Fewer southern ministers felt the need to reconcile science and received beliefs, and those who did were quickly silenced. For example, James Woodrow, the uncle of future president Woodrow Wilson, was dismissed from Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, S.C., for claiming that evolution was compatible with Scripture. Nor did Protestant churches encounter the growing religious diversity brought to both urban and rural North by immigration (see below). In fact, the strongest influence from the North in this period may have been the migration into the region, particularly the Appalachians, of new Protestant groups like the Seventh-Day Adventists and Holiness movements.

## DIVERGENT SUBCULTURES

Increasing differentiation within American culture in the second half of the nineteenth century was not only the result of differences between regions or between cities and countryside. Within the cities and towns themselves, immigration and the emergence of distinct working-class communities made for even greater diversity in ways of living and thinking. All of these groups were excluded from the dominant metropolitan culture, and sought to work out their own interpretations of the idea of progress.

Native-born, Protestant Americans greeted the swelling numbers of immigrants in the late nineteenth century with profound ambivalence (see Chapter 19). On the one hand, immigrants helped provide the workers and consumers required for the nation’s material progress.

Andrew Carnegie estimated the economic contribution of each immigrant at \$1,500, and outside the Northeast nearly every state established agents or boards of immigration to attract foreign settlers. Moreover, Americans had long pointed proudly to their nation’s attractiveness to migrants as ultimate proof of the success of their experiment in republican government. Unlike nineteenth-century European nations that defined themselves in terms of a common ethnicity, Americans had espoused — at least officially — an ideological form of nationalism that required only an acceptance of democratic institutions. (Even today, the absence of an ethnic basis for citizenship distinguishes the United States from nations such as Germany and Japan.) Americans even derived a sense of national identity from their ability to assimilate many types into one: Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., boasted, “We are the Romans of the modern world, the great assimilating people.”

But increased postwar immigration brought a further proliferation of languages, religions, and customs that prompted many to ask whether the nation could absorb, even survive such diversity. Even before the Civil War, the anti-Catholicism that had greeted Irish immigrants (see Chapter 14) had exposed a widespread assumption that the United States was a *Protestant* nation. The predominance of Catholic migrants from southern and central Europe threatened the widespread assumption that the United States was a *Protestant* nation, and the arrival of large numbers of eastern European Jews aroused fears for the future of the nation’s *Christian* character. The anxieties that accompanied these realizations demonstrated the extent to which many assumed that a shared Protestant culture was essential for the success of democratic society.

The rising authority, among members of the urban upper classes, of Darwinism and supposedly “scientific” ideas about racial differences added a new racial strand to the older religious strand of nativism in the United States. Particularly in New England and the Northeast, writers proclaimed that America’s greatness lay in the dominance of its “Anglo-Saxon stock.” Families that had been prominent for generations attempted to distinguish themselves from social-climbing parvenus by emphasizing their descent from English nobility. John Fiske, the popularizer of evolution, for example, claimed to be a direct descendant of ninth-century England’s King Alfred. For most of the postwar period, however, Anglo-Saxonists remained confident in the ability of their “race” to assimilate newcomers. Not until the crises of the 1890s would anxieties about the future of



their multi-ethnic population supersede this optimism. Then, increasing demands were heard, particularly in the Northeast, for immigration restrictions.

### *Immigrants Encounter the New World*

The thinking of native-born Americans about the fate of immigrants seemed to resolve into opposing poles of complete assimilation and some sort of persistence as an “undigestible” foreign mass within the national body. As with rural Americans, however, immigrants followed a path of selective change. The very act of migration, of course, entailed fundamental changes. But once in America, newcomers had to decide how much change to accept, and how to interpret the changes that occurred. In the interest of preserving key aspects of their way of life, they accepted, even embraced, some changes while resisting others. There is irony here as well. In the process of transforming an “immigrant” into an “ethnic” culture, each group created an identity based in varying degrees on a sense of distinctiveness, of being “outsiders” in America. Yet over time the combined influence of the new diversity of cultures transformed the very definition of what it meant to be “an American.”

For Catholic newcomers, whether from “old” immigration sources such as Ireland and Germany or the newer regions of southern and eastern Europe, the church was the most important institution mediating between immigrants and America. By 1850, Catholics were already the nation’s largest single denomination, and despite recurrent anti-Catholicism they were a political force in key cities and states. Yet because a majority of Catholics in the postwar period were foreign-born, the church itself faced the task of defining its own identity in the midst of the proliferation of national cultures. Its leadership, moreover, was divided over how best to accommodate to American culture, or indeed how to envision the kind of America they wanted to accommodate *to*.

One source of anti-Catholicism throughout the nineteenth century was the church’s close ties in Europe with reactionary or autocratic governments and its expressed opposition to democratic ideas. (See Chapter 14.) This supposed mistrust of the Catholic’s ability to be a “real” American received fresh impetus in 1870 when the First Vatican Council proclaimed the dogma of papal infallibility. (There was considerable opposition to this step among liberal Catholics in Europe, who also dissented from the church’s reactionary

politics and often advocated the separation of church and state.) In America, some Catholic leaders, styling themselves “Americanizers,” argued that the church must distance itself from its ties to reactionary foreign powers and embrace “Anglo-Saxon” manners and institutions. Orestes Brownson, a former Transcendentalist who converted to Catholicism before the Civil War, warned, “If Catholics choose to separate themselves from the great current of American nationality, and to assume the position in political and social life of an inferior, a distinct, or an alien people, or of a foreign colony planted in the midst of a people with whom they have no sympathies,” the church would miss its potential to transform American society. He was succeeded as spokesman of the Americanizers by the archbishop of St. Paul, Minnesota, John Ireland, who proclaimed, “Progress is the law of God’s creation,” which the church must follow.

