



▲ A family on a bicycle outing

◀ An 1896 advertisement

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

America Takes to Wheels

In the 1880s, the “safety bicycle” gained popularity in the United States. Cheaper than a horse, it offered an easy mode of transportation in the period before automobiles and mass transit became widespread.

“By 1893 a million bicycles were in use. It seemed as though all America had taken to wheels. . . . By physicians the therapeutic benefits were declared to be beyond compare, while dress reformers welcomed cycling as an aid to more rational fashions. . . . ‘It is safe to say,’ declared an expert of the census bureau in 1900, ‘that few articles ever used by man have created so great a revolution in social conditions as the bicycle.’”

—Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr.,
The Rise of the City, 1878–1898

Social and Cultural Trends

Objectives

- Explain how new types of stores and marketing changed American life.
- Analyze the ways in which Americans developed a mass culture.
- Describe the new forms of popular entertainment in the late 1800s.

Terms and People

Mark Twain
Gilded Age
conspicuous
consumerism
mass culture

Joseph Pulitzer
William Randolph Hearst
Horatio Alger
vaudeville

NoteTaking

Identify Main Ideas Record the main ideas of this section in a table.

Consumerism	Mass Culture	Entertainment
•	•	•
•	•	•

Why It Matters Novelist **Mark Twain** satirized American life in his 1873 novel, *The Gilded Age*. He depicted American society as gilded, or having a rotten core covered with gold paint. Most Americans were not as cynical. The dizzying array of things to do and buy convinced the growing middle class that modern America was in a true golden age. Still, Twain’s label stuck, and historians refer to the last decades of the nineteenth century as “the **Gilded Age**.” The new lifestyle that middle-class Americans adopted during this period—shopping, sports, and reading popular magazines and newspapers—contributed to the development of a more commonly shared American culture that would persist for the next century.

Section Focus Question: What luxuries did cities offer to the middle class?

Americans Become Consumers

Industrialization and urbanization changed the lives of American workers. More people began to work for wages rather than for themselves on farms. Some people worked in offices, drove trolleys, or became factory foremen. Even farmers made more cash as machinery improved and they sold more crops. At the same time, more products were available than ever before and at lower prices. This led to a culture of **conspicuous consumerism**, in which people wanted and bought the many new products on the market. All but the very poorest working-class laborers were able to do and buy more than they would have in the past.

Advertising Attracts Customers Rowland H. Macy opened what he called a department store in New York in 1858. It became the largest single store in America. Its sales methods—widespread advertising, a variety of goods organized into “departments,” and high-quality items at fair prices—became the standard in large urban stores. By the 1870s, many big cities had department stores: Jordan Marsh in Boston, Marshall Field in Chicago, and Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia.

John Wanamaker developed innovative ways to keep customers satisfied. He was the first to offer a money back guarantee. In addition, he placed large newspaper advertisements to attract customers. Later, Wanamaker became Postmaster General. In that position, he lowered the bulk shipping rates and began free delivery to rural areas, which led to a boom in the mail-order catalog business.

While department stores pioneered new marketing and sales techniques, companies began to create trademarks with distinctive logos that consumers would recognize. For the first time, consumers began to notice and buy brand-name goods. Long-distance shipping allowed consumers in Atlanta, Cincinnati, and San Francisco to purchase the same products.

Some Achieve Higher Standards of Living After the Civil War, Americans began to measure success by what they could buy. Equating purchasing power with a higher standard of living, middle-class and some working-class consumers rushed to modernize their homes and clothing styles. In this period, the cost of living decreased because manufactured products and new technology cost less. Better sanitation and medical care contributed to better health, causing life expectancy to climb. That was good news for most people.

The end of the nineteenth century is sometimes called the Victorian Era, after the queen of England. The rich were richer than ever before, and the middle class tried to imitate their lifestyle. Factory-produced clothing and prepackaged food gave homemakers a break from some activities, but rising expectations of cleanliness and more complicated meals meant that they spent more time on those tasks. Other luxuries, like indoor plumbing, also became common. On the other hand, many women had to work outside their homes to achieve a middle-class lifestyle.

Life changed for men, as well. Public transportation allowed families to live at a distance from the dirt, noise, and bustle of industry. However, it often meant that men became commuters, leaving home early in the morning and returning late in the evening. Still, their culture taught them that hard work would pay off.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did consumption patterns change in the late nineteenth century?

