CHAPTER NINETEEN: THE INCORPORATION OF AMERICA, 1865–1900

THE RISE OF INDUSTRY, THE TRIUMPH OF BUSINESS
  A Revolution in Technology
  Mechanization Takes Command
  The Expanding Market for Goods
  Integration, Combination, and Merger
  The Gospel of Wealth
LABOR IN THE AGE OF BIG BUSINESS
  The Wage System
  The Knights of Labor
  The American Federation of Labor
THE NEW SOUTH
  An Internal Colony
  Southern Labor
  The Transformation of Piedmont Communities
THE INDUSTRIAL CITY
  Populating the City
  The Urban Landscape
  The City and the Environment
CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN THE GILDED AGE
  “Conspicuous Consumption”
  Gentility among the Middle Class
  Life in the Streets
CULTURE IN CONFLICT, CULTURE IN COMMON
  Education
  Leisure and Public Space
  National Pastimes
CONCLUSION

KEY TOPICS
* The rise of big business and the formation of the national labor movement
* The transformation of southern society
* The growth of cities
* The Gilded Age
* Changes in education
* Commercial amusements and organized sports

AMERICAN COMMUNITIES: PACKINGTOWN, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
  Packingtown mirrored the industrial age. It attracted immigrants from all over Europe, offering them jobs based on skill, tenure in America, and low wages. The immigrant groups settling in the Chicago neighborhood maintained their ethnic identities and institutions. The one common meeting place was the saloon. The meatpacking houses were a model of monopoly capitalism, with huge, specialized factories, and equally large amounts of waste that polluted the Chicago River and air. Spurred by technology, the Chicago meatpacking companies controlled all aspects of the industry from the raising of the cattle to the dietary habits of consumers. The vignette illustrates
how industry, ethnicity, and big business shaped the post-Civil War City.

THE RISE OF INDUSTRY, THE TRIUMPH OF BUSINESS The post-Civil War era saw a tremendous boom in business and technology. Inventors like Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison brought new products to Americans. By 1900, Americans had produced over 4,000 cars. In 1903, the Wright Brothers pioneered airplane flight. Railroads stimulated development as they crisscrossed the nation creating a national market. Industry grew at a pace previously unimaginable. By the early 20th century the United States produced 1/3 of the world’s industrial goods. Continuous machine production characterized many industries. Coal provided the energy for this second industrial revolution. New technologies increased productivity and the volume of goods. Assembly line production, beginning with meat-packing, spread throughout American industry. New techniques for marketing and merchandising emerged to distribute the growing volume of goods. Rural free delivery enabled Sears and Montgomery Wards to thrive and required that these companies set up sophisticated ways of reaching their customers. Chain stores developed in other retail areas, frequently specializing in specific consumer goods. Department stores captured the urban market. Advertising firms helped companies reach customers and helped stores to lure them in.

Business leaders tried to gain control over their markets and enlarge their own businesses. Periodic depressions wiped out weaker competitors and enabled the survivors to grow to unprecedented heights. Businesses employed vertical integration to control every step of production. They employed horizontal combination to gain control of the market for a single product. John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Trust was the best example of this. Although Congress claimed to have outlawed the trust in 1890, the enforcement of the law hampered unionization but did not prevent the continued consolidation of American business. American business leaders saw their success as an indication of their own personal virtues. A “gospel of wealth” seemed to justify ruthless financial maneuvering by men like Jay Gould. More acceptable was the model presented by Andrew Carnegie, a self-made multi-millionaire who brought efficiency to the steel industry. Captains of industry seemed to fulfill the lessons of Charles Darwin—survival of the fittest.

LABOR IN THE AGE OF BIG BUSINESS The American labor force in the late nineteenth century underwent a dramatic transformation. The number of Americans working for wages dramatically grew. Immigrants met the demands of new industries. Mechanization transformed labor by changing employer-employee relations and creating new categories of workers. In the older trades such as machine tooling and textiles, craft traditions were maintained while new industrial systems were added. Women workers moved into clerical positions created by the advent of the typewriter and telephone, and into retail as sales people. Racism kept African Americans and Chinese out of most skilled positions. Factory work was a dangerous and tedious ten to twelve-hour stint. Periodic depressions threw millions of workers out of jobs.

Workers mobilized to challenge unsatisfactory working conditions and the wage system that made them possible. The Knights of Labor, led by Terence V. Powderly tried with some success to mobilize labor to take control of their own industries. The Knights urged workplace cooperation as the alternative to the wage system. They set up small cooperatives in various industries, though these generally proved unsuccessful. The Knights joined the fight for an 8-
hour workday. Workers normally excluded from craft unions joined the Knights, including unskilled workers, women, and African Americans. Though achieving some gains, the Knights lost their crusade for an 8-hour workday due to a violent incident at Chicago’s Haymarket Square. Employers pooled resources to rid their factories of union organizers—the Knights lost and the wage system won. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), led by Samuel Gompers, organized skilled workers within the wage system. The AFL did not organize unskilled workers, females, or racial and ethnic minorities. It focused on short-term goals of higher wages, shorter hours and collective bargaining. Unlike other unions, the AFL did achieve a degree of respectability.