Catholics who opposed this approach were more critical of the dominant American culture, with its lack of order and discipline and its excessive individualism and materialism. Nonetheless, they were careful not to challenge the nation’s fundamental institutions. They avoided the thorny issue of the separation of church and state, to which Rome was unalterably opposed, but embraced the principle of freedom of conscience. Since Catholics were still a minority, it was a strategically useful position, but ironically it served to promote the further secularization of public life in America. Catholic writers pointed out that in the United States it was Protestant evangelicals who posed the most significant threat to free religious practice by seeking to legislate their norms of Sabbath observance and to inject their forms of worship into public ceremonies. They noted that the Protestants in Massachusetts and Connecticut had been the first in America to establish state-supported churches and had clung to them longest, until the 1830s. Catholic leaders opposed the public schools, not because they were secular but precisely because of the prevalence of Protestant religion there.

These Catholics professed themselves to be as patriotic as the Catholic Americanizers and Protestants who attacked them for disloyalty. They simply did not accept the right of the dominant majority to equate Americanism and Protestantism. In so doing, they articulated a more pluralistic way of understanding American culture. They emphasized the important role that Catholics had played in the New World, a role minimized by Protestant historians. The Columbian Catholic Congress held in conjunction with the Chicago ex-



**Immigrants Shopping, 1895** Immigrants to the United States all wrestled with questions of assimilation. But they also lived their lives from day to day, as this 1895 photograph of crowds of people shopping for food at a Hester Street market in Manhattan's Lower East Side attests. Such a scene could just as well have been photographed in eastern Europe, although there more women would have covered their heads with scarves.

position in September 1893 reminded Americans that “it was a Catholic monk who inspired Columbus with hope; it was Columbus and a Catholic crew that first crossed the trackless main; that it was a Catholic queen who rendered the expedition possible; and that it was a

Catholic whose name has been given to the entire continent.” Catholic historian John Gilmary Shea argued that it had been the Catholics of Maryland who had introduced religious liberty to colonial America. The standard claim that the Puritans of New England had pioneered religious liberty he deemed “a farce too contemptible for consideration.” Rather, he characterized them as “narrow-minded, tyrannical, and intolerant in religious thought,” and “grasping and avaricious” in their treatment of the Indians.

Despite their criticisms of American society, Cath-



olic critics did not seek a permanent isolation of immigrant cultures within their own communities. They sought instead the right to define the terms of their assimilation. Anton Walburg, a German-born pastor in Cincinnati, published a controversial pamphlet *The Question of Nationality in Its Relation to the Catholic Church in America* in 1889. Like so many travel books by European writers, it attacked Americans' worship of money, their ridiculous obsession with size instead of quality, and their unsophisticated culture. Yet Walburg's purpose was not simply to criticize but to improve. Pointing to the nation's destiny for greatness, he attempted to distinguish a "false Americanism" from a "true," pluralistic one that would admit of "no distinction of color, rank, condition, or nationality." He hoped that by maintaining a sense of pride in their heritage, instead of embracing the lowest forms of popular American culture, immigrants could enrich their adopted homeland.

If the idea of cultural pluralism challenged the claims of Protestants to represent the core tradition in American history, it was also suspect to the more conservative church hierarchy in Rome. Francesco Cardinal Satolli, the first apostolic delegate to the United States, blessed the Catholic Congress in Chicago in 1893: "Christian truth and American liberty will make you free, happy and prosperous." But he attacked America's ranking Catholic prelate, James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore (see Chapter 19), for attending the World's Parliament of Religions at the same exposition, because he feared that such ecumenism fostered "indifferentism," or the blurring of religious distinctions, which would weaken Catholic identity. Debates within the church culminated in 1899 in *Testem Benevolentiae*, the letter of Pope Leo XIII denouncing "Americanism," or an overemphasis on personal liberty as "hostile to Catholic doctrine and discipline." Like the same pope's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum novarum*, the letter emphasized that American Catholics must obey traditional principles of mutual obligation, not American notions of individual freedom.

Like Catholic immigrants, the Jews who came to the United States in the postwar period also debated how best to respond to the new world they encountered. Unlike Catholics, they had a long history of being "outsiders," a persecuted minority within Europe's Christian societies. In the relatively more tolerant environment of America, Jews faced a new problem: how to preserve a sense of cultural identity that had been shaped by centuries of exclusion. Within the ghettos of

Europe, cultural uniformity had been enforced, but it could not be taken for granted in the New World. Although, as for many other migrants, piety was often not a primary characteristic among those Jews who chose to emigrate, in their new homeland religion became central to their identities. Yet the precise character of that religion remained to be determined.

In 1877, about quarter of a million Jews lived scattered thinly throughout the country. Because Judaism had no centralized hierarchy, the individual synagogue became the most important unit, although Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati represented an important center of Jewish culture. Before large numbers of eastern European immigrants began arriving in the later part of the century, most American Jewish immigrants had come from Germany. Many had prospered, and the worship practices in their congregations began to look more like liberal Protestantism, with the introduction of family seating in place of the separation of the sexes and the embellishment of stained glass windows and organ music. In 1885 a rabbinical conference met in Pittsburgh to establish a national organization and agreed on a set of defining beliefs for what was called Reform Judaism. It ratified the congregational structure that had emerged and stated that the laws of the Torah and Talmudic commentary should be adopted "only as far as they can be adapted to the institutions of the Society in which they live and enjoy the blessings of liberty." This in effect permitted Jews to abandon many aspects of worship and daily life, such as special dietary practices, that had for centuries defined Jewish identity. Noting this, a number of rabbis at the conference refused to join, laying the foundation for what emerged in the twentieth century as Conservative Judaism.

By 1885, the new patterns of immigration made Reformed Jews a minority. The number of Jews quadrupled by the end of the century, reaching 3 million by World War I, with the majority clustered in the Northeast. These new immigrants were much poorer and shared, in Yiddish, a common language. (Yiddish is the German dialect spoken by central and especially east European Jews.) With greater numbers to support the preservation of their distinctive way of life, they rejected the Reformed path of adaptation to American culture. The result was a growing diversity in definitions of what it meant to be a Jew in America. While some in areas like New York City, with the greatest concentration of Jewish immigrants, chose to adhere strictly to all laws of the Torah, others adapted more selectively to the dominant culture. For many, Yiddish provided a

common urban sub-culture, with its own books, newspapers and theater. Others, while retaining a sense of Jewish identity, were attracted to secular labor radicalism (see below).