Mass Culture

One of the effects of the spread of transportation, communication, and advertising was that Americans all across the country became more and more alike in their consumption patterns. Rich and poor could wear the same clothing styles, although the quality of that

Changing Roles for Women

Women in the late 1800s were primarily responsible for housekeeping, though a growing number worked outside the home. *How might new appliances like these have changed women’s work and expectations?*

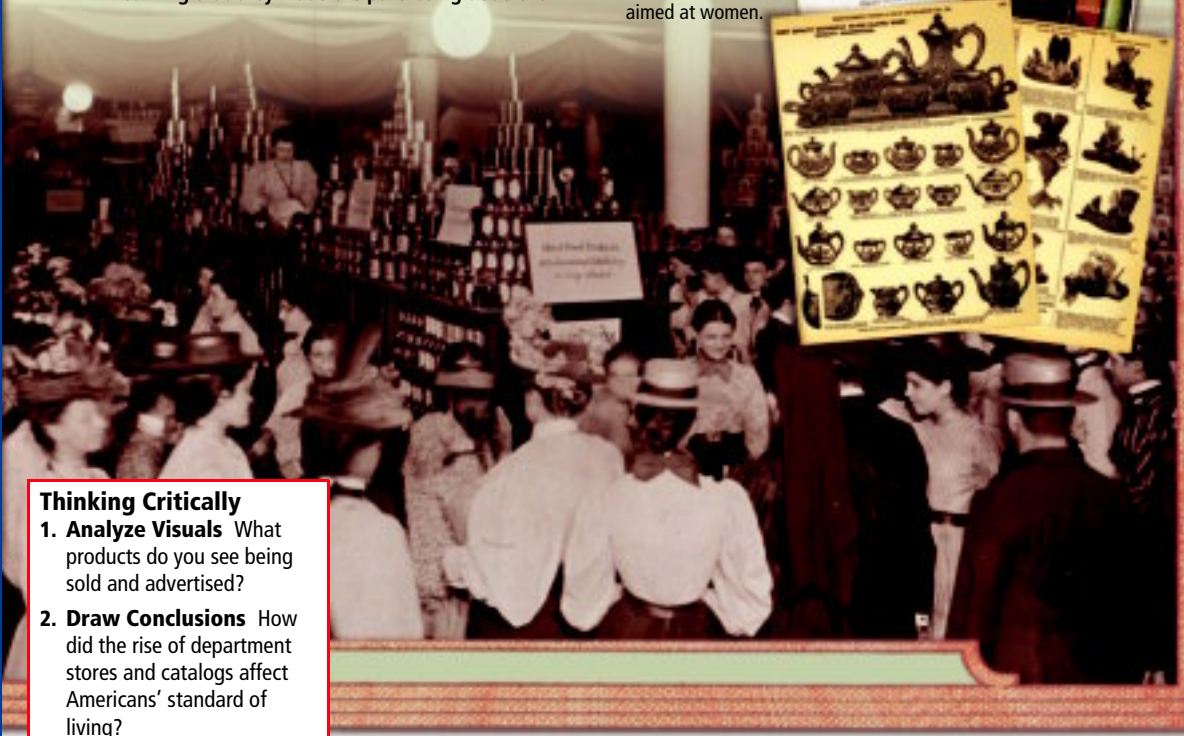


NEW WAYS OF SHOPPING

INFOGRAPHIC

Department stores made shopping into a form of entertainment for middle-class women. Enormous display windows gave shoppers a glimpse of what was inside—clothing, furnishings, toys, and other items—all under one roof. Well-groomed young women sold the merchandise, which the shopper could touch before buying. Different brands and styles were available for comparison. Stores aimed their advertising at women, realizing that they made the purchasing decisions.

Catalogs sold ▶ everything from houses to hats. This toothpaste advertisement is aimed at women.



Thinking Critically

- 1. Analyze Visuals** What products do you see being sold and advertised?
- 2. Draw Conclusions** How did the rise of department stores and catalogs affect Americans' standard of living?

clothing varied. Household gadgets, toys, and food preferences were often the same from house to house. This phenomenon is known as **mass culture**.

Newspapers Circulate Far and Wide The newspapers of the Gilded Age both reflected and helped create mass culture. Between 1870 and 1900, the number of newspapers increased from about 600 to more than 1,600. No one knew more about newspapers than **Joseph Pulitzer**, a Hungarian immigrant who had fought in the Civil War. Active in Missouri politics in the 1870s, Pulitzer moved to New York in the 1880s, where he started a morning paper, the *World*. It was so successful that Pulitzer soon started publishing the *Evening*

World. The papers were inexpensive because they were supported in part by businesses that placed advertisements in their pages.

