

APUSH – Urbanization Stations

Leisure and Landscape in the Cities

1. How did innovations in transportation and architecture contribute to the growth and changing look of American cities?
2. Identify several popular forms of leisure and entertainment during the Gilded Age? What do these activities say about the lifestyles and attitudes of Americans during the Gilded Age?
3. What, if any, role did leisure and entertainment play in the growth of cities during the Gilded Age?
4. Based on the readings, would you consider life in the cities during the Gilded Age to be a positive or negative experience? Defend your opinion.

Life in the Tenements

5. Define tenement. What factors contributed to the presence of tenements in the cities?
6. In your own words, describe the 5 major problems faced by cities during the Gilded Age.
7. How did cities attempt to deal with the challenges of city life? How successful were they?
8. According to the readings, would you consider life in the cities during the Gilded Age to be a positive or negative experience? Defend your opinion.

Political Machines

9. Define political machine. Why is Boss Tweed's Tammany Hall considered one of the most notorious political machines?
10. What strategies did Political Machines use to influence elections and make money for themselves?
11. Do you think the actions of political machines should be considered illegal, or do you agree with people like Plunkett that political machines were simply taking advantage of opportunities?
12. According to the readings, would you consider life in the cities during the Gilded Age to be a positive or negative experience? Defend your opinion.

Leisure and Landscape in the Cities

Transportation: Innovations in mass transit enabled large numbers of workers to go to and from jobs more easily. Street cars attached to moving underground cables were introduced in San Francisco. The first practical electric streetcar line began operating in Richmond, Virginia. In Boston, electric subways began running underneath the city's busy streets. Mass transit networks in many urban areas linked city neighborhoods to one another and outlying communities to the central business district and other focal points.

Architecture: To accommodate increased populations, cities needed to build upward. Architects were able to design taller buildings than ever before because of the invention of elevators and the development of internal steel skeletons to bear the weight of buildings. The skyscraper soon became America's greatest contribution to architecture. They solved the practical problem of how to make the best use of limited and expensive space and served as towering symbols of a rich and optimistic society.



Public Spaces: City planners in several cities sought to restore a measure of serenity to the urban environment by designing parks and recreational areas. Cities began setting aside precious green space for their residents' outdoor enjoyment. Many cities distributed small playgrounds and playing fields throughout their neighborhoods so that most citizens had park space for public recreation. Finished parks often featured boating and tennis facilities, zoos and bike paths. Some cities constructed amusement parks on their outskirts. They boasted picnic grounds and a variety of rides to amuse visitors. The first roller coaster and Ferris wheel were popular as well.

Sports and Leisure: New pastimes such as bicycling entertained women and men. The bicycle changed women's attire and freed women from the scrutiny of the ever-present chaperone. Some thought that it gave women freedom and self-reliance.

Americans also became avid fans of spectator sports, especially boxing and baseball. Fans flocked to games played by the National/American Leagues and the Negro National/American Leagues.

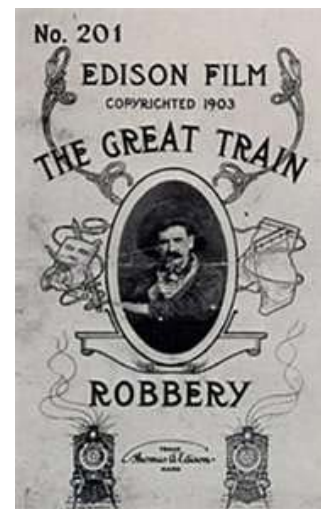


Entertainment: Other forms of entertainment attracted audiences of working people with leisure time to fill. Especially popular were vaudeville performances, variety shows that including song, dance, slapstick comedy, and chorus lines. The biggest spectacle was the annual visit of the Barnum and Bailey Circus.



At the same time, an exciting new form of music called ragtime began to draw hoards of listeners. A blending of African-American spiritual and European musical forms, ragtime originated in the saloons of the South and became an important element of the development of American jazz.

The earliest motion pictures also developed during this time period. Though relatively short and silent, they ranged from drama to comedy and created the earliest movie stars. Because they could be shown all over the country, movies were able to spread current ideas and trends across the country and contributed to the growth mass culture.



Frederick Law Olmsted Applauds the City's Attractions (1871)

We all recognize that the tastes and dispositions of women are more and more potent in shaping the course of civilized progress, and we may see that women are even more susceptible to this townward drift than men. Often times the husband and father gives up his country occupations, taking others less attractive to him in town, out of consideration for his wife and daughters. I once offered to a very sensible and provident man what I thought to be a great job offer. I was surprised that he hesitated to accept it, until the question was referred to his wife, a bright, tidy American-born woman, who promptly said: "If I were offered a great deed of the best farm that I ever saw, on condition of going back to the country to live, I would not take it. I would rather face starvation in town."