Many Jewish immigrants transferred intellectual skills, honed by a culture that emphasized Talmudic study, to the pursuit of education through the public schools. In New York they were so successful that by the turn of the century Jewish students dominated the publicly funded City College. They gained admittance to upper class Columbia University in such numbers that the institution, fearing for its elite reputation, adopted a “selective admission” policy — in effect a quota system — to reduce the proportion of Jewish undergraduates. Columbia’s deans revealed their view of the undergraduate liberal arts program as a socializing experience for “gentlemen” of the upper classes when they explained that the children of eastern European Jews lacked the “social advantages” to make “pleasant companions” for the college’s “natural constituency.” Moreover, the deans said, Jewish students were a bit too “enthusiastic” about “accomplishment.” The problem seemed to be that these children of immigrants had adapted too well to the new culture of intellectual inquiry being shaped in the emerging universities.

To varying degrees, each group of immigrants arriving in postwar America conducted a similar internal and external debate over change. Like native-born farmers, they negotiated contentiously with the agents of centralization and homogenization over how far and on whose terms they would become “assimilated” to the national American culture. Although no group of immigrants in the process of becoming an “ethnic” group was able to preserve unchanged the way of life they had known in their homelands, they were able to resist pressure to submerge their cultures into some “Anglo-Saxon” mainstream.

For other groups of immigrants, as well as longtime Americans such as blacks and Indians, issues of race made assimilation far more complicated. After the Civil War, for example, no group sought assimilation more eagerly than the former slaves, only to meet the intractability of white racism. The differences between Du Bois and Booker T. Washington (see Chapter 16), for example, involved different formulas for racial progress and assimilation. Du Bois resisted Washington’s program of working within segregated communities, for he wanted to see talented African Americans participating as equals within the dominant metropolitan culture. He envisioned black leaders becoming “co-

worker[s] in the kingdom of culture,” by “fostering the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to, but in conformity with, the greater ideals of the American Republic.” Yet the foreboding that racism would continue to make his people outsiders within their own nation gave rise to Du Bois’s famous statement about their divided consciousness: “One ever feels his twoness — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts; two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

### ↻ *Workers Respond to Industrial Progress*

If many immigrants were skeptical about Americanizers’ claims that “Progress” was “the law of God’s creation,” so were the working men and women whose lives were transformed by the industrialization of manufacturing in the postwar period. Change was not uniform, however, differing in type and intensity according to the industry and the region. In areas of the South and West to which railroads came late in the century, if at all, artisanal forms of production that had disappeared from the Northeast in the Market Revolution (see Chapter 9) survived until late in the century. Compounding this regional diversity in rates of development, each manufacturing area had its own unique mix of industries, attracting differing patterns of ethnic and religious settlement. As in other aspects of American culture, the proliferation of local differences belied a surface impression of homogenization.

Nonetheless, workers everywhere responded skeptically to the visions of progress proffered by spokesmen for the new industrial order. The ideal of many continued to be a world of small-scale, independent producers, comparable to the agrarian world celebrated by *McGuffey’s Readers*. They looked back to the artisanal system of production as it had operated before the Market Revolution and the emergence of the factory system. There, young boys had learned their trade by apprenticing to master craftsmen, working for little pay but in exchange being taught the complicated skills of production. After completing his apprenticeship, the young man continued to work for somewhat higher wages until he saved enough to establish a workshop of his own. In this world the possession of a certain amount of property, within the context of a rough general equality, ensured a balance of independence and equality that was the foundation of a democratic society. Robert MacFarlane, a mid-century labor leader,

argued that a “small but universal ownership” was the “true foundation of a stable and firm republic.” This artisanal ideal sought to balance individual rights with communal responsibilities, and work was done for the public good as well as personal gain.

This was the ideal, at least. In the crowded cities of the Northeast, reality had already begun to diverge from the ideal in the decades before the Civil War. The hope that westward expansion brought increased opportunities for young journeymen had attracted many artisans to the Free Soil ideology before the war. For some, it worked: Jane Addams’ father had begun life as a miller’s apprentice in Illinois, and novelist William Dean Howells started as a printer’s devil (assistant) in rural Ohio.

But in industry after industry after the war, industrialization destroyed the traditional crafts. By breaking up manufacturing into smaller, simpler steps and by introducing new technologies, factory owners eliminated the need for artisanal skills. This allowed the employment of less-skilled workers, including immigrants and — anathema to many artisans — even women, who received lower wages. Mass-production lowered the quality of goods but also the price; those who had not been able to afford handmade goods might see this as progress, but not the craftsman whose skills were no longer demanded. In those industries where mass-production overwhelmed or eliminated traditional craft skills, workers could no longer hope to climb the artisanal ladder to achieve an independent livelihood as a small-scale producer. Instead, they faced the likelihood of a lifetime of working for wages. In a culture that had traditionally equated permanent wage-labor with slavery, this was a bitter pill.

Even if their trades were not immediately threatened, artisans in postwar America observed industrial changes with alarm. Their analysis of the problem and their proposed solutions were consistent with their producerist tradition, however. Rejecting the new Marxist socialist argument that class was determined by ownership of private property, they attributed the growing economic ills to a small group of wealthy capitalists who did no productive work but manipulated the system to control the labor of the vast “middle classes” of artisans, farmers and small businessmen. They feared that industrialized manufacturing would destroy this virtuous middle group through “the encroachments of both . . . the extremely rich and the extremely poor.”