THE "NEW SOUTH" Southerners like Henry Grady envisioned a “New South” that would take advantage of the region’s resources and become a manufacturing center. Northern investors bought up much of the South’s manufacturing and natural resources often eliminating southern competition. Southern communities launched cotton mill campaigns to boost the textile industry. Local merchants and landowners supplied much of the capital, though by the 1920s northern investors held much of the South’s wealth including the major textile mills. For the most part, southern industry produced raw materials for northern consumption and became the nation’s internal colony.

Most southern factories were white-only or else rigidly segregated. African American were allowed low-paying jobs with railroads while African-American women typically worked as domestics. With the exception of the Knights of Labor, white workers generally protected their racial position. Wages were much lower for southerners than outside of the region, a situation that was worsened by widespread use of child and convict labor. The Piedmont (the area from southern Virginia through northern Alabama) developed into a textile-producing center with dozens of small industrial towns. As cotton and tobacco prices fell, farmers sent their children into the mills to pay off debts. Gradually they moved into these company-dominated mill villages. Mill superintendents used teachers and clergy to inculcate the company’s work ethic in the community. But mill village residents developed their own cultures, reinforced by a sense of connection to one another.

THE INDUSTRIAL CITY In the years after the Civil War, manufacturing moved from rural areas to the city. Millions of people followed these jobs to American cities making the United States an urban nation. Many of the migrants came from rural areas in the United States. But immigrants and their children accounted for most of the urban population growth. Immigrants came because of economic opportunities. Some returned to their home countries. Leaving Europe to escape persecution, Jews could not. Success depended on the skills the immigrants brought with them. Groups tended to live near their countrymen and to work in similar trades. Newcomers frequently moved in search of better opportunities.

The city was transformed under pressure of this huge influx. Open space rapidly decreased. People were packed into dumbbell tenements in working-class neighborhoods. Wealthy neighborhoods gleamed with new mansions, townhouses, and brownstones. Several cities experienced devastating fires, allowing architects to transform the urban landscape as part of the city beautiful movement. Architect Louis Sullivan surveyed the aftermath of the Chicago fire and envisioned building skyscrapers in the newly cleared space. Cities were built with a sense of
imperial style. Streetcars and subways also altered the spatial design of cities. The extension of transportation allowed residential suburbs to emerge on the periphery of the cities. Despite technological innovations, pollution continued to be an unsolved problem. Overcrowding and inadequate sanitation bred a variety of diseases. Attempts to clean up city water supplies and eliminate waste often led to polluting rivers, building sewage treatment plants, and creating garbage dumps on nearby rural lands.

CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN THE GILDED AGE The growth of consumer goods and services led to sweeping changes in American behavior and beliefs. The upper classes built common networks among themselves. They created a style of “conspicuous consumption” that broadcast their tremendous wealth to all. They patronized the arts by funding the galleries and symphonies of their cities. A new “middle class” developed its own sense of gentility. Aided by expanding transit systems, they moved into suburbs providing both space and privacy but a long commute to and from work. Middle-class women devoted their time to housework. New technologies simplified the tasks, but household work expanded to fill the time available. The new middle class embraced “culture” and physical exercise for self-improvement and moral uplift. Not forced to work or perform chores, middle-class youth found leisure a special aspect of their childhood.

Many working class people felt disenchanted amid the alien and commercial society. To allay the stress, they established close-knit ethnic communities. While Chinese, Mexicans, and African Americans were prevented from living outside of certain ghettos, European ethnic groups chose to live in closely-knit communities. Many immigrants came without families and lived in boarding houses. For many immigrant families, home became a second workplace where the whole family engaged in productive labor. Despite their meager resources, many attempted to imitate middle-class customs of dress and consumption, while preserving Old World customs. Immigrant cultures freely mixed with indigenous cultures to shape the emerging popular cultures of urban America. Promoters found that young people were attracted to ragtime and other African-American music. Promoters also found that amusement parks could attract a mass audience looking for wholesome fun.