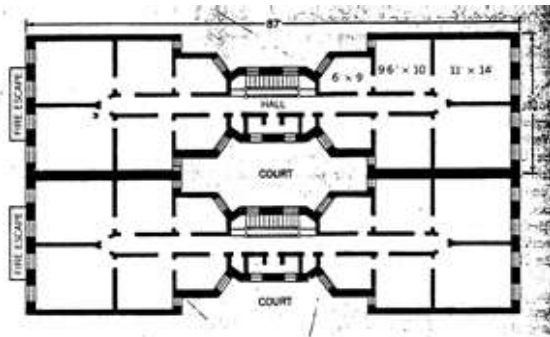
Compare the advantages of the city to the country in respect to schools, libraries, music, and the fine arts. People of the greatest wealth can hardly command as much of these in the country as the poorest work-girl is offered here in Boston at the mere cost of a walk for a short distance over a good firm, clean pathway, lighted at night and made interest to her by shop fronts and the variety of people passing.

It is true the poorer work-girls make little use of these special advantages, but this is simply because they are not yet educated up to them. When, however, they come from the country to town, are they not moving in the way of this education? In all probability, as is indicated by the report (in the "New York Tribune") of a recent skillful examination of the condition and habits of the poor sewing women of that city, a frantic desire to escape from the dull lives which they have seen before them in the country, a craving for recreation, especially for more companionship in yielding to playful girlish impulses, innocent in themselves, drives more young women to the town than anything else.

Life in the Tenements

Housing: As urban centers grew, new types of housing developed. Row houses were single-family dwellings that shared side walls with other similar houses, allowing several single-family residences to be packed onto a single block. Most immigrants lived in the city center, sometimes with two or three families occupying a one-family residence. These multifamily dwellings, called tenements, were overcrowded and unsanitary.

In 1879, to improve such slum conditions, New York City passed a law that set minimum standards for plumbing and ventilation in apartment buildings. To meet these standards, landlords began building dumbbell tenements – long, narrow, five or six-story buildings that were shaped like barbells. The central part was indented to allow for an air shaft, and thus, an outside window for each room.



Sometimes a whole family was crowded into a single room.

Since garbage was picked up infrequently, people sometimes dumped it into the air shafts, where it attracted rats and vermin. To keep out the stench, residents nailed windows shut. Though established with good intent, dumbbell tenements soon became even worse places to live than the converted single-family residences.



The necessity of improving water quality to control diseases such as cholera and typhoid fever was obvious. To make water safe, chlorination and filtration was introduced.

Water: Cities also faced the problem of supplying fresh water that was safe to drink. Cities such as New York and Cleveland built public waterworks to handle the increasing demand, but many residents had grossly inadequate water mains and piped water – or none at all. Homes seldom had indoor plumbing, and residents had to collect water in pails from fountains on the street and heat it



Sanitation: as the cities grew, so did the challenge of keeping them clean. In most, unsanitary conditions were all too widespread. Horse manure piled up on the streets, sewage flowed through open gutters, and factories spewed foul smoke into the air. Without a dependable system of trash removal, people dumped their garbage into alleys and streets. Sewer lines and sanitation departments helped somewhat, but the task was an ongoing challenge.

Fire: The limited water supply in many cities contributed to another menace: the spread of fires. Major fires occurred in almost every large American city, most notably Chicago and San Francisco. In addition to lacking water with which to combat blazes once they started, most cities were packed with wooden dwellings, which were like kindling waiting to be ignited. The use of candles and kerosene heaters was also a fire hazard. The development of professional fire departments, automatic fire sprinklers, and the replacement of many wooden buildings with structures made of brick, stone, and concrete also made cities safer.



Crime: as the populations of cities increased, so did crime. Pickpockets and thieves flourished in urban crowds, and con men fooled non-English speaking immigrants and naïve country people with clever scams. Crime-ridden areas of certain cities, which were controlled by gangs of young toughs, became known as Murderers' Alleys or Robbers' Roosts.

Jacob Riis Describes Immigrant Life in the New York City Tenements (1890)

Today, what is a tenement? The law defines it as a house “occupied by three or more families, living independently and doing their cooking on the premises; or by more than two families on a floor, so living and cooking and having a common right in the halls, stairways, yards, etc.” That is the legal meaning.