The Knights of Labor was established by a small group of Philadelphia garment cutters in 1869. It was a time



**Anti-Labor Cartoon, 1890** Here, a monstrous, mechanical figure representing the Knights of Labor threatens to crush employers on an anvil labeled “Capital.” By this time, however, the Knights were already fading as a force in the labor movement.

when organized labor movements were in disarray but fraternal societies flourished. Its first leader, Uriah Stephens, had been studying to become a Baptist minister when the Panic of 1837 forced him out to work as a tailor to support his family. Strongly attracted to fraternal rituals, he was a Freemason, an Odd Fellow, and a Knight of Pythias. The other founding members were also active in a variety of fraternal orders, and together they fashioned a secret, ritualistic brotherhood dedicated to “education”



**The Haymarket Poster** In English and German, this poster summons workers to the fateful Haymarket Square “mass meeting” on May 4, 1886. Notice that those coming to the meeting are urged to “arm yourselves.”

in the values of universal brotherhood, cooperation, and honor. Like the other popular fraternal orders, the Knights created in their meeting places, literally called “sanctuaries,” places untouched by the ruthless competition of the day. The postwar popularity of fraternal organizations, each claiming in some way to defend such “chivalric” qualities as courage, loyalty, truthfulness, deference to legitimate authority, justice and care for the vulnerable, offered an eloquent challenge to the reigning doctrines of progress. The Knights of Labor offered an additional element in its vision of one day establishing an alternative culture based on its principles.

For its members’ protection, the Knights’ founders insisted on absolute secrecy, and the new order grew slowly by establishing additional chapters, called assemblies. Its principles and rituals were passed on only by word of mouth. Gradually, the organization began to spread beyond the Philadelphia region, into the heavy

industrial areas of western and northeastern Pennsylvania and into New York. The failure of the 1877 railway strikes and the brutal suppression of unions brought additional workers into the Knights, finally prompting the creation of a national organization in 1878. The preamble of the constitution written at its first General Assembly proclaimed its goal as making “industrial and moral worth — not wealth — the true standard of individual and national greatness.” In place of strikes and partisan politics, the Knights advocated nothing less than the end of the wage system through its own version of evolution: They looked toward “the organization of all laborers into one great solidarity, and the direction of their united efforts toward measures that shall, by peaceful processes, evolve the working classes out of their present condition in the wage-system into a cooperative system.” The preamble also called for equal pay for women, abolition of child labor, an eight-hour day, a graduated income tax, and government ownership of natural monopolies such as telegraphs, telephones, and railroads. For the present, it focused on transforming workers themselves through mystical ritual and doctrines. At the beginning of each meeting the assembly’s head, the “Master Workman,” solemnly intoned:

*In the beginning the great Architect founded the Universe;*

*The governing principle of which is Immutable Justice.*

*In its Beautiful proportions is displayed Omniscient Wisdom;*

*And sealed His work with the signet of Everlasting Truth;*

*Teaching that everything of value, or merit, is the result of creative Industry;*

*And the cooperation of its harmonious parts evermore inculcates perfect Economy.*

The Knights’ ceremonies created a semi-religious experience for many workers who had been alienated from mainstream Protestant churches because of the latter’s support of the new economic system. The order emphasized the dignity of labor by pointing out that Christ had been a carpenter, and vowed that its primary enemy was the “idolatry of wealth.”

As the assemblies proliferated, the movement began to diversify. The Knights welcomed members of all “productive” groups, including women and African Americans, barring only bankers, lawyers, speculators, gamblers, and liquor dealers. Despite its inclusiveness,

particular assemblies tended to be dominated by a particular trade or ethnic group, giving rise to conflicting interests. Although the original Knights had been native-born, Protestant craft workers, newer members were more likely to be unskilled industrial workers, many of them foreign-born Catholics. Under the umbrella of the organization were assemblies of Marxists in New York City, anarchists in Chicago and Denver, Germans in Cincinnati, French Canadians in New England mill towns, and black coal miners in Ottumwa, Iowa. Tensions grew between radical and trade-unionist factions. Many newcomers, like railroad machinist Terence V. Powderly, began to agitate to abandon the order's "veil" of secrecy, streamline the ritual, and take on a more public role.

In 1879 Powderly became national head and moved the Knights away from secrecy. An Irish-born Catholic, he hoped to keep the church from including the Knights in its blanket condemnation of all ritualistic secret societies. (In this he failed, as both the American bishops and the Vatican denounced the Knights in the mid-80s. Only in 1891 did Pope Leo XIII reverse the condemnation, at the urging of Cardinal Gibbons.) But Powderly maintained the order's vision of transforming economic relationships by educating workers and developing methods of workplace democracy to restore their "personal dignity." After going public in 1882, the order grew within three years from fewer than 43,000 to 111,000. But increasingly its locals defied the ban on strikes. In the early 1880s a few, such as Philadelphia shoemakers and Union Pacific shopmen, were victorious, but many, including miners in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, textile spinners in Fall River, Mas-

sachusetts, and iron molders in Troy, New York, were defeated. Then, in 1885, Knights led and won a highly publicized strike against Southwest Railway Conglomerate, owned by the widely detested financier and "robber baron" Jay Gould. Practically overnight, membership swelled to over three-quarters of a million. Many of these new members came with raised expectations and little interest in the order's cooperative vision. Despite Powderly's continuing emphasis on education, new members demanded strike leadership and support. But industrial employers vowed to fight back, and a second strike against Gould failed disastrously in 1886, followed by other defeats.

The most damaging blow to the Knights' vision of a brotherhood of all producers came in May 1886, when a dynamite bomb exploded as policemen attempted to break up a protest meeting of workers in Chicago's Haymarket Square. The toll eventually rose to eighteen killed and many more wounded, most of them policemen. Unable to discover the bomb-thrower's identity, the authorities nevertheless convicted eight anarchists, two of whom were members of the Knights, of conspiracy in the bombing. (Seven of the eight were German immigrants, adding fuel to nativists' fears as well.) Despite Powderly's refusal to defend the accused men, the national press took advantage of the situation to vilify the order, while internal divisions between radical and conservative wings ripped the organization apart. Although the Knights played an important role in the emergence of the rural Farmers' Alliance movement in the late 1880s (see Chapter 21), national membership quickly melted away.