The job of a newspaper, Pulitzer believed, was to inform people and to stir up controversy. His newspapers were sensationalistic, filled with exposés of political corruption, comics, sports, and illustrations. They were designed to get the widest possible readership, rather than simply to report the news. Pulitzer soon found a competitor in **William Randolph Hearst**, whose *Morning Journal* employed the same tactics. Their sensational styles sold many papers.

At the same time, ethnic and special-interest publishers catered to the array of urban dwellers, especially immigrants. The Philadelphia *Tribune*, begun in the 1880s, targeted the African American market. In New York, there were six Italian-language papers by 1910. Each sold more than 10,000 copies daily.

Literature and the Arts Flourish Mark Twain was not the only author to take a critical look at society during the Gilded Age. Novels that explored harsh realities were popular. Stephen Crane exposed the slums of New York in his *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893). He later wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*, which explored the psychological aspects of war. Other novelists focused on moral issues. **Horatio Alger** wrote about characters who succeeded by hard work, while Henry James and Edith Wharton questioned a society based upon rigid rules of conduct. Playwrights such as John Augustin Daly mirrored Twain's disapproval of the Gilded Age.

The vitality of city life also inspired graphic artists. Philadelphia's Thomas Eakins painted a larger-than-life illustration of a medical operation, complete with exposed flesh. Painter Robert Henri and his associates developed a style of painting known as the Ashcan School which dramatized the starkness and squalor of New York City slums and street life.

Education Newspapers and literature flourished, in part, because more Americans could read. Public education expanded rapidly. Slowly in the South and rapidly in the North, grade-school education became compulsory. Many locales provided public high schools, although only a small percentage of young people attended. In 1870, the nation had only a few hundred high schools; in 1910, there were more than 5,000. Kindergartens also appeared as a way to help working-class mothers. As a result, the literacy rate climbed to nearly 90 percent by 1900.

Schools taught courses in science, woodworking, and drafting, providing skills that workers needed in budding industries. The curriculum also included civics and business training. Urban leaders counted on schools to help Americanize immigrants, teaching them English and shaping them into good citizens. Teacher-training schools responded to the call. Not only did they grow in number, but they also developed more sophisticated ideas about teaching and learning. Reformer John Dewey sought to enhance student learning by introducing new teaching methods.

Institutions of higher education also began to provide specialized training for urban careers. Today's liberal arts curriculum was largely designed during this era. A few of

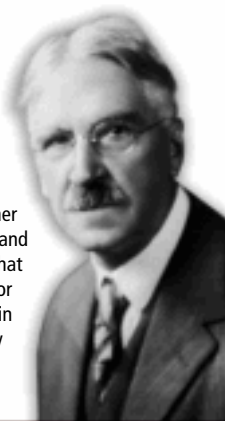
Vocabulary Builder

cater—(KAYT uhr) *v.* to supply something that is wanted or needed by a particular group

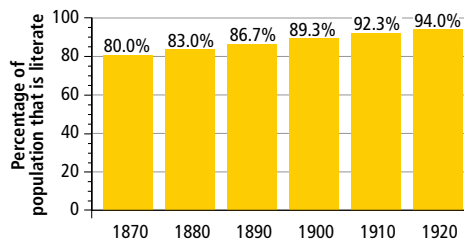
HISTORY MAKERS

John Dewey (1859–1952)

Dewey was an influential philosopher, reformer, and professor. His child-centered philosophy shaped progressive education reform. He argued that students learn by doing activities that teach them to answer their own questions, rather than by memorizing from books and lectures. His opponents argued that orderly classrooms were better for learning. Dewey's ideas declined in popularity by the 1950s, but they remain influential today.



U.S. Literacy Rates, 1870–1920



SOURCE: Historical Statistics of the United States

the new careers—teaching, social work, and nursing—were open to middle-class women. This led to an upsurge in women's colleges, since women were barred from many men's colleges. However, many state universities began to accept women into their classes.

Limited access to white institutions led to a growth in schools and colleges for African Americans. Across the South, the number of normal schools, agricultural colleges, and industrial-training schools mushroomed as the children of newly freed slaves set out to prepare to compete as free people.

 **Checkpoint** What factors contributed to mass culture?

New Forms of Popular Entertainment

Urban areas with thousands of people became centers for new types of entertainment in the Gilded Age. Clubs, music halls, and sports venues attracted large crowds with time and money to spend. The middle class began to take vacations at this time, while the working classes looked for opportunities to escape from the busy city, even if just for a day.

City Dwellers Escape to Amusement Parks In 1884, Lamarus Thompson opened the world's first roller coaster. At ten cents a ride, Thompson averaged more than \$600 per day in income. The roller coaster was the first ride to open at Coney Island—the nation's best-known amusement park—at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean in New York City. Soon, Coney Island added a hotel and a horse-racing track. Similar amusement parks, located within easy reach of a city, were built around the country.