CULTURES IN CONFLICT, CULTURE IN COMMON Stimulated by business and civic leaders and the idea of universal free schooling, America’s school system grew rapidly at all levels. Even so only a small minority attended high school or college. Supported by federal land grants, state universities and colleges proliferated and developed their modern form, as did the elite liberal arts and professional schools. Professional education was an important growth area and women benefited greatly by gaining greater access to colleges. Vocational education also experienced substantial expansion. Barred from the mainstream, African Americans founded their own colleges and vocational schools. Howard University, established for African Americans, had its own medical school. Educator Booker T. Washington founded the Tuskegee Institute to press his call for African Americans to concentrate on industrial education.
In large cities, varied needs led to the creation of park systems. The working class and middle class had different ideas on using public spaces. Park planners accommodated these needs by providing the middle-class areas with cultural activities and the working class with space for athletic contests. Disputes over alcohol illustrated the conflict between the two classes, but both classes found common ground in a growing number of pastimes. Ragtime, vaudeville, and especially sports brought the two classes together in shared activities that helped to provide a national identity. After the Civil War baseball emerged as the “national pastime” as professional teams and league play stimulated fan interest. The game initially reflected its working-class fans both in style of play and in organization. It soon became tied to the business economy. By the 1880s baseball had become segregated, leading to the creation of the Negro Leagues in the 1920s. Efforts by players to form their own cooperative rule league failed.

CONCLUSION Rich and poor alike watched the many changes in the emerging industrial, urban order, yet inequality increased. By the 1890s hopes for an egalitarian society were waning.

Lecture Suggestions

1. To explain the growth of industry and the changes in the organization of business, take a look at a single industry. Harold C. Livesay’s *Andrew Carnegie* (Little, Brown, 1975) gives a nice look at the kinds of changes that were going on. You can discuss the impact of technology—the development of the Bessemer process. You can examine the changes in business organization. Carnegie introduced cost accounting, management hierarchies, etc. You can explain the changing nature of labor. A discussion of the Homestead strike illustrates the problems workers were facing. Carnegie himself is an example of a rags to riches tale of an immigrant who went on to become a robber baron.

2. A standard, and frequently successful, strategy for looking at labor is to juxtapose the Knights of Labor and the AFL. Make the connection of the Knights to the tradition of Workingmen’s Parties (see Chapter Thirteen). Workingmen’s Parties sought more general reforms such as debtor relief, free education, end to militia service, universal manhood suffrage, etc. Make the connection of the AFL to the “pure and simple unionism” tradition of the antebellum trade unions, which focused on more tangible goals. The key, by the 1880s, is whether labor will accept or challenge the wage system. Most students assume that everyone’s goal throughout history has been to get a “good job.” In fact, throughout most of American history the goal has been to be independent. The Knights tried to maintain this; the AFL accepted the new order.

3. The material on the cities and on immigrants is often discussed in conjunction with one another. Discuss how cities grew in size and scope. Discuss how changes in transportation created cities with specialized areas—business, industrial, residential, slums, etc. Discuss how immigrants came to populate the city. Discuss the reasons for mass immigration in terms of “push and pull factors.” Explain the factors that pushed immigrants out of the old country. Generally it was the transformation of peasant agriculture, though for some, religious and political persecution played a role. Explain the factors that pulled them to America. Many immigrants were drawn by economic opportunity. Others wanted religious and political freedom.
Discussion Questions

1. What were the major factors that led to the tremendous industrial boom in the years after the Civil War? Why did this boom also create such huge businesses?

2. How did labor change during the Gilded Age? Make the connection with the material in Chapter Twelve, which discusses pre-industrial ways of working. Are the patterns discussed here radically different or a continuation of earlier ones?

3. What were the key differences between the Knights of Labor and the AFL?

4. Did cities become more or less desirable places to live?

5. The text refers to the South as an “internal colony” of the North. What does this mean? Did Southerners see themselves this way?

6. How did most middle-class Americans spend their leisure time? What about working-class Americans? Were their cultures more likely to be in conflict or overlapping?

Out of Class Activity

The late nineteenth century saw a tremendous number of immigrants coming to America. Yet it is a mistake to think that immigration has stopped. Students could interview recent immigrants and draw comparisons between the lives of immigrants today and those in the late nineteenth century.

If You’re Going to Read One Book on the Subject

As mentioned before, William L. Barney, *The Passage of the Republic* (Heath, 1987) describes well the diverse character of nineteenth century America. Chapters Eight and Nine are interdisciplinary overviews of the material covered in this chapter that would help the uninitiated instructor give a different spin on this material.

Audio-Visual Aids

“The Masses and the Millionaires—The Homestead Strike” Shows the 1892 strike and its impact on the American labor movement. (Color, 26 minutes, 1974)

“Manners and Morals of High Capitalism” from John Kenneth Galbraith’s “Age of Uncertainty” series. Discusses theories like Social Darwinism and Conspicuous Consumption in the context of the gilded age economic system. (Color, 57 minutes, 1977)

“Edison’s Miracle of Light” From the “PBS American Experience” series. Shows how Edison developed the components needed for an electrical system, yet lost control of the industry in a mess of personal patent and corporate battles. (Color, 60 minutes, 1995)