The order's attempt to offer an alternative vision

## ✿ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### "The Secret Work of the Knights of Labor," 1870s

*Like the many other fraternal organizations that proliferated in the nineteenth century, the Knights of Labor drew heavily upon religious language and beliefs in its secret rituals. It also hoped to channel the sense of brotherhood into economic transformation.*

In the beginning, God ordained that man should labor, not as a curse, but as a blessing; not as a punishment, but as means of

development, physically, mentally, morally, and has set thereunto his seal of approval in the rich increase and reward. By labor is brought forward the kindly fruits of the earth in rich abundance for our sustenance and comfort; by labor (not exhaustive) is promoted health of the body and strength of mind, labor garners the priceless stores of wisdom and knowledge. It is the "Philosopher's Stone," everything it touches turns to wealth. "Labor is noble and holy." To glorify God in its exercise, to defend it from degra-

dation, to divest it of the evils to body, mind, and estate, which ignorance and greed have imposed; to rescue the toiler from the grasp of the selfish is a work worthy of the noblest and best of our race.

You have been selected from among your associates for that exalted purpose. Are you willing to accept the responsibility, and, trusting in the support of pledged true Knights, labor, with what ability you possess, for the triumph of these principles among men?

of progress may have foundered because of its effort to balance universalism with local autonomy. Its emphasis upon the “honor” and “nobility” of work and its inclusiveness brought together thousands of workers, who often had very different goals. But for a time its rituals, publications and public activities formed an alternative culture that challenged the authority of the dominant view that workers deserved to be poor. In the twentieth century, union organizers for the IWW and the CIO returned to the ideal of an inclusive brotherhood of skilled and unskilled workers. For the moment, however, emphasis shifted to the pragmatic “bread and butter” unionism championed by Samuel L. Gompers. Gompers had joined the Knights of Labor in 1873 while a cigar-maker in New York City. He soon parted ways with the order and in 1886 helped found the American Federation of Labor, an organization exclusively for craft unions. Recognizing that employers were more vulnerable to strikes by skilled workers, who were harder to replace, Gompers and the AF of L focused on improving wages, hours, and conditions for them, while ignoring unskilled industrial operatives. In 1888 Gompers publicly attacked the Knights’ cooperative vision as utopian. In effect, he urged workers to accept that “progress” had made the wage system inevitable and seek a secure place within the new order. “The way out of the wage system,” he stated, “is through higher wages.”

### ∞ *Radical Visions of Progress*

Though agreeing with Gompers that the self-sufficient artisan was a thing of the past, other Americans developed visions of progress far different from those purveyed by the metropolitan press. The postwar period witnessed a proliferation of radical voices in the United States, some influenced by European thinkers and many others home-grown, who argued that the capitalist system of industry was merely a transitional stage in social evolution.

Although the image of the bomb-throwing anarchist, the legacy of Haymarket, became a stereotype for all radicals in the national media, critics of American society held a wide variety of positions. Anarchists themselves drew upon the writings of a number of different European philosophers and ranged between extremes of libertarianism and collectivism, and between advocates of violence and pacifism. All, however, rejected the authority of government and advocated a society based on voluntary institutions. They differed over whether this society would be achieved

through revolution or the gradual spread of cooperatives as envisioned by the Knights of Labor. As we have seen, many American anarchists lived in metropolitan immigrant communities and published newspapers in English and German. By the end of the century a growing number of workers in western mining and industrial areas had embraced anarchism. Native-born Americans were also drawn to anarchism through the writings of nonconformists such as Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman. They spread their ideas by publishing newspapers with titles like *Truth* and *Free Comrade* and utopian romances such as *The Dwellers in Vale Sunrise* and *The Natural Man*. They also founded a number of communes in the West, including Home (Washington State) and Kaweah (California).

Socialists occupied an even more varied spectrum of philosophical positions, although all agreed that the path of social evolution lay in collective ownership of industrial wealth. Many were followers of the “scientific” socialism developed by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Karl Marx, who argued that “laws” of economic development dictated the eventual overthrow of the capitalist system by a revolution of the impoverished masses it had created. Just as Sumner dismissed economic reformers as sentimental moralists, Marx ridiculed other forms of socialism as “utopian.” Nonetheless, thousands of Americans, from impoverished immigrants to prosperous intellectuals, adhered to a belief that some form of state control of economic institutions would bring about a just society. Many rejected Marx’s belief in revolution, however, in favor of a more evolutionary vision. After the defeat of his American Railway Union in 1894 (see Chapter 21), Eugene V. Debs turned his energies to founding a non-Marxist Social Democracy party, dedicated to the achievement of socialist goals through acquisition of political power. Groups of socialists established colonies, such as Equality, in Washington State, seen as a “vanguard of the army that was to cover the thinly-populated State of Washington with a network of cooperative settlements and quietly and peaceably — and quite legally — transform it into a cooperative commonwealth.”

In fact, creating alternative visions of progress — through fiction, in utopian novels, and through the founding of new communities in the West — was a major method of social criticism in late nineteenth-century America. The inspiration behind most of these was *Looking Backward*, the hugely popular novel published in 1888 by Edward Bellamy. Bellamy found it difficult to fit into postwar society, rejecting careers in

the ministry, law and journalism. Suffering from tuberculosis and prone to bouts of nervous exhaustion, he found escape in imagining fantasy lands, which he captured in romantic short stories that he published in newspapers and magazines. *Looking Backward* began as one such story, but as he wrote amid the unrest of 1886, there came into his mind the image of a great “industrial army” organizing the nation’s production in the same way that the Union Army had conducted the war. Bellamy seized upon the military model as the answer to all the ills of the day. *Looking Backward* told the story of the Boston patrician Julian West, who in the year 2000 awakens from a hypnotically induced sleep. He finds that society has been transformed, not merely through the introduction of marvelous new technologies but through a complete reorganization according to principles of cooperation, public service, and economic justice. With the protagonist West standing in for the skeptical reader, the novel demonstrates in precise detail how such a society would operate, down to a system of credit cards to regulate purchases in a magnificent department store of the future.