While earlier generations had enjoyed a picnic in the park, the new urbanite—even those with limited means—willingly paid the entry fees for these new, more thrilling, entertainments. Urban residents of all ethnicities and races could be found at these amusement spots, though each group was usually relegated to a particular area of the parks. The parks represented a day-long vacation for city laborers who could not afford to take the long seaside vacations enjoyed by the wealthy.

Outdoor Events Draw Audiences In 1883, “Buffalo Bill” Cody threw a Fourth of July celebration near his ranch in Nebraska. He offered prizes for competitions in riding, roping, and shooting. So many people attended that Cody took his show on the road, booking performances at points along railroad lines. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show toured America and Europe, shaping the world's romantic notion of the American West. The show included markswoman Annie Oakley and the Sioux leader Sitting Bull, as well as displays of riding, roping, and horse-and-rider stunts.

Religious-inspired entertainment also grew in popularity. The Chautauqua Circuit, a kind of summer camp that opened in 1874, sponsored lectures and entertainment along New York's Chautauqua Lake. It began as a summer school for Methodist Sunday school teachers. Soon, Chautauqua leaders were transporting their tents to small towns all across America to deliver comic storytelling, bands and singers, and lectures on politics or morals. A family might stay at a camp for as long as two weeks. Many people saw their first “moving pictures,” or movies, in a Chautauqua tent. Theodore Roosevelt called Chautauqua “the most American thing in America.”

Going to the Circus

Circuses such as the Ringling Brothers and the Barnum & Bailey began in the late nineteenth century, traveling around the country to perform before large audiences.




New Entertainment in the Cities Cities, with their dense populations, offered many glitzy shows and various types of entertainment. At first, **vaudeville** shows were a medley of musical drama, songs, and off-color comedy. In 1881, an entrepreneur named Tony Pastor opened a theater in New York, aiming to provide families with a “straight, clean variety show.” By 1900, a few companies owned chains of vaudeville theaters, stretching all across the country.

Performance theater was not the only option. Movie theaters, called nickel-odeons, soon introduced motion pictures, charging a nickel for admission. Films such as *The Great Train Robbery* became wildly popular. In music halls, ragtime bands created a style of music that would later evolve into jazz.

Some cities—including Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta, Buffalo, and Omaha—hosted exhibitions of new technology and entertainment. These extravaganzas stretched Americans’ imaginations to see a future filled with machines and gadgets. Millions of visitors saw everything from steam engines to typewriters and telephones. In many ways, the new amusements mirrored urban life, filled with variety, drama, bright colors, and a very fast pace.

Spectator Sports Attract Fans Baseball—America’s national sport—had been around for a number of years before the National League organized it into a business in 1876. Baseball soon became a public show. Major cities built stadiums that seated thousands, like Boston’s Fenway Park. Billboards advertised everything from other sports to toothpaste and patent medicines. There were even baseball songs. The most famous—“Take Me Out to the Ball Game”—was written in 1908. Until 1887, teams sometimes included African American players. After the Chicago White Stockings refused to play against a team that had a black player, separate African American teams emerged by 1900.

Like baseball, horse racing, bicycle racing, boxing, and football became popular spectator sports. University football clubs formed on campuses around the country, but they faced a public outcry at the violence of the game. Rule changes made it into the sport we know today. Meanwhile, James Naismith invented basketball at the Springfield, Massachusetts, YMCA in 1891. Heroes emerged in major sports, particularly in boxing, as immigrants and ethnic Americans rooted for the boxers who shared their background.

 **Checkpoint** What new forms of entertainment began in the late nineteenth century?



A Special Honor

This 1911 baseball card shows the pitcher Cy Young. He had the most wins of any pitcher in Major League history.

SECTION

3 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nca-1407

Comprehension

1. Terms and People What do the following terms and people have in common?

- Mark Twain
- Gilded Age
- conspicuous consumerism
- mass culture
- Joseph Pulitzer
- William Randolph Hearst
- Horatio Alger
- vaudeville

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Identify Main Ideas Use your completed table to answer the Section Focus Question: What luxuries did cities offer to the middle class?

Writing About History

3. Quick Write: Make a Plan Write an itinerary for a weekend trip to a city in 1900. Consider what kinds of activities a first-time visitor from the country might like to experience.

Critical Thinking

4. Analyze What factors contributed to consumerism?

5. Summarize Describe middle-class entertainment.

6. Make Comparisons How did middle-class urban life differ from life for the urban poor?