But in reality, it is generally a brick building from four to six stories high on the street, frequently with a store on the first floor which, when used for the sale of liquor, has a side opening for the benefit of the inmates and to evade the Sunday law; four families occupy each floor, and a set of rooms consists of one or two dark closets, used as bedrooms, with a living room twelve feet by ten. The staircase is too often a dark well in the center of the house, and no direct ventilation is possible, each family being separated from the other by partitions. Frequently the rear of the lot is occupied by another building of three stories high with two families on a floor.

The statement that between seventy and eighty children had been found in one tenement once made a sensation. It no longer excites even passing attention, when the sanitary police report counting 101 adults and 91 children in a Crosby Street house. The children in the next house, if I am not mistaken, numbered 89, a total of 180 for two tenements!

Political Machines

The Political Machine: A political machine was an organized group that controlled the activities of a political party in a city and offered services to voters and businesses in exchange for political or financial support. In the decades after the Civil War, political machines seized control of local government in major cities. A political machine worked to gain voters' support. In exchange for votes, people received city jobs, contracts, or political appointments. At the top of the pyramid was the city boss. The boss controlled the activities of the political party throughout the city.



The Role of the Political Boss: A city boss controlled thousands of municipal jobs, including those in the police, fire, and sanitation departments. The boss controlled business licenses and inspections and influenced the courts and other municipal agencies. Some bosses used their power to build parks, sewer systems, and waterworks and gave money to schools, hospitals, and orphanages. By solving problems, bosses could reinforce voters' loyalty, win additional political support, and extend their influence.

Immigrants and the Political Machine: Immigrants received sympathetic understanding from the political machines and in turn became loyal supporters. Many political bosses were from immigrant families. They could speak to immigrants in their own language and understood the challenges that newcomers faced. The machines helped immigrants become naturalized, find places to live, and get jobs. In return, the immigrants provided the political bosses with votes.

Election Fraud and Graft: Since the power of the political machines and loyalty of voters were not enough to carry an election, some political machines turned to fraud. They padded the list of eligible voters with the names of dogs, children, and people who had died. Then, under those names, they cast as many votes as were needed to win. Once a political machine got its candidate into office, it could take advantage of numerous opportunities for graft. For example, after hiring a person to work on a construction project for the city, a political machine could ask the worker to turn in a bill that was higher than the actual cost of materials and labor. The worker then "kicked back" a portion of the earnings to the machine. Taking these illegal payments for their services made many political machines and individual politicians very wealthy. Other ways that political machines made money were by granting favors to businesses in return for cash and by accepting bribes to allow illegal activities such as gambling to flourish. Politicians were able to get away with shady dealings because the police rarely interfered.

The Tweed Ring Scandal: William Tweed was one of the earliest and most powerful bosses and became head of Tammany Hall, New York City's powerful Democratic political machine. In the late 1860s, The Tweed Ring pocketed as much as \$200 million from the city in kickbacks and payoffs.

In one case, New York taxpayers were charged \$11 million dollars for a construction job that only cost \$3 million. The widespread corruption led to public outrage and the eventual arrest and conviction of Tweed for fraud and extortion.



George Washington Plunkitt Scorns Reform (1905)

Everybody is talking these days about Tammany men growing rich on graft, but nobody thinks of drawing the distinction between honest graft and dishonest graft. There's all the difference in the world between the two. Yes, many of our men have grown rich in politics. I have myself. I've made a big fortune out of the game, and I'm getting' richer every day, but I've not gone in for dishonest graft—blackmailing gamblers, saloonkeepers, disorderly people, etc.—and neither has any of the men who have made big fortunes in politics. There's an honest graft, and I'm an example of how it works. I might sum up the whole thing by saying "I seen my opportunities and I took 'em."

Just let me explain by examples. My party's in power in the city, and it's going to undertake a lot of public improvements. Well, I'm tipped off, say, that they're going to lay out a new park at a certain place. I see my opportunity and I take it. I go to that place and I buy up all the land I can in the neighborhood. Then the board of this or that makes its plan public, and there is a rush to get my land, which nobody cared particular for before. Ain't it perfectly honest to charge a good price and make a profit on my investment and foresight? Of course, it is. Well, that's honest graft.

This civil service law is the biggest fraud of the age. It is the curse of the nation. There can't be no real patriotism while it lasts. How are you going to interest our young men in their country if you have no offices to give them when they work for their party? When the people elected Tammany, they knew what they were doing. We didn't put up any false pretenses. We didn't go in for humbug civil service and all that rot. We stood as we have always stood, for rewarding the men that won the victory. They call that the spoils system. All right; Tammany is for the spoils system, and when we go in we can fire every anti-Tammany man from office that can be fired under the law. It's an elastic sort of law and you can bet it will be stretched to the limit.