Like the Knights of Labor, Bellamy hoped that cooperation would replace the injustice and disorder of the 1880s, but he lacked their faith in the virtue of working people. Like many members of the middle class, he distrusted strikes and saw socialist political parties as misguided. Instead, he was attracted to the image of a vast army of industrial workers as a more efficient and orderly way of organizing society. Like the Knights’ vision, it would be based on principles of mutual obligation and equality, but would be directed from the top down by an enlightened corps of officers. (Bellamy had sought to enroll at West Point in 1867 but was turned down because of poor health.) He labeled his ideal “nationalism,” to convey the sense both of national ownership and transcendence of narrow special interest. Like a well-calibrated machine, the national industrial army would be carefully organized to provide just the right combination of incentives and punishments to produce compliance. All production would be controlled by a single organization, elimi-



**Edward Bellamy** *Looking Backward* combined utopian idealism with many of the techniques of sentimental popular novel-writing to achieve an unprecedented success with the American public in the troubled 1880s and 1890s.

nating “the wastes which resulted from leaving the conduct of industry to irresponsible individuals.” In a world without class, industrial work would be performed by young people as a form of universal service, with greater rewards accruing to the most difficult. Decisions would be made by officers who had risen through the ranks; older adults were free to choose occupations that suited their interests. Women were organized in a sort of auxiliary army, with tasks deemed suitable to their different needs and abilities, but all received equal “credits”; neither they nor their children depended upon men for support. All received ample resources to ensure access to the array of consumer goods that the industrial system produced.

The novel was immediately successful, becoming one of the most widely read books of the century. Its sales were surpassed only by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the religious historical novel *Ben-Hur*. Readers were clearly attracted to Bellamy’s detailed description of a far happier, juster society. The novel, unfortunately, was much vaguer about exactly *how* the transformation had taken place. Bellamy leaves the explanation to a sermon preached by one of his characters. Noting that by the late nineteenth century “the vast majority of men had agreed as to the crying abuses of the existing social arrangement,” it was still tolerated because they failed



to perceive a viable alternative to competitive individualism. Then, when at an unspecified time it was generally recognized that a reorganization of society “on a higher ethical basis” was in the interests of all, “the dawn” finally came. “From the moment men allowed themselves to believe that humanity after all had not been meant for a dwarf, . . . but that it stood upon the verge of an avatar of limitless development, the reaction must needs have been overwhelming. It is evident that nothing was able to stand against the enthusiasm which the new faith inspired.” The sermon alludes to a “stormy epoch of transition, when heroes burst the barred gate of the future and revealed to the kindling gaze of a hopeless race, . . . a vista of progress whose end, for very excess of light, still dazzles us.” But the implication is that the revolution was swift and nearly bloodless. True to his New England Protestant roots, Bellamy presents the revolution in terms of a mass intellectual conversion, a secular millennium.

Many of his readers did indeed respond enthusiastically to the vision. John Dewey and Charles Beard both placed *Looking Backward* second only to Marx’s *Capital* on their lists of the most influential books of the late nineteenth century. The WCTU, the National Council of Women, the National Farmer’s Alliance, and the Knights of Labor all distributed copies to their members. It was translated into more than fifteen languages and inspired an international debate. Readers founded hundreds of Nationalist Clubs to promote the vision; characteristically, their goal was the voluntary conversion of capitalists through persuasion rather than political engagement. They published a magazine, *The Nationalist*, to promote the cause. Bellamy himself, however, began to believe that the movement must take on practical issues, and founded his own journal, *The New Nation*, to advocate government ownership of coal mines, telegraph and telephone companies, and the railroads, and equal and compulsory education.

A popular writer and lecturer, Charlotte Perkins Gilman extended Bellamy’s ideas to present a more radical feminist vision. She argued that it was, in fact, women’s economic dependence upon men that was holding up the final evolution of society into socialism. Applying evolutionary ideas, she noted that women’s dependent position resulted in an unhealthy exaggeration of gender differences that required men to be ruthlessly competitive, both to the detriment of society. Her ideas were developed in speaking to Nationalist Clubs and writing poetry and articles for *The Nationalist* and other “progressive” periodicals. They were summarized

in a best-selling book *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Evolution* (1898). Gilman’s ideas influenced the women’s rights movement, then regaining momentum, though she was little interested in winning the vote. More moderate women’s suffragists believed that receiving the franchise was an essential step in the progress of both their gender and the nation as a whole.

### ↻ *Radical Critiques of Progress*

Other social critics went farther, rejecting entirely the dominant faith in progress. Henry George, a middle class Philadelphian, had traveled widely throughout the United States and worked as a seaman, a printer, and a newspaperman. His observations of the tremendous changes of the 1860s and 1870s led him to write a book, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), challenging the very foundations of the idea of progress. George presented his own version of “scientific” history to refute the “hopeful fatalism” of laissez-faire economics. He believed that repeated cycles of “growth and decay of civilizations” throughout history belied the popular theory of continuous progress, the view that “improvement tends to go on unceasingly, to a higher and higher civilization.” Instead, it showed that nations tended to rise and fall, as division of labor and the accumulation of wealth steadily widened the gap between classes. As an increasing proportion of the civilization’s resources were devoted to the support of an idle ruling class, it invariably collapsed. In his idea of a “single tax,” George claimed to have discovered the key to eliminating these cycles. This was a tax on what he defined as unearned wealth in land, which would prevent growth in inequality. His thinking reflected his roots in the agrarian and artisanal producerist ideal of a small-scale, egalitarian economy and widely diffused political power. The book was dismissed by the national media but inspired a small but dedicated band of Single Taxers, and his general analysis of the nation’s problems had a much wider readership. In 1886, with support from the Knights of Labor and other workers’ and radical groups, George ran for mayor of New York as the candidate of the United Labor party. He was narrowly defeated by Democrat Abram S. Hewitt but ran ahead of a wealthy young Republican named Theodore Roosevelt.

George’s analysis also inspired the Farmers Alliance and Populist movements (see Chapter 21). His vision of a civilization in decline also underlay *Caesar’s Column*, a disturbing futuristic novel published in 1891 by



Minnesota Populist writer Ignatius Donnelly. One of the most widely read books of the early 1890s, it was an apocalyptic, anti-utopian premonition of society as it would be in 1988 if trends continued. Evoking the worst fears of rural America, Donnelly portrayed the city as a den of hypocrisy, sexual debauchery, grinding poverty, and explosive violence. The world is ruled by a small group of plutocrats and policed by hired bands of “Demons,” who drop poison-gas bombs from dirigibles to suppress opposition. Under this oppression, both urban workers and farmers have become brutalized. Ultimately, the civilization is consumed in a bloody revolution, leaving a small number, a saving remnant, to flee to Africa, where they form a new society based on Christian socialist principles.

Donnelly’s vision, fusing radical politics with evangelical millennialism, was further manifested in his preamble for the 1892 Omaha platform of the People’s Party:

A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents, and it is rapidly taking possession of the world. If not met and overthrown at once, it forebodes terrible social convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism.

Donnelly’s apocalypse illustrates the role of evangelical culture in the emergence of the Alliance movement and Populism. A shared Protestant culture provided a fertile medium for nurturing the agrarian movements

to challenge the economic and cultural power of Northeastern financial elites. The Alliance’s traveling lecturers spoke a language and employed organizational forms shaped by generations of revivalists. The experience of working together within the Alliance movement helped farmers withstand the withering ridicule of the metropolitan press.

By the mid-1890s, however, it had become difficult for even the most optimistic middle-class American to dismiss the voices of critics of progress. Of the financial panic of 1893, Henry Adams wrote of his Boston friends, “Men died like flies under the strain and Boston grew suddenly old, haggard, and thin.” His eccentric younger brother Brooks was in the midst of writing his own book, entitled *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1895). It reasserted a cyclical theory of historical development, in which societies alternated between periods of civilized “concentration” and barbaric “dispersion.” In the early stages of centralization, he believed, the characteristic “mental types” were religious, military, and artistic; as it continued, the capitalist, or moneylender, became dominant. At some point, concentration can go no farther, and disintegration sets in. Brooks Adams made no effort to conceal his contempt for the commercialism of his day, idealizing the art and chivalry of the Middle Ages. He perceived incipient disintegration even in the era’s art.

The ecstatic dream, which some twelfth-century monk cut into the stones of the sanctuary hallowed by the presence of his God, is reproduced to bedizen a

## ✻ IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### Caesar’s Column: A Story of the Twentieth Century, 1890

*Populist writer Ignatius Donnelly created one of the first “dystopian” novels in 1890 to show the logical outcome of the nation’s concentration of wealth. Set in 1988, the story climaxes in an apocalyptic riot by the urban poor, brutalized by oppression and deprivation.*

Civilization is gone, and all the devils are loose! No more courts, nor judges, nor constables, nor prisons! That which it took the world ten thousand years to create has gone in an hour. . . .

But still the work of ruin and slaughter goes on. The mighty city, with its ten million inhabitants, lies prostrate, chained, helpless, at the mercy of the enraged *canaille*. The dogs have become lions.

The people cannot comprehend it. They look around for their defenders — the police, the soldiery. “Where are they? Will not this dreadful nightmare pass away?” No; no; never — never. This is the culmination — this is the climax. . . . These are “the grapes of wrath” which God has stored up for the day of his vengeance; and now he is trampling them out, and this is the red juice — look

you! — that flows so thick and fast in the very gutters.

You were blind, you were callous, you were indifferent to the sorrows of your kind. The cry of the poor did not touch you, and every pitiful appeal wrung from human souls, every groan and sob and shriek of men and women, and the little starving children — starving in body and starving in brain — rose up and gathered like a great cloud around the throne of God; and now, at last, in the fullness of time, it has burst and comes down upon your wretched heads, a storm of thunderbolts and blood. . . .

warehouse; or the plan of an abbey, which Saint Hugh may have consecrated, is adapted to a railway station.

Adams made no specific predictions about the United States, though he referred pointedly to the growing power of the banker, referred to as “the monied type,” and “the usurious mind.” Theodore Roosevelt, reviewing the book for *Forum* magazine, admitted that it contained a “very ugly element of truth.” But he attempted to put Adams in his place by concluding that the idea that moneylenders were crushing American farmers was “really quite unworthy of Mr. Adams, or of anyone above the intellectual level of Mr. [William Jennings] Bryan, Mr. Henry George, or Mr. Bellamy.”

From the new world of the research universities came other challenges to the reigning faith in progress, all the more troubling because they were couched in the dominant language of science itself. Thorstein Veblen, son of Norwegian immigrants, had grown up on farms in Wisconsin and Minnesota, isolated from native American culture. He did graduate work at Johns Hopkins, Yale, and Cornell and taught at a number of prominent universities, but never lost the sense of being an outsider in metropolitan culture. His most famous book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), applied the tools of evolutionary science to modern American business. But unlike Spencer or Sumner, who equated dominance with superior “fitness,” Veblen mustered evidence from philosophy and the new fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics to show that the “leisure class” controlling America was made up of those who excelled in “pecuniary” and “predatory” traits that were “survivals” from barbaric stages of development. It had been engineers, mechanics and workmen, not the financiers, he argued, who wrought the industrial advances of the nineteenth century. They possessed what Veblen called the “instinct of workmanship,” motivated by “a taste for effective work, and a distaste for futile effort.” But their achievements were now controlled by a leisure class that performed no productive work. Unlike the Alliance or the Knights of Labor, Veblen claimed to be purely objective and scientific in his treatment of this class, but he ruthlessly satirized the behavior of “captains of industry” as barbaric. The great institutions of late nineteenth-century culture, including the modern university, as well as the opulent displays of the wealthy (see Chapter 19), he ridiculed as forms of “conspicuous consumption,” and even “conspicuous waste.”

Son of a pioneer Wisconsin businessman, historian

Frederick Jackson Turner too was something of an outsider to metropolitan culture. As a graduate student at Johns Hopkins he resisted his professor’s theory that American democracy was merely the result of “Anglo-Saxon” traditions. As a professor at the University of Wisconsin, Turner developed his own evolutionary theory about American culture that reflected his Midwestern origins. Like an increasing number of late nineteenth-century evolutionists, he thought that environment played a greater role than heredity. He attributed all that was distinctive in American culture, especially its democratic and pluralistic character, to the influence of the frontier. “Up to our own day,” he wrote, “American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West.” For Turner, who largely ignored the existence of native Americans, the continuous “advance of American settlement westward,” the taking up of “free land,” had set up a repeated cycle of “progress” from frontier simplicity to civilized complexity that enabled Americans to develop a culture unlike that of Europe. “American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character.”

Turner presented his ideas in a paper, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” read before a meeting of the American Historical Association in conjunction with the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition. In some ways, Turner simply translated a popular vision of expansionary progress into the measured language of social science, and his tone was similarly upbeat. Yet the evolutionary pattern he traced was not linear, but cyclical. Throughout its history, Turner believed, American culture had been reinvigorated through a return to the primitive wilderness and through the exertion of transforming it.

Even as it celebrated the frontier’s importance, Turner’s paper began with the Superintendent of the Census’ 1890 announcement that there was no longer a frontier — a line separating settled from unsettled regions in the United States. “This brief official statement marks the closing of a great historic movement,” Turner acknowledged. As he intended, his paper defined a new frontier in research, which occupied professional historians for the next half century. But it left unanswered the crucial question: what would replace the frontier in American society? Did the disappearance of the “gifts of



**The Chicago Exposition, 1893** The glittering white buildings and a vast array of industrial and technological wizardry on display dazzled the public, which flocked to tour the Exposition. Visitors carried away a vision of past and future progress that belied the grim realities of the depression that struck the U.S. just as the Exposition was closing.

free land” mean the end of American uniqueness? Had progress itself ended the special qualities that Turner identified? The only thing certain was that if progress was to continue, Americans would have to find an environmental equivalent to the frontier.

### CONCLUSION: VOICING ALTERNATIVES

Even as America became more physically unified in the generation after the Civil War, its increasing diversity was reflected in a wide range of responses to change. A metropolitan culture, disseminated through national media and educated in the new university system, extolled the growing power of science and efficiency over all aspects of life. But those who shared less in the nation’s growing industrial wealth, in urban working-class neighborhoods, small towns and rural areas, found ways to communicate alternative points of view that often rejected change or found ways of influencing

how it shaped their lives. Farmers, workers and immigrants all refused to accept dominant interpretations of progress and used their own publications and organizations to preserve a degree of choice over changes in local ways of life.

By the end of the century, the chorus of voices criticizing the idea of progress mounted to overwhelm the “fatalistic hopefulness” of the dominant postwar national culture. Some Americans continued to speak with the moral language of traditional values, but they were joined by a younger generation of university-trained men and women more comfortable with the arguments of evolutionary science. In the face of persistent industrial conflict and financial crises in the 1890s, even many middle-class Americans began to ask whether the limits of progress had been reached. Together, these voices clamored increasingly for reform of politics and the economy. The fact that many rejected the complacent materialism of the Gilded Age should not obscure, however, that they had little else in common. The diversity of values among Americans, even of definitions of what it meant to be an American, became increasingly apparent after the turn of the century, as many Americans of all types set out to reform their society.

## SUGGESTED READING

Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930* (1997). Describes the mixture of encouragement and resistance in farm families' attitudes toward change.

Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (1988). The middle chapters provide a detailed analysis of the postwar emergence of influential metropolitan cultural institutions in New York City.

Sally F. Griffith, *Home Town News: William Allen White and the Emporia Gazette* (1989). Illustrates the multifaceted role of a community newspaper in mediating between metropolitan and small town culture in late nineteenth-century Kansas.

David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders: The Encounter between Evangelical Theology and Evolutionary Thought* (1987). Describes the varied and changing responses to Darwinian theories.

George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (1980). An influential study of the development of a distinctive evangelical subculture in the United States.

Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (1994). Early chapters highlight the powerful attraction of many American intellectuals to the idea of a centralized national government.

William G. McLoughlin, *The Meaning of Henry Ward Beecher: An Essay on the Shifting Values of Mid-Victorian America, 1840-1870* (1970). An examination of the influential role of a popular preacher and writer in the shaping of liberal Protestantism.

R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (1986). Demonstrates that groups outside the Protestant mainstream have repeatedly redefined what it means to be American.

Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (1996). Details the transitional role of the fraternal order that served as an important forum for the expression of producerist opposition to industrialization.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (1988).

Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go a-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (1989).

Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (1954).

Thomas Bender, *Intellect and Public Life: Essays on the Social History of Academic Intellectuals in the United States* (1993).

Robert S. Fogarty, *All Things New: American Communes and Utopian Movements, 1860-1914* (1990).

Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (1976).

Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Science* (1977).

John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (1955, 1988).

John Lauritz Larson, *Bonds of Enterprise: John Murray Forbes and Western Development in America's Railway Age* (1984).

James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies* (1979).

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Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (2001).

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John H. Roberts, *Darwinism and the Divine in America: Protestant Intellectuals and Organic Evolution, 1859-1900* (1988).

Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (1982).

Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life* (1991).

Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (1982).

Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (1965).

Altina L. Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America* (1982).

William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (1946, reprinted 